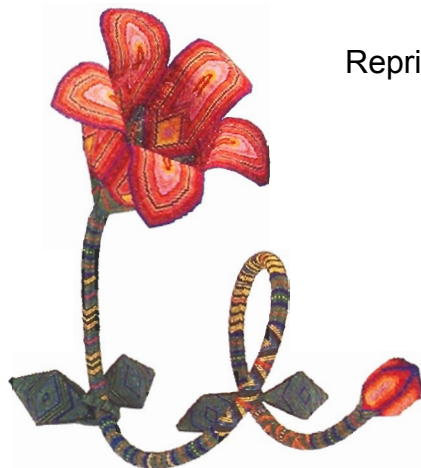


# The Vibrant Beadwork of Madelyn Ricks

Diane Fitzgerald



*Late Bloomer. 14" x 11" x 6"*

I like to create jewelry and sculpture using bold geometric designs and bright vibrant colors for many areas of interest," says Madelyn Ricks. Her choice of designs, which sometimes resemble a patchwork of geometric shapes, is a natural outgrowth of the pottery she made prior to her work with beads.

At age fifty-five, after sixteen years as a clay artist, Madelyn realized that lifting heavy pieces of pottery and the equipment used in the process had resulted in arthritis in her shoulder. Something had to change. She began looking for another medium to serve as her creative outlet and means of income. Friends invited her to consider gold—or silversmithing or metalwork, but she rejected the idea because of the long learning curve required and the need to invest in and

work with equipment. Madelyn wanted something portable, something she could learn quickly, and something that wouldn't require a huge investment of time and money.

She found it in beads. The catalyst was the seminal book, *The New Beadwork*, by Alice Scherer and Kathlyn Moss. Madelyn was awed by it and knew that this medium could be her means of continuing in the world of arts and crafts. Seeking out bead stores while traveling to craft shows still showing her pottery, she discovered the world of Delica beads—the tiny tubular beads made by the Japanese Miyuki Company that are known for their consistent size and wide range of colors and finishes. Madelyn uses them exclusively. With help from Carol Wilcox Wells's book, *Creative Beadweaving*, she taught herself peyote stitch, and it has been her mainstay ever since.

Madelyn's work falls into three categories: small pieces such as pins and earrings, large dramatic neckpieces, and vessels. Her vessels continue her bold geometric color and design which contrast with the flower-like and conical shapes balancing on the end of a curving tube. The result is eye-catching pieces that generate great admiration among show-goers.

Many of her neckpieces are very contemporary and large—definitely not for the conservative traditional person. Madelyn finds that her pieces sell the best in fashion centers and large urban areas such as Chicago, New York, and other major East Coast cities. "My pieces are for women who aren't afraid to make a fashion statement wearing bold designs. Women buy them to wear with a power business suit or for an evening out when they're dressed to the hilt." Occasionally she creates pieces with a neutral palette of colors, but the geometric designs are still the dramatic ones characteristic of Madelyn.



