

Project Report

Ramblings in Search of an Exhibition: *Beadwork Adorns the World**

Marsha Bol

Abstract: In this project report, exhibition curator Marsha Bol discusses the origins and scope of the 2018-2019 Museum of International Folk Art exhibition Beadwork Adorns the World. The exhibition presented a worldwide survey of beadwork arts in their cultural and social contexts.

[Keywords: art; beadwork; body adornment; material culture; museum exhibitions; folk art museums. Keywords are derived from the American Folklore Society Ethnographic Thesaurus, a standard nomenclature for the ethnographic disciplines.]

Surely it was an act of hubris to think that I could write a book and plan an exhibition on a topic with a worldwide focus! But beginning in 2011, I did just that, knowing full well that this was going to be a major challenge (Figure 1).

One of the great joys at the start of this project was the opportunity to venture into the collections storage areas of the Museum of International Folk Art (MOIFA) in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Initially I searched through every corner, shelf, and drawer of the multiple collections rooms holding over 150,000 objects, looking for every example of beadwork that I could find. The museum curators generously offered up suggestions based on pieces they knew about in the museum's collections, or that they had run across in their own various researches. One curator told me about an 1890s Lakota beaded violin case she knew of in a San Francisco private collection of objects with US flags emblazoned on them.

I had already settled on focusing on beadwork, even though everyone kept calling it Marsha's "bead" project! Others before me have written extensively and authoritatively about the origins and types of individual beads, but my interest was in worked beads, and how the resulting finished products reveal coded cultural information about the makers and users.

I wasn't completely "wet behind the ears." I do have a background in Plains Indian art, most particularly Lakota women's arts of quillwork and beadwork. I began study in this area with my dissertation on Lakota gender and art (Bol 1989, see also Bol 1985, 1999). Ever since then, I have been periodically picking up the pieces of this project as various work positions

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Figure 1. Beadwork Adorns the World at the Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA. Gallery image by Blair Clark, courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.

allowed me to do so; endeavoring to move it further along. Most recently, I had returned to beadwork studies while an Associate Curator of Anthropology at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History—developing what was then the new Alcoa Foundation Hall of Native Americans. I was able to conduct new field research then in South Dakota, and again while I was at the University of Texas, San Antonio as an Associate Professor. With some knowledge of Lakota traditions, I was still left with the rest of the world to investigate!

Everywhere I traveled, I looked for examples of beadwork and beadwork artists. While traveling for other reasons, I searched in Uzbekistan, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and also in Southwest China while traveling with Mathers Museum of World Cultures' Director, Jason Baird Jackson. On the occasion of my husband's 50th anniversary of participation in the Stanford-in-Germany program, I took the opportunity to make a side trip to the Bohemian region of the Czech Republic, renowned for its history of manufacturing glass beads for worldwide export.

When I traveled to the American Folklore Society's 2013 annual meeting in Providence, Rhode Island, I stopped off in Corning, New York, to see an exhibit, *Life on a String*, at the Corning Museum of Glass and later borrowed their excellent video to show in our own exhibition at MOIFA. There I saw a remarkable Chinese court necklace. Thinking that it must be incredibly rare, when I went back home, I found three such necklaces in MOIFA's own collection. While attending the American Alliance of Museum's 2014 annual meeting in

Seattle, Washington, I visited a collector with an extraordinary collection of Borneo beadwork. He generously loaned pieces from his collection to be photographed for the book and for the exhibition. Again, while on my way to Yellowstone National Park I stopped by a gallery in Jackson, Wyoming, to introduce myself and inquire about a special Plains Indian beadwork private collection.

One intentional trip was to visit the African holdings at the Field Museum in Chicago, which is known for its outstanding collections. These were dizzying, so I shot record photos to take back for study in Santa Fe. Ultimately, we borrowed several remarkable African kingship objects from the Field.

An international opportunity that presents itself every year outside the front door of the MOIFA is the Santa Fe International Folk Art Market (IFAM), featuring some one hundred and fifty traditional master artists from sixty or so countries during the second weekend in July. Through the IFAM, I have had the chance to get to know beadworkers from South Africa, Ghana, South Sudan, Kenya, Mexico, Ecuador, Taiwan, and Haiti—all continuing the traditional, and some not-so-traditional, beaded arts. Some of these artists and their work are presented in the Artist Profiles within the exhibit, which were intended to remind visitors that beadwork is still very much a living art form.

With so much material to work with, and to select from, after shooting over one thousand photographs of objects every Friday morning for several years in the MOIFA photo lab, next came the question of how to organize and interpret the material (Figures 2, 12, 15, 18, 21, 24, 26-27). The most obvious organizational frame would probably have been by geographic location, but somehow that didn't allow for following threads of similar (or contrasting) practices worldwide. So instead I proposed to organize both the book and the exhibit thematically. The objects themselves fell into natural themes according to how they were, and are, used. These themes, such as life stages, gender, leadership and status, spiritual life, and beyond the village, revealed many parallel uses among the various beadworking societies, thus allowing the opportunity to compare the myriad of creative ways in which humankind works their beads.

