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THE GARDEN OF BEADED DELIGHTS



MARCIA KATZ
TRANSLATES
HER OWN
VISION
OF THE 
WORLD INTO
INTRICATELY
WOVEN BEAD
CREATIONS.

Anyone who is tempted to believe Marcia Katz's insistence that she is just an ordinary person need only look at her beaded creations to be convinced otherwise. The extraordinary beadwork that she creates is tangible proof that Katz looks at the world a little differently than do those around her; the quality of that work raises her above the commonplace. Luckily, she has chosen a medium of expression that translates her vision into a form that is visible to all.

Her peyote-stitch *Bee Bracelet*, a fluid, dense, and richly textured piece strung with gold-colored glass, brass, and seed beads, creates a garden landscape. Viewed closely, as if one were strolling through that garden and then stopping to inspect a point of interest, the individual character of each vintage bead, charm, and crystal embedded within the strands of seed beads becomes more defined.

The bracelet began with a brass bee charm that caught her eye in a shop. She bought it, already seeing in her mind's eye what she would create. "When I saw the bee charm, I envisioned a large farm as seen from an aerial view. I decided to use shades of one color, and chose gold.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Necklaces that Katz makes today are truly one of a kind, created with an improvisatory approach that makes them impossible to recreate. Katz made the piece at the near right, *Festoonery*, by encasing a shell in netting, then adding freeform sculptured peyote stitch and drilled shells. For many necklaces, such as the two at mid and far right, Katz embellishes loom-woven pieces with such off-loom finishing touches as fringes with vintage, crystal, or specialty beads. Photo © Donna Chiarelli.

It took me about a year to collect the right beads to be a part of the piece. I felt a sculptural peyote stitch would enable me to formulate the look of valleys, trees, meadows, hills, and gardens," Katz explains.

Digging into her bead collection box, scouring bead stores, rescuing old jewelry from antique shops, flea markets, and garage sales, Katz unearthed vintage and new gold beads, flower beads, and charms that would hide in and peek out of the garden. The finished bracelet consists of seed beads, bugle beads, charlottes and 12 cuts, glass, 22-karat gold, crystal, and some new and vintage brass. The Delica beads were chosen for their smoothness over the rolling hills. The charlottes and cuts lend to the sense of outdoor textures. Katz started with the middle two inches, working back and forth with bridges of beads to complete a homeland for her bee.

Katz chooses to work largely with the squared-off Delica-style beads. "I like this type of seed bead because of its uniform size . . . In addition, the beads have thin shells but a large hole, making it easy to complete several passes through the same bead when necessary." Another reason to use Delicas is the range of colors — over 700 from which to choose — offering brightness and glitter, though not as brazen as they might be with other materials. Often the same colors are offered in both matte and shiny finish, increasing design possibilities.

The peyote stitch is one of Katz's favorite techniques, as it allows her to create sculptural artwork as she did with the *Bee Bracelet*. She sees her jewelry crafted in this way as one-of-a-kind artwork.

"I could teach someone how to do a peyote stitch, but I could not tell them how to duplicate this bracelet. It was built organically, one bead at a time.

The design was a continual process, with no set pattern. And it would be difficult, perhaps impossible, to even find the same individual vintage beads, pearls, and crystals that were incorporated into the design," Katz explains.



CREATIVE ROOTS.

Katz traces her creativity to her father's branch of her family tree, where many relatives were and are practicing artists. During college, she grounded her natural artistic impulses by earning a degree in elementary education, specializ-

ing in art. While a student at Fairleigh Dickinson University, Katz married her college sweetheart. Her husband, Martin, an accountant, provides a natural balance to her artistic temperament. Even today, when asked a question about dates or figures, she defers to Martin.

curtains, and furniture to resemble a flowering paradise, Katz provided a special room in which her child could blossom. The creation of this room foreshadowed her next major endeavor — in 1976, Katz's fascination with color bloomed into a flower business when she and her husband bought a farm near Boston.



For her *Anemone Necklace*, made up entirely of seed beads, Katz used a three-dimensional loom beading technique that was developed by bead artist Diane Fitzgerald. Photo: Peter Gorman.

"We were taking a drive one weekend to explore Massachusetts. We found this property with the greenhouses for sale, and we decided to start our own business," Katz explains.

While the Katzes always maintained a little garden on their New Jersey residence, neither had any prior experience in growing plants on a large scale — but they weren't afraid to learn. Hiring a professional gardener to assist them, they undertook the business of growing ornamental and flowering plants under 40,000 square feet of glass. Both remember the nights the temperature-sensitive

alarms would sound, and they would have to check the greenhouses to make sure the plants were safe and warm. "The alarms went off so many nights that even on the nights when they didn't sound, Martin would get up and check on them," Katz chuckles.

With her bedroom on the second floor of the house, overlooking the greenhouses, she spent much time just looking down and enjoying the masses of color. These pleasurable reveries would later bear fruit in the creation of the *Bee Bracelet*.