*Autumn Splendor. 10" x 10" x 1"*

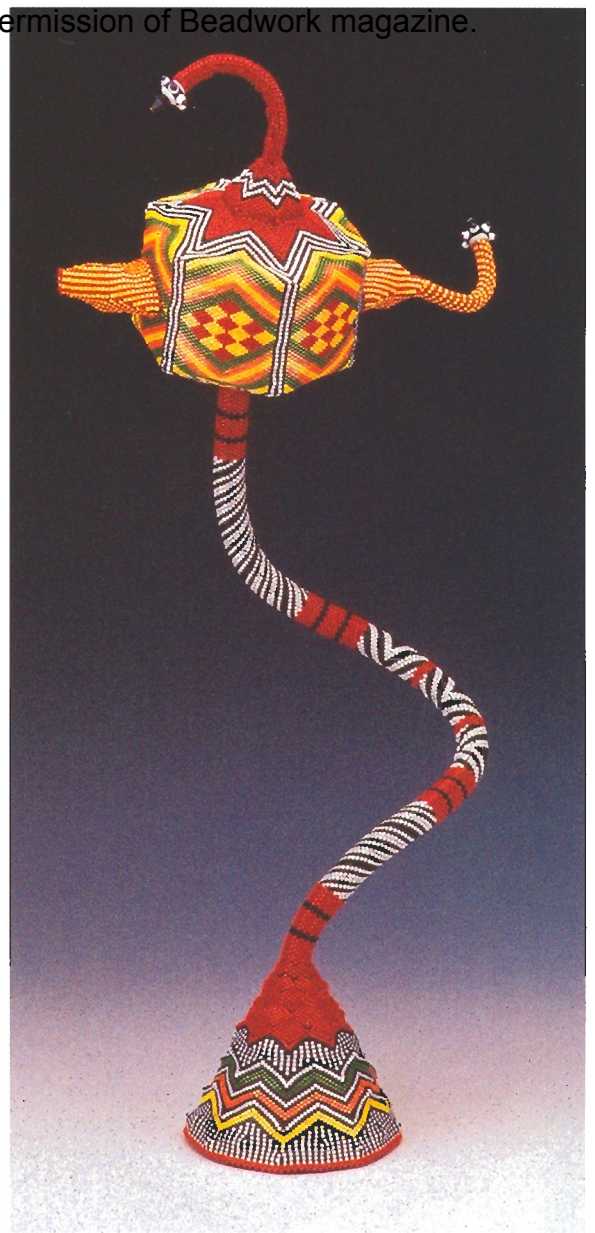


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*Red Lightning*, 12" x 14" x 1"



*What Fun.* 12" x 9" x 6"



*Flying Jester Teapot.* 6" x 6" x 14"

"I chart out my designs using double size graph paper in rectangles proportioned to Delicas and color the patterns with marking pens," says Madelyn. She photocopies the patterns in color and saves them to use as reference in future projects. "I reuse certain motifs that I particularly like or that work well," she says, "and sometimes I cut and paste portions of designs into new pieces."

Madelyn uses Nymo thread (usually single) and a size 12 beading needle to make her pieces. She works with her beads in the shallow white porcelain paint trays with multiple sections promoted by Virginia Blakelock, never mixing one color of bead with another. At home, she usually beads on her sofa listening to books on tape. On the road she carries her

beads and trays in a gun case and often beads in her hotel room after a long day at a craft show. She stores 100-gram bags of beads in clear plastic shoe boxes by color for easy access. With each order for more beads, she adds a few new colors to her stash.

Madelyn creates all her large gallery pieces herself but has help for some smaller necklaces and pins that are sold wholesale. Since she usually works alone, she finds that the useful advice from her five helpers refreshes and stimulates her as she works. Often with several pieces underway at once because of the demands of creating both gallery pieces and large sculptures, she can't always work on the piece that most attracts her. Her pieces range in price from \$45 for a pair of earrings to \$3,200 for a large sculpture.



*Beaded Vessel with Stand. 8" x 8" x 10"*



*Zigzag Neckpiece. 7" x 12" x 1"*

"There appears to be a market for beadwork," says Madelyn. "Often at high-end craft shows now there are two or three others selling their beadwork, and it is all unique." Her advice to those who want to sell their work is to consider carefully the kind of beadwork they want to create and how they will position it at craft and art shows. "For example," Madelyn said, "I wouldn't spend \$200–\$300 on a beaded pin, but there are many people who would. Don't price your beadwork according to what you would spend yourself. Get past that, and make every attempt to create your own style, and you'll do better."

Madelyn realizes why beadwork has such immense appeal to her. "It is the slow, deliberate rhythm of creating beadwork that I find comforting," she says. "There are no machines and no equipment—just needle, thread, and beads. Seeing patterns develop slowly and small patterns turn into larger ones is very gratifying to me." ©

Diane Fitzgerald is a bead artist and teacher who lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota. "As I interviewed Madelyn for this article, I was amazed at how much we had in common. Her designs absolutely thrill me!"



*Celtic Band. 5" x 25" x 1"*

Several galleries carry Madelyn's jewelry: Callaway Gallery in Rochester, Minnesota, Vale Craft Gallery in Chicago, Illinois and Snyderman-Works Gallery in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Her e-mail is [madelynricks@voyager.net](mailto:madelynricks@voyager.net).