

I N A G O L U B

EMBELLISHING AN ANCIENT TRADITION

For Ina Golub, it seems that beads patiently waited in the wings before they appeared center stage and she began to apply her artistry to making beaded objects. One event that raised the curtain was a visit to Jerusalem's Israel Museum in 1993 where several small ancient beaded ritual objects caught her attention. This visit inspired Ina eventually to create a small spice container in the form of a fish, a popular form for the Havdalah spice container used in the ceremony that concludes the weekly Jewish Sabbath. Her delicate object, just six inches tall, represents Leviathan, a mythical sea creature mentioned in the Bible. He rises out of the sea with mouth open to hold the sweet Sabbath spices. Ina's entry won first prize in the prestigious 1998 Philip and Sylvia Spertus Judaica Prize Competition held at the Spertus Museum in Chicago. The award was a \$10,000 check!

Having exhibited her fiber work widely and won many awards, Ina was already a well-established fiber artist when she began working seriously with beads. She had also completed many successful fiber com-



*Miriam's Vessel. Mixed stitches over glass.
9" x 5" x 5". Left, detail.*

PHOTOS BY JANICE RHODE

DIANE FITZGERALD

missions for synagogues and private individuals around the country. Although she always used accent beads to embellish her ritual textiles, making objects completely with beads began to intrigue her only as recently as the mid-1990s.

"As a kid, I did Indian loom bead-weaving, beaded sweaters, and such things," said Ina, "I had a treasure box of beads and jewelry . . . didn't we all?" Ina's father, who taught her to knit when she was six years old and home with the chicken pox, was a fine amateur craftsman who made beaded flowers in the 1960s. In graduate school, Ina was inspired by a fiber art professor to begin collecting beads to adorn her work. When her father died

some years later, she inherited his stash—boxes and hanks of Czech seed beads. Another opportunity to acquire a considerable bead collection occurred when her graduate school professor retired. The legacy included several varieties of beads, large and small, also a large selection of real Victorian jet and even some steel cut beads in several colors. "I consistently used beads from these collections on my fiber work," says Ina, "and continued to build my own collection



whenever I had the opportunity. Today I have a growing stash. If a shape or color appeals to me, I buy some, and then of course, if I am working on a particular piece, I buy some more."

Ina's strong background in art began with a major in art education at Montclair State University in New Jersey where she earned a bachelor's degree in 1960. In 1965, at Indiana University, she earned a master of arts for teachers degree. During these years she was painting and creating

wonderful hand-woven secular textiles. She also taught art for ten years before she became a full-time artist and now considers the possibility of teaching beading in the future. Although Ina was raised in a family that practiced minimal observance of Jewish traditions, she felt a pull toward her roots. With the help of Rabbi Reuben Levine, then the spiritual leader of Temple Beth Ahm in Springfield, New Jersey, she began an enlightening journey into the depths of her heritage, a journey that continues to this day.

Sometime in the winter of 1989, Ina was reading an issue of *Threads* magazine and came across an article about Virginia Blakelock's bead loom weaving. "The detail and texture of Virginia's incredible work blew me away," said Ina. "I

knew I had to explore beadwork as an art form." She began noticing beadwork, especially in the secular craft community. Familiar with the work of Virginia Blakelock, Joyce Scott, William Hodge and others, and with a deepening knowledge of Jewish traditions, Ina made a trip to Israel in 1993. It was here that all the bits and pieces of her art world came together. She recalls the impact of the beaded



This is the Torah, Torah Pointer. Peyote stitch over turned wood, sterling silver by Kurt Matzdorf. 8" x 1", plus chain.



Spice Container IV. Mixed stitches over Lucite form. 6" x 2" x 2". Private collection.

ceremonial objects in the Judaica collection of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. Two objects that particularly caught her eye were a Hanukkah lamp and an Etrog container. The Hanukkah lamp, used during the Jewish festival of lights, was crafted almost entirely of Czech glass beads. The Etrog container, made to hold the fragrant citron fruit used on the Festival of Sukot that celebrates the fall harvest, was made of silver with side panels beaded on cardboard in a technique resembling needlepoint. "Taking the trip seemed the precedent in my own heritage that I needed to join the current beadwork renaissance, and inspired me to develop a series of Jewish ceremonial objects in beadwork, a series that continues to inspire my new work," Ina observes.