One danger I feared was that by mixing objects from various cultures together, each thematic area, lacking visual cohesion, might look like a mixed-up "stew" concocted with objects from different places all jumbled together. I struggled with this concern until I finally arrived at a plan to anchor each thematic section with one or, at most, two case studies. Thus, each of the ten sections focuses on the beadwork of a particular cultural tradition as a case study. Then surrounding this case study are examples of similar usage, such as hats and crowns that identify the marital status of its wearer from a myriad of other traditions. The case studies are the heart of the exhibition (Figures 1, 3-11, 13-14, 16-17, 19-20, 22-23, 25).



Figure 2. Woman's Wedding Tunic, c. 1880. Swat River Valley, Northwest Pakistan. Cotton, buttons, metal, glass beads. 33 7/8 in. (86 cm). Museum of International Folk Art, IFAF Collection, FA.1988.44.1. Photograph by Blair Clark, courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.

And so, *Beadwork Adorns the World* opened as a temporary exhibition at the Museum of International Folk Art on April 22, 2018, and closed on February 3, 2019. It was accompanied by a stand-alone book, *The Art and Tradition of Beadwork*, published by Gibbs Smith, with 256 pages plus six hundred color photos (Bol 2018).

References Cited

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Marsha C. Bol is Director emerita of the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Over the course of a varied curatorial, professorial, and directorial career, she has curated numerous exhibitions and led diverse museum programs and initiatives. With Suzanne Seriff, she has recently been honored by the Council for Museum Anthropology with the Michael M. Ames Award for Innovative Museum Anthropology. Her Ames award recognizes her role envisioning, founding, and leading the museum's Gallery of Conscience initiative.

Additional Figures

Additional figures showing beaded works from the exhibition and gallery images from the Museum of International Folk Art presentation of the exhibition are provided below.



Figure 3. Gallery image by Blair Clark, courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.



Figure 4. Gallery image by Blair Clark, courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.



Figure 5. Gallery image by Blair Clark, courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.



Figure 6. Gallery image by Blair Clark, courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.



Figure 7. Gallery image by Blair Clark, courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.



Figure 8. Gallery image by Blair Clark, courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.



Figure 9. Gallery image by Blair Clark, courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.



Figure 10. Gallery image by Blair Clark, courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.



Figure 11. Gallery image by Blair Clark, courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.



Figure 12. Warrior's Tunic, 1850-1875. Atayal peoples, northern Taiwan. Raveled wool, cotton, hemp, giant clamshell (*Tridacna*) beads. 38 ½ x 18 in. (98 x 46 cm). Museum of International Folk Art, A.1995.93.714. Gift of Lloyd E. Cotsen and the Neutrogena Corporation. Photograph by Blair Clark, courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.



Figure 13. Gallery image by Blair Clark, courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.



Figure 14. Gallery image by Blair Clark, courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.



Figure 15. Grave Wreath, c. 1880. France. Ceramic, glass beads, wire. 32 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 4 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (83 x 75 x 12.5 cm). Museum of International Folk Art, Gift of the Girard Foundation Collection, A.1981.1.387. Photograph by Blair Clark, courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.



Figure 16. Gallery image by Blair Clark, courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.



Figure 17. Gallery image by Blair Clark, courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.



Figure 18. Marriage Exchange Apron. Ambai island, Papua province, New Guinea (Indonesia). Commercial cotton, glass beads, bark fiber thread, feathers. 31 7/8 x 22 1/16 in. (81 x 56 cm). Museum of International Folk Art, IFAF Collection, FA.2002.49.13. Gift of Diane and Sandy Besser. Photograph by Blair Clark, courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.



Figure 19. Gallery image by Blair Clark, courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.



Figure 20. Gallery image by Blair Clark, courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.



Figure 21. Unmarried Woman's Corset, 2012. Maker: Mary Padar Kuoajok Athac (Dinka), Yirol West County, Lakes State, Bahr el Ghazal Region, Republic of South Sudan. Cotton, glass beads, plastic buttons. 40 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 19 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (103.5 x 50.5 cm). Museum of International Folk Art, IFAF Collection, FA.2012.48.1. Photograph by Blair Clark, courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.



Figure 22. Gallery image by Blair Clark, courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.



Figure 23. Gallery image by Blair Clark, courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.



Figure 24. Baby Carrier, early Twentieth Century. Aoheng peoples, Orang Ulu group, Kalimantan region, Borneo island, Indonesia. Cotton, leather cord, glass beads, metal, cowry shells, organic, wood. 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 19 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (12.8 x 49.5 x 34.3 cm. David McLanahan Collection.



Figure 25. Gallery image by Blair Clark, courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.



Figure 26. Initiated Woman's Back Belt, c. 1950. Mbukushu (or Bayei) peoples, Okavango Delta, Botswana. Animal hide, glass beads, ostrich eggshell beads. 25 3/16 x 16 9/16 in. (67 x 32 cm). Museum of International Folk Art, Gift of the Girard Foundation Collection, A.1982.30.584. Photography by Addison Doty, courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.



Figure 27. Bridal Headdress, c. 1850. Southern Judean Hills, Hebron region, historic Palestine. Cotton, silk, silver, white metal, coral, glass beads. Diameter: 6 ¼ in. (16 cm). Museum of International Folk Art, Gift of Florence Dibell Bartlett, A.1955.86.919. Photograph by Addison Doty, courtesy of the Museum of International Folk Art.

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