When utility bills escalated and a blizzard caved in some of the greenhouses' glass, Martin's practical business sense concluded that it was no longer economically feasible to continue the operation. They sold the farm; he took a position with Harvard Uni-

versity, and Katz became a floral designer for one of the oldest florist shops in Boston.

It was here that Katz took another step forward; a coworker at the florist shop taught her to knit. Although the

"IT WAS SOMETHING ABOUT THE FEEL OF THE BEADS IN MY HANDS. I DID NOT WANT TO PUT THEM DOWN!"



schools, and professional conferences, and she carried over her creative impulses into her private life as well. When her first child was born in 1968, Katz transformed the nursery into a lush garden setting. Painting the walls,

experience would later prove valuable in designing comfortable, wearable beaded art, she saw it less as a step towards something else, and more as an all-consuming passion. "It became an obsession. I even kept my knitting next to me in the car so if I stopped for a red light I could pick it up and do a few stitches!" Katz recalls.

She searched for different colors and textures in yarn. She experimented with incorporating feathers and old beads she collected into the sweaters and hats she knitted. Soon, she opened her own yarn shop, then began giving knitting classes, then began designing and selling sweaters.

"I found my attraction to beads intensified, and I even took apart some of my collection of old jewelry to use the beads and crystals in my designs," Katz confesses. With both their daughters grown and on their own, the Katzes thought they might like to explore the warmer climate of Florida for a new residence.

One weekend in 1986, they flew south to investigate. Before they returned to Boston, they had bought a home on the barrier island of South Hutchinson.

Selling her yarn business and relocating to Florida, Katz had no idea what she would be doing next. Strolling through town one day, a beaded feather-shaped pillow in a needlepoint shop captured her attention. She signed up for a workshop and fabricated her own beaded pillow.

"It was the first time I made something entirely of beads," Katz recalls. "I was hooked." The appeal of beads lay not simply in their visual beauty, but also in their tactile qualities. "It was



This **Bead and Fiber Necklace** is made in two parts, which were then woven together at the top. The focal point is an antique Colombian charm in the center. Photo: Peter Gorman.

something about the feel of the beads in my hands. I did not want to put them down!"

For Katz, this was the point of no return. She bought any book she could get her hands on, took workshops, and experimented endlessly. After reading Virginia Blakelock's *Those Bad, Bad Beads*, she bought a loom and made several evening bags. She loved the work, but there was still a drawback.

"Loomed beaded pieces have a pliability and a textural softness you don't achieve by hand," she says. "I loved this quality, but I hated how my back felt after working several hours on the loom." Not one to be deterred, Katz designed a back-friendly loom which she

took to a friend, August Ensalaca, a retired tool-and die-maker. They experimented with several prototypes until they constructed what Katz calls "The Perfect Loom." Measuring 18 inches by 24 inches and rather than lying flat on a desk, Katz's wooden Perfect Loom is on a stand so the angle and height can be adjusted. Recently she designed legs for the loom to give the artist the option of working on a table or on a free-standing unit.

Katz introduces her students to the equipment, providing each participant in her workshops with a Perfect Loom on which to work. "I just want beadworkers to experience this tool and see it is not difficult. Nor does working with a loom have to be back-breaking! It is a very logical way of working. You work from your design graph and then count beads."

Many of the pieces that Katz creates on the loom, she embellishes with off-loom finishing touches. "I like to add fringing with vintage, crystal, or specialty beads. Off loom I may incorporate gemstone beads to make a unique necklace clasp or purse closure."