Ina's first beaded pieces were two Torah pointers, objects used to follow the reading of the Torah in the synagogue. They are beaded in peyote stitch over turned wooden forms, one with a pattern of color gradations and another with a pattern of Hebrew letters which state, "This is the Torah." The silver pointer hands were made by Ina's colleague, master silversmith Kurt Matzdorf.

Ina takes her inspiration not only from Jewish tradition but also from life itself. "The exquisite formations of nature, particularly sea forms, are a constant reference, as are those artists throughout

history such as the French Impressionists, who were preoccupied with the effects of light," says Ina. "That effect is one of the things which intrigues me about beads—the sparkle and reflective quality of all those tiny molecules of light." Ina doesn't limit herself to any one technique in beadwork, but uses whatever stitches or combinations of stitches best serve her needs in a particular piece.

In addition to the prize-winning Leviathan spice container made in peyote stitch, Ina has completed more than twelve other pieces and several more are in progress, including a whole school



Spice Container V. Bead weaving on wire warp. 7" x 2" x 2". Permanent collection, Yeshiva University Museum, New York.



Hanukkah Lamp, c. 1900, Jerusalem. Glass beads, cotton thread, and iron wire. Permanent collection, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

of fish spice boxes. Another series of spice containers resemble tiny architectural models or fanciful buildings with pointed or domed roofs. Either woven on a bead loom or peyote-stitched over a Lucite form, these little gems follow a strong tradition in Jewish art of spice boxes in the shapes of medieval towers and buildings. They are rarely taller than seven inches.

Miriam's Dance, a Torah shield, depicts Miriam, the first female prophet, who led the women of Israel to freedom. In this piece, bead embroidery is applied to fabric primarily with backstitch. Another piece devoted to Miriam is *Miriam's Vessel*, Ina's rendition

CREATING A FORM

Ina often uses the product Varaform® to create an armature for her figures. It is a mesh fabric treated with thermoplastic resin and it's used in theater costuming and other venues. Ina cuts the Varaform, heats it in warm water using an old electric frying pan, and molds it, sometimes over another form that is later removed. Sometimes she covers the form with polyester batting and fabric to make something like a stuffed muslin form. She may use the fabric, often silk, as a background for beads; at other times she lets the fabric show to provide a contrast of texture and color with beads. She usually beads around the form but sometimes sews the beads directly to the Varaform. Her most recent source for this product is Douglass & Sturgess in San Francisco (415) 896-6283.

Beadwork, Dec. 2001/Jan. 2002

of a special goblet used during Passover to hold water; it symbolizes both the prophet Miriam as well as women's roles in the exodus from Egypt. "In *Miriam's Vessel*," says Ina, "I attempt to suggest the power of the Biblical waters that symbolize Miriam's life: She is shown with her timbrel at the Sea of Reeds; her well spouts water which breaks into droplets that feed the earth; and her baby brother, Moses, rests in his basket amid the bulrushes on the banks of the Nile."

There is a lifetime of experience in every piece that Ina creates. She combines meditation, visualization, and dreaming, techniques which, she says, make images happen in her brain. She then translates these images into objects, sometimes directly into beads and sometimes into drawings and meticulous studies for a particular piece. In her Jewish heritage, Ina has tapped a rich source of imagery for her work and has combined it with the wonder of natural forms. "The book of Exodus eloquently describes the accoutrements of the sanctuary, all to be made by the artist Bezalel in the shadow of God," says Ina, "Each time I read these pages my inner voice speaks, compelling me to pursue the creation of yet another ceremonial form. As an artist I feel privileged to create in the shadow of God." ❁

Diane Fitzgerald is the author of Beading with Brick Stitch: a Beadwork How-To Book. She may be contacted at dmfbeads@bitstream.net.

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