

## DIANE FITZGERALD



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## IN PURSUIT OF BEADS

PEGGY WRIGHT

Since 1989, in pursuit of those little objects called beads, Diane Fitzgerald has opened her shop Beautiful Beads, become a teacher and author, and developed her own artistic voice.

Prior to that time, Diane worked in two other media, quilting and needlepoint. During those years she kept a foot-square box of beads tucked away in her closet. She appreciated their transparency, reflectivity, and colors. She also liked their scale.

"Ever since I was young, I've always liked little things. I had a six-inch high dollhouse with tiny furniture to go with it. I just loved it."

Diane's interest in needlepoint was natural, with its tiny stitching, but she found quilts were just too big. "The scale of my work decreased when I worked in needlepoint. I worked twenty-two stitches to the inch. Once I copied a friend's Oriental rug stitch by stitch, and it came out 18 by 36 inches. Needlepoint and beadwork are similar in their scale. I've just got the patience for it."

## OPENING A BEAD STORE

Diane was frustrated, however, with the results of her attempts to make jewelry from her beads. Finally, she and a friend, Barb Hjort, took a class with Helen Banes in Chicago and learned to create needlewoven necklaces. After the class, Diane had trouble finding beads. Constantly alert for new sources, she found a woman through her quilting contacts who was selling her inventory of beads.

"The woman wanted to get out of her jewelry business, so I visited her and looked at the beads. We negotiated for a while and then Alan [Diane's husband] finally said 'If you want them, I'll lend you the money.' So we bought them and brought them all home in the trunk of the car—\$11,000 worth of beads in the trunk of the car. Can you believe it? I bought the beads, but I had no idea how I would use them. It was the start of my shop."



Gingko Leaf II Necklace

## BECOMING A TEACHER

Diane opened shop in 1989 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She knew that she had to teach if she was going to sell beads. "Other people were just like me. They loved beads, but didn't know how to use them."

Diane asked Barb Hjort, who was an art teacher, to co-teach a needlewoven necklace with her. She acknowledges both Barb and Helen Banes as her first mentors in teaching.

Diane learned additional techniques and acquired other models for teaching by taking more classes herself. She taught herself techniques from Horace Goodhue's book, *Indian Bead-Weaving Patterns*. When she discovered he lived in St. Paul, she signed up for his classes. Diane also took a class from Virginia Blakelock and several from teachers at the Shepherdess in San Diego.

Diane again used these experiences to develop her classes. While teaching was necessary to sustain her bead shop, she also found how much she enjoyed instructing students.

"It's always been my philosophy to teach because I get new ideas as I do. It's fun to spend the day with a pleasant group of people, to see what colors they choose. I always try to organize my classes by giving people structure, but I also provide them with room for personalization, such as picking their own colors. It's inspiring to see the varied combinations."



English Garden Bracelet

## FOUNDING THE UPPER MIDWEST BEAD SOCIETY

Through teaching classes, Diane helped build the beading community in the Twin Cities. As it grew, the need for an organization to support the large number of beadworkers emerged.

"Some students asked me to start a bead society. Horace Goodhue made one of the first presentations, and the room was packed, giving us a really good start. I published the society's newsletter for about five years and organized the meetings. At first, we met in my shop, but the beading community just kept growing. We've been going strong for ten years now."

## BECOMING AN AUTHOR

While Diane has inspired students through her classes, and the Twin Cities' beading community through the Bead Society, she has also reached a larger audience through her books. She co-authored her first book, *Beads and Threads*, with Helen Banes to insure that Helen's needleweaving technique would be documented. "I thought a collaboration with her would be a great way to do a book. This partnership worked out very well. *Beads and Threads* has sold over twenty thousand copies in five years and is still on the shelves in bookstores."

*Counted and Charted Patterns for Flat Peyote Stitch* is Diane's first self-published book. "I published it because I could see the satisfaction my mother receives from her counted and charted cross-stitch. Every night she works on her projects and follows the diagrams to a T. I decided to write a similar book on peyote-stitched beadwork with a bead-line guide to isolate each row.

