

L I N D A  
F I F I E L D

by Gwen Heffner

Historically, beadwork has embellished clothing and possessions, marked status, and illuminated rituals within societies. It was an integral part of the culture and traditions for which it was designed. While much of contemporary society lacks a viable connection to tradition and value, one exception finds its name in bead artist Linda Fifield.

Coming from three generations of Appalachian craftswomen who made handwork a part of the daily rhythm of life, Linda builds upon a rich personal and tangible heritage—a family tradition of craftsmanship. Fifield remembers, “Adoration of my maternal grandmother kept me often at her side, mesmerized by the fluid motions of her hands as she created intricate, delicate laces or stitched miles of quilting.”

Linda’s mother Wanda Jo, in turn, became an accomplished quilter and continues to produce fine works. This creative environment directed Linda to choose the path of a craftswoman and gallery owner. For her, artistic

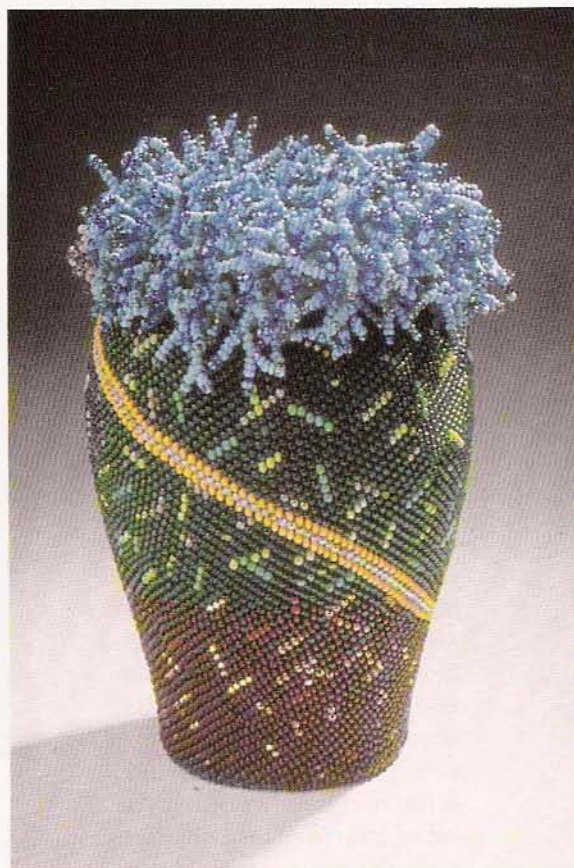
commitment is not only a way of life, it is the continuation of her family’s history.

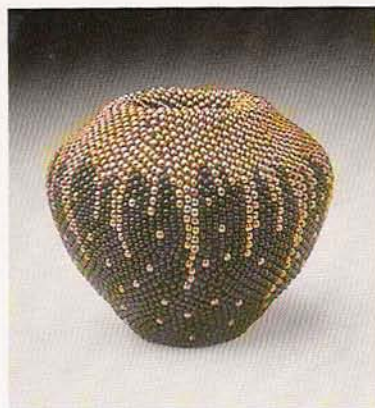
“My mother and grandmother provided our family with hand-constructed garments, quilts for our beds, crocheted laces for our table and embroidered linens,” she recalls. “There was always some type of handwork being done because it was an integral part of our daily life.”

Through the years, Linda learned numerous fiber techniques—quilting, weaving, knitting, crocheting, embroidery, rug-hooking, and garment construction. Continuing these traditions today in her adult life, Linda says, “There is never a time when I don’t have a work in progress.

