

*World on a String, Part Two: The Tiny Mighty Bead* (2005, 94 minutes). This part presents vivid images that include the following cultures: Central and South America, rituals of the Huichol of Mexico; North America, Native Americans of many tribes at an annual dance festival; Nepal, India, the Newar People and the Rabari People of the Ran of Kutch; Myanmar, the Naga People, Southeast Asia, Vietnam Hilltribe Flower Hmong and Red Mao; South Africa, the Ndebele and Zulu Peoples.

In the course of Part Two, Diana brings us up close and personal to bead-bedecked opium smokers, reformed headhunters, mescal inspired artists, dedicated social activists, festival dancers and solemn, lovely Naga women whose only personal possessions are their beads.

The next time I am about to complain as I am caught in Los Angeles traffic on the way to a Bead Society meeting, I am going to put things in perspective by remembering the uniquely dressed widowed or deserted Zulu women of Southern Africa as they walk together for hours through their lush hill country, then help one another across a rushing river to reach their daily beading circle. Their determination to sustain themselves and their group through beads is inspiring. Seeing it through Diana's camera is amazing, and humbling.

*World on a String, Part Three: The Sacred Bead* (2005, 93 minutes) covers bead use in Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Shamanism. Scenes in Part Three range from demonstrations of passionate public religious ritual to serene private worship. Beads appear on gilded statues, village costumes, and rosary strings. There are many dazzling displays, but amid all the color and action I found most touching the scene focused on an elderly woman in a Northern Spanish town, a town so small and so remote that there was no church or resident priest. We see her as she sits alone next to a vintage radio, listening to a broadcast of a Catholic mass. She does this faithfully twice each day, counting her prayers on a rosary of simple black beads. One gets the feeling that those beads are her lifelong dearest companions.

Part Three also features a very informative visit to a monastery in the United States. Here we see rose petal rosary beads being made, from blossom to bead, by chatty, good-natured monks. It is a rare and delightful addition to bead lore.

Participating with the Friedbergs to produce the *World on a String* series, the Bead Society of Los Angeles has taken a unique opportunity to fulfill its original mandate to find and share information about beads. Diana and Lionel have been working on major productions together for 35 years, first in South Africa, then in the United States. Their extensive experience writing, directing, producing, photographing, and editing documentaries in many parts of the world, plus their compassion for people and passion for beads, gives this documentary series top professional polish and genuine insight.

By contributing to general as well as specific knowledge about beads, *World on a String* will create a better informed, more receptive audience for bead research. With this in mind, I suggest that you not only watch your copies three times, but recommend *World on a String* to your local public lending libraries and college and museum reference libraries.

The *World on a String* website is <<http://www.worldonastringmovie.com>>.

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*Beads of Life: Eastern and Southern African Beadwork from Canadian Collections.*

**Marie-Louise Labelle.** Canadian Museum of Civilization, *Cultural Studies Paper* 78, Gatineau, Quebec J8X 4H2, Canada. 2005. 186 pp., 109 color figs., 64 b&w figs. Canadian \$45.00 (paper cover).

The book opens with a map of Africa that shows the countries covered. The author elected to cover the subject in a thematic and sociological way, to reflect how the exhibits themselves were arranged. This is not, however, a catalog-style publication, but rather a companion to the exhibition with the same title, which opened at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Gatineau, Quebec, on 14 April 2005, and ran until 26 February 2006.

The first chapter after the Introduction covers Eastern and Southern African Beadwork from Canadian Collections. It comes as something of a surprise to find out just how

extensive those collections are, and we are told the story of how they came to arrive in Canadian museums.

A chapter follows on Materials of Early Ornament and Clothing in which the diverse natural materials are discussed and illustrated, along with comments on the social significance of the ways in which they are used. Stages of personal life, often called *rites de passage*, and status are reflected in the ornaments and beadwork worn; local customs and polite usage also govern the selection of clothing and adornment that gets worn. The author rightly notes the way in which similarities in life style, such as pastoralism, bring about apparent similarities in beadwork styles. The white beads and other ornaments enabled diviners to carry out their mission, furnished links to the ancestral world, and also identified them for what they were. The author expounds interestingly (pp. 23-30) on the important and significant part that metal ornaments and beads played in the culture of eastern Africa. Southern Africa, where glass beads arrived earlier, has less documentation on the use of natural materials used as adornment.

The next section, on Glass Beads and Colour Interpretation, is perhaps the one that will be of most interest to readers of this book. The chapter starts off with a review of where the earliest glass beads originated, and how they came to take an increasingly important part in clothing and adornment, taking the place of metal and natural materials such as feathers, shells, bone, and vegetable fibers. A parallel is drawn between African womenfolk occupying themselves with beadwork, and the beadwork and embroidery practiced by women and girls in polite Western society, with the observation that this missionary-fostered, peaceful activity could be read as a form of cultural colonialism. Most of this chapter addresses widely held notions and misconceptions about the significance of color meanings and combinations, and the ways in which color is perceived in various African communities, especially in southern Africa. Names given to bead colors are discussed, the varying significance of color, also the whole issue of coded messages through beadwork. The author made good use of her fieldwork experience in eastern Africa, especially among the Masaai, and ethnic informants who were able to offer insights and comments to support her arguments.

The chapter Aesthetic Principles of Beadwork deals with the importance of color, especially white, as used in eastern and southern Africa. Before glass beads became available, white body paint was widely used, with white beads made from ostrich eggshell, cowries, and olivella shells. When glass beads became common, white as a background, along with red, plus black or dark blue, became the principal colors used. The women doing the beading would aim for a balanced design. As colors became more diverse, color

harmonies and sequences became important, and individual styles of different culture groups could be better identified. Beadwork techniques and materials varied according to the groups involved, and whether beads were assembled to make a fabric, or applied onto leather, cloth, or wire.

Next comes a section on Status Clothing and Ornaments which points out that beadwork is important as an indicator of status—not merely social standing, but more importantly, a means of “reading” the person concerned: age grouping, marital status, number of children, the children’s status, family grouping, or whatever. Small children may wear a string of beads that is added to as they grow. Young men and girls tend to wear a quantity of beadwork before marriage, and the amount worn may be a measure of the individual’s attractiveness. Widows obviously wear only a few pieces of beadwork; their ornaments may be buried with them, or go to her daughters. Stylistic confusion may arise if a beadworking woman “imports” the beading style of her own locality when she moves after marriage to a different area.

The last section, called Beads of Life, reviews the important part that beads and beadwork play in contemporary eastern and southern Africa, whether as a means of raising cash, or making political statements and affirming African identity.

The illustrations are excellent and clear. A bonus is that the dimensions of each piece are given in centimeters, which is most necessary due to the varying scales of reproduction used (e.g., on p. 123 where the pieces illustrated in figs. 114-116 are of very different sizes, but are given similar amounts of space on the page). The illustrations that show how beadwork is worn have captions giving extra background information. But the design and layout of this book leaves something to be desired; the reader needs to flip back and forth between the text and the figure referred to. There is no index, which seems to be a glaring omission in a book of this type, where beadwork is discussed thematically rather than geographically. The bibliography, though, is full and up to date. There are very few typos.

*Beads of Life* gives an excellent sociological introduction to the role that beadwork plays in the life of this large and diverse area, without being too technical, and as such, is worth having; the numerous illustrations of beadwork pieces and beadwork in different contexts add to the book’s value.

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