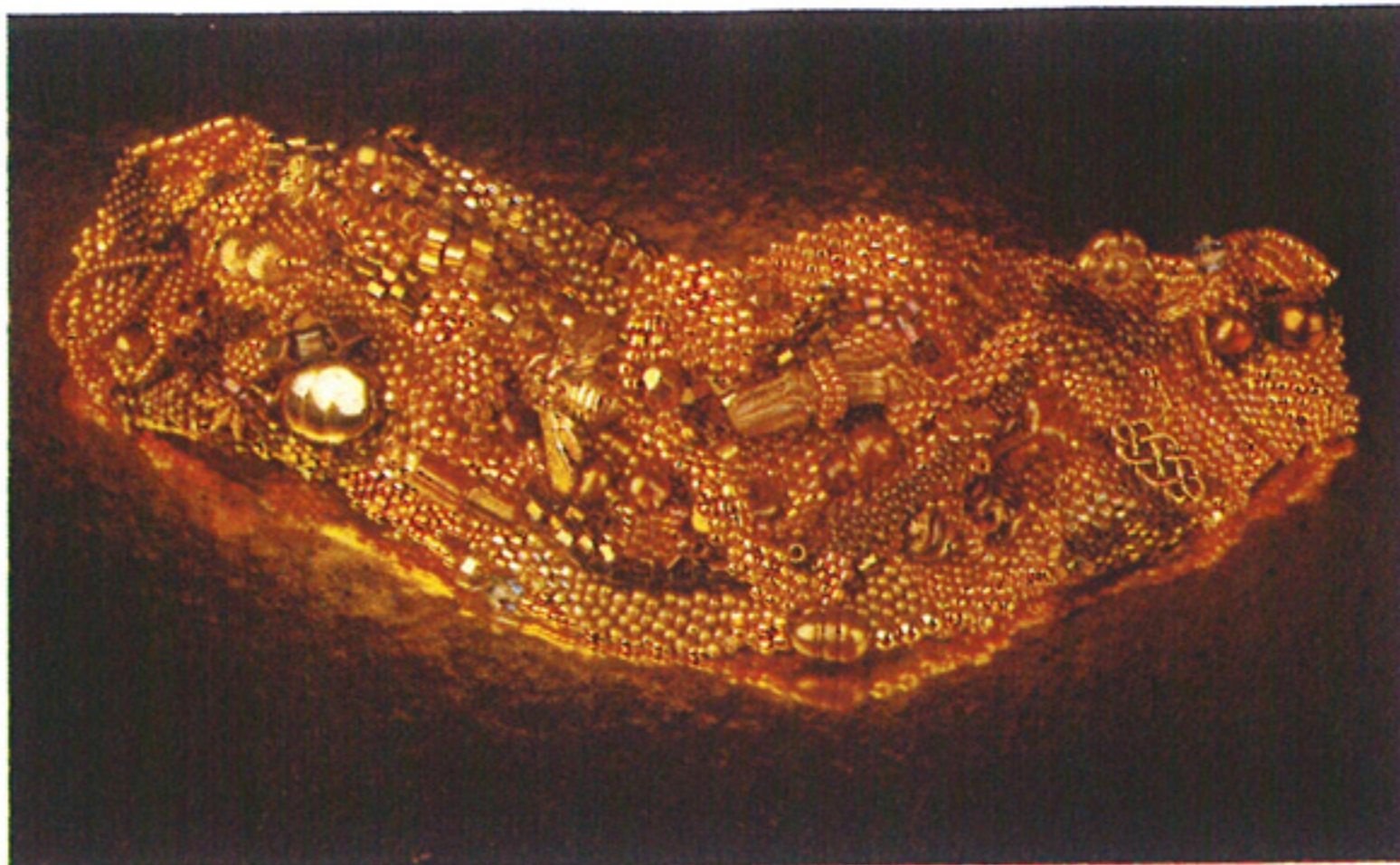


SUCCESSFUL LOVE AFFAIR. The artist's love affair with beads is proving to be a successful relationship, garnering her special recognition. In 1997, one of her three-dimensional loomed pieces was juried into Embellishment, an international exhibition. In 1998, one of Katz's beaded necklaces, *Festoonery*, was chosen for the book, *The Sea, Selections from the First International Miyuki Delica Challenge*, edited by Barry Kahn. Artists were invited to submit original pieces reflecting an ocean theme, with the major requirement that they use the Delica bead to produce their work.

"Deciding what to make came very naturally," Katz recalls. "I live on the beach and walk the beach every day collecting shells. As soon as I read about the challenge, I knew exactly what I would enter."

She first enclosed her selected shell in netting, then added free-form sculptured peyote and drilled shells. The necklace was constructed using a tubular stitch and embellished with more drilled shells.

Despite her artistic and commercial pursuits, it is safe to say that teaching is a vocation from which Katz will never retire. Since her immersion in the world of beads, she has been giving workshops in her studio as well as at the community college, at bead shops, galleries, and even in hospitals. This August, she will travel to Cape Cod to teach a workshop at the Samuel



Katz's Sculptural Peyote Bracelet represents a bee flying through a garden, depicted in many colors and sizes of beads, mostly in shades of gold and including many vintage beads and charms. Photo: Peter Gorman.

Day Glass Studio.

"I love teaching people who share the same passion. The learning process is a two-way street. I get inspiration for my work oftentimes from my students and sometimes just from showing a beading technique."

Katz recalls the time a friend asked her how she made a beaded bag on the loom. The artist sat down at her equip-

ment explaining and demonstrating the beading process. After a time, the friend thanked her and left. Katz, however, got so caught up with the colors and textures of the beads she had chosen that she continued well into the night, until the purse was finished.

Her barrier island home complements the artist's life, with her studio hanging out over shop windows overlooking the open sea. Katz is an enthusiastic early

riser, usually up at 4 a.m., with a head full of creative concepts. "I jump out of bed with ideas. And if I can't start them, at least I can get them down on paper," she says. ♦

Marcia Katz may be contacted through her studio at #1201, 10044 South Ocean Dr., Jensen Beach, FL 34957; or e-mail mkatz@gate.net.

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