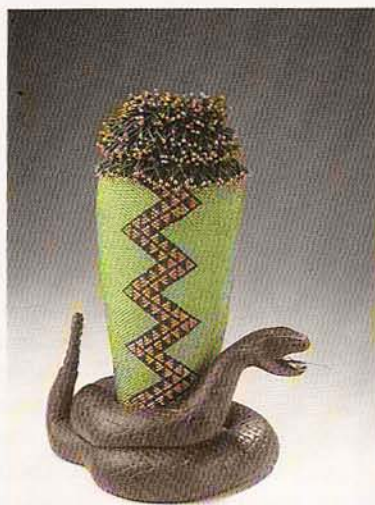
“I have marketed my hand-braided and beaded leather designs at craft shows and regional shops, and through a leather retail shop that I owned and operated in Berea, Kentucky,” she continues. “In 1992 I opened Contemporary Artifacts Gallery in Berea with my partners Gwen Heffner and Teresa Deaver. Presenting my work in this

**EARTH,**  
BY LINDA FIFIELD.  
BEADED VESSEL,  
6.5 BY 4 INCHES.





**COPPER MOUNTAIN,  
BEADED VESSEL,  
BY LINDA FIFIELD  
3 INCHES HIGH.**



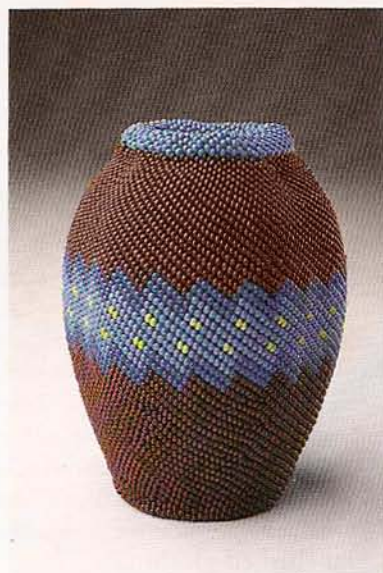
**GUARDIAN OF THE  
GREEN VESSEL, BY  
LINDA & JACK FIFIELD.  
BEADED VESSEL,  
10 INCHES HIGH.**

beautiful gallery environment has advanced my development as an artist, and I've become adept at a variety of beading techniques—both on and off the loom.”

Linda said many years spent exploring various techniques and materials has led her to one major creative interest: beading vessels. Seeing Native American beadwork for the first time at the Field Museum in Chicago in 1975 was a turning point in Fifield's life. She says she was captivated and knew at once that she wanted to create works of such precision, beauty, and sensitivity. “I was mesmerized,” she says. “The fine twined and coiled weaves of Pomo, Pima, Tlinglit, Yurok, Papago, Apache, and many other tribes were fascinating, and I was struck by the similarity between twined and coiled baskets and the textured surface of beadwork.

Returning to her home in rural southeast Kentucky, Linda began researching beadwork through books. Working alone, she mastered numerous ancient beading techniques that have been practiced by various cultures throughout the world. Fifield's relative isolation allowed her to mature and develop a distinctive style and a body of work that is astonishing in its diversity.

“Since the beginning, I've worked to develop a basket/vessel form using glass seed beads,” she says. “When I recieved a copy of *The New Beadwork* by Kathlyn Moss and Alice Scherer, I was astounded. I had no idea of the extent of the diverse and innovative beadwork that is being created. This book has made an invaluable contribution



**UNTITLED,  
BY LINDA FIFIELD.  
BEADED VESSEL,  
4.5 BY 3.5 INCHES.**



**LIZARDS,  
BY LINDA FIFIELD.  
BEADED NECKLACE,  
12 BY 7 INCHES.**

in raising the awareness of beading as an art form, and its influence on me has been highly motivational.”