Diane wrote her third book, *Sea Anemone Beadwork*, to document an unusual piece of Native American beadwork owned by Horace Goodhue. "I'm proud of this book because the technique would have been lost if I hadn't studied Horace's piece. He owned only one piece using the technique, which was destroyed when his van burnt up, and he had seen only one other piece."

Diane's fourth and fifth books provide instructions for beadwork that use techniques practiced by the Zulus of South Africa. The fourth book, *Zulu Beaded Chain Techniques*, covers eight Zulu chains, only one of which had been documented previously. Diane wrote the fifth book, which gives instructions for eight more chains, after coming back from South Africa, where she investigated more beadwork techniques.

"Zulu beadwork fascinates me more than any I've ever seen. The work is intricate, and the Zulus often combine their beads with a looping structure where one thread loops around another thread instead of going through a bead. I've never seen these stitches done by any other group of people."

## EMERGING AS AN ARTIST

Recognized for both her teaching and her books, Diane has also emerged as a creative artist in her own right. Her work is known nationally, appearing regularly in publications and juried shows.

Diane frequently works improvisationally. She selects a color palette and builds many small components, not knowing how they will fit into a larger work. Guided by her sense of design, Diane listens to these small pieces as they suggest how they want to be combined. It's often a matter of serendipity.

"I made a piece that looks like branching coral because I wanted to imitate the ivy that was crawling up the brick wall in front of our condominium. I got the effect for the ivy and for the brick wall, but I never put the two pieces together in a necklace. One day, I ran across a beaded cabochon that was lying on my desk. I wondered how the coral piece and the cabochon would work together. I tried it and liked the effect. The best work comes quickly, and the pieces go right together. All of a sudden, it's just there."

This piece, *Coral Reef Necklace*, became a class Diane offered last winter. When she creates a piece, she frequently develops a class around it and the class reflects her philosophy of design.

"When I teach, I tell students that making small pieces is somewhat like making parts for a jigsaw puzzle. Many ways exist, however, to fit together a bead puzzle. You can play with the components, balancing colors and shapes and textures until you get a pleasing arrangement."

Diane likes to work with small components because they don't call for much planning or sketching. She believes it's easier to think incrementally, creating one small piece and then another, rather than developing a whole concept up front. You can let the piece take you wherever it wants.

Although she works in this incremental fashion, she considers all elements of design, such as line, texture, and movement, when she puts together her small pieces. "You have to consider how lines move your eye around a piece, how they can lead to your focal point. Movement is important. You can create movement by having something in the piece that moves itself, like fringe, or something that causes your eye to move, like a line or path."

"Contrast in texture is also important. You have to put in



*Sea Moss Necklace*

some large, smooth, bold beads in freeform work. Seed beads always create strong texture. It's impossible to escape texture because you are joining small pebbly things. You have to contrast them with something smooth."

Diane has incorporated things like ginkgo leaves into necklaces, taking her inspiration from nature. "In the first ginkgo necklace, I played with the leaves as you might arrange quilt blocks, combining them in different ways, and the form emerged that became the piece. I like to see necklaces come to a point because I think that form is more flattering to the face. So I brought the clusters of leaves together at the bottom with a triangle of netting, to which I applied cabochons. The necklace needed more interest at the top, so I added dragonflies."

Regardless of her inspiration, Diane uses her sense of color and design to delight her audience. "I like to make things that are beautiful. I don't make political things; I don't make startling things. I just want them to be appealing so when people look at them they will feel good. So much ugliness exists in the world. If you make something beautiful, maybe you can push away some of the ugliness, at least for a few minutes. If I can do that, it makes me feel good, too." ❁

*Peggy Wright, an avid beadworker, currently is Program Coordinator for the Upper Midwest Bead Society. She also works as a technical writer to support her beading habit.*



*English Garden Bracelet*