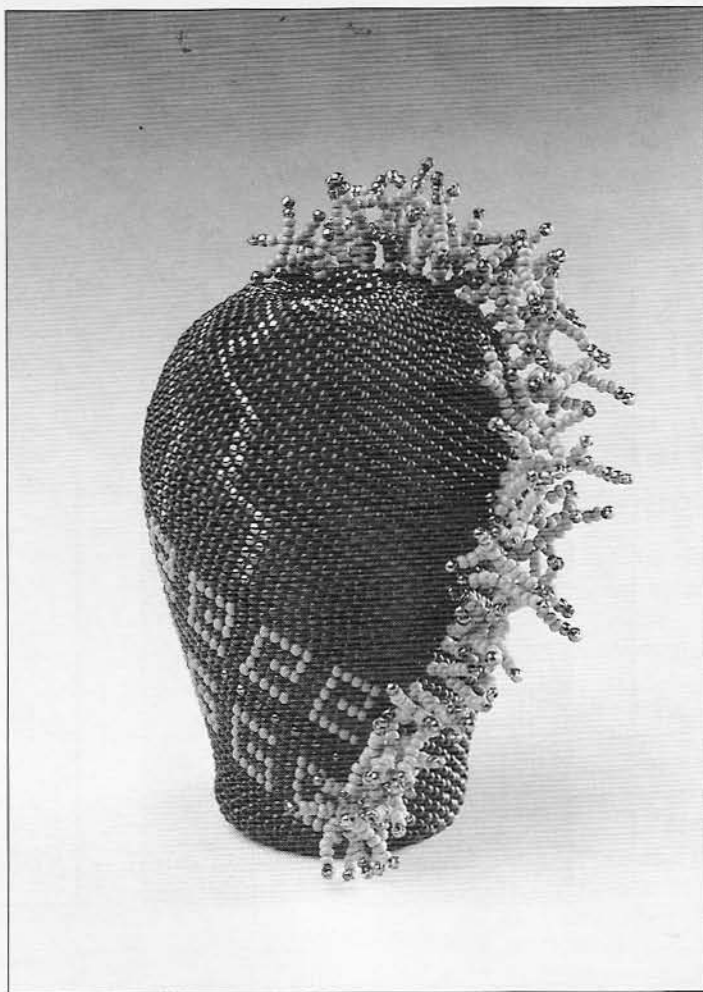
As in all works of art, Fifield’s beadwork is created within a personal context, reflecting visual and tactile richness, color, nature, precision, and intimacy. Like her home, land, and life, her works are carefully and beautifully structured. Often all extraneous elements are removed, leaving a stark and elegant simplicity.

Her designs use a variety of imagery that ranges from simple and abstract geometrics to intricate and realistic florals and animals. Her recent works have been collaborative and incorporate small carvings and sculptures made by her husband Jack. Collaborative works, such as *Earth in Balance*, invite contemplation and wonder, reflecting the two artists’ environmental concerns and their senses of humor.

“Working in stone and wood, Jack creates sculptural pedestals that enhance the beaded forms they support,” Linda relates. “This collaborative effort further enriches my creative spirit as our family carries on its traditions.”

The relatively small size and uniformity of seed beads allow Linda to achieve fine graphic detail and structure. Made of glass, these microbeads become a three-dimensional refraction of light in a phenomenal array of colors. She uses glass seed beads and a netting stitch commonly called peyote stitch or gourd stitch to cover entire surfaces of clay vessels. These beaded vessels, which form the core and focus of her work, have been increasing in size and complexity in the past eight years.

“The uniformity of Czechoslovakian seed beads enables me to achieve detailed graphic design,” Linda says, “and the wide range of colors and bead




**MOHAWK,**  
**BY LINDA FIFIELD.**  
**BEADED VESSEL,**  
**5 INCHES HIGH.**  
CLAY FORM BY TERESA DEEVER.  
PHOTO BY RON FORTH.

finishes provide endless variation and design possibilities. Beading around a ceramic form—the technique I employ most—is a twill weave whose origin can be traced to ancient cultures of the Middle East.”

Striving for a balance of color, light, and texture, Linda prefers to design simple compositions using vivid colors. The precision of the intricate stitch creates a pebbled, tactile surface that is sensuous to the touch. “The rhythm of beading and the necessary attention to minute detail bring about a clarity of mind akin to meditation,” she notes. “I undertake each vessel with the joy of personal challenge. My wish is to create objects of beauty, as I feel harmony is found within beauty and peace within that harmony.”

Fifield also uses several loom weaving techniques to produce necklaces, tapestries and framed wall pieces. Weaving glass seed beads on a loom creates a fabric of glass that offers diverse possibilities. Linda pushes her woven pieces further by building out from these tapestries with her various netting stitches, stuffing areas of the weaving from behind, and quilting areas to give the work a wonderful third dimension.

By planting thoughts of beauty with reflective seed beads, Linda Fifield creates works that are the harvest and reward of her abundant creativity. The resulting garden of her works is dramatic, universal, and ultimately true. 

*Author Gwen Heffner is a studio potter and owner of Contemporary Artifacts Gallery in Berea, Kentucky.*