

CARE OF AMERICAN INDIAN BEADWORK:

- Glass beads are fragile and will break if handled roughly. Take care not to scrape or strike the beads.
- Older threading material can be stiff and inflexible; back up fragile beaded items with a supportive board.
- Avoid areas of high humidity as this can cause damage to glass beads, and cotton, linen and sinew threading will absorb moisture.
- Avoid excessive light – it will not damage the beads but may damage threading and backing materials.
- Some beaded items, especially garments, are very heavy and need extra support.
- When choosing to hang beaded outfits, examine the shoulders carefully for any weakness. If the shoulders are not strong, a heavily beaded outfit will not be able to support its weight and may distort or tear at the shoulders.
- Remove loose dust and dirt with a soft brush.
- Rubbing alcohol can be lightly used for cleaning glass beads because it quickly evaporates; it is especially good for greasy dirt.



INDIAN ARTS & CRAFTS ASSOCIATION

SINCE 1974



THE WORLD'S LEADING AMERICAN INDIAN ARTS ALLIANCE



The IACA Mission

To promote, preserve and protect authentic
American Indian arts and crafts.

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COLLECTING AMERICAN INDIAN BEADWORK



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 BEADWORK**
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BEADS OF EVERY MATERIAL

have been and are still used by Native Americans to decorate personal and tribal cultural items. The beads vary in size, shape, color, and the materials from which they were and are made. Variations in the threading materials and application techniques also vary by region. Glass beads are the most widely used today. These were introduced by traders during the late 1700s and throughout the 19th century and were mostly imported from Europe. Even today, some of the best glass beads are still imported from the Czech Republic, famous for its glass-makers.

Glass beads are made in many colors, shapes, and sizes. The most common method is to wind molten glass around a long iron rod where different shapes can be made by molding the semi-soft glass. Seed beads are made by creating thin tubes of glass which are cut to size, creating very small beads. Seed beads are very commonly used on American Indian cultural items.

As glass beadwork became more intricate, it varied by region, tribe, and reservation. Floral designs are used by the Woodlands tribes, such as Potawatomi and Ojibwa, while floral and geometric designs are used throughout the tribes of the Northern Great Plains, including Blackfeet and Cree. On the Central Plains tribes such as the Sioux and Arapaho use linear and geometric patterns.

Beads can be hand strung individually into single strands and then sewn onto animal hide or fabric with various stitches, or woven with a needle and loom and applied in a group. The creation of the beaded design depends greatly on tradition, the materials at hand, and the purpose for which the beadwork serves. Threading material can be cotton, linen, deer sinew, or fishing line. The skill of the beader and their experience with all of their materials is key. If the thread breaks or is not properly prepared, beads could be lost or the band of beadwork loses its structural stability.

The unique skill and beautiful art form of Native beadwork is something that is done expertly by a few. It is an art form that requires patience, a steady hand, good eyes and a creative mind. Contemporary Native beadworkers challenge themselves with new materials and designs.

All Native Made art and craft, whether ancient or contemporary, carries with it the spirit of purpose. The shapes, colors, textures and designs each have meaning to Native people. It is from this purpose that creativity thrives.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- *Bead sizes and colors should be uniform and no knots should show.*
- *Beading should lay flat, unless a raised pattern is used.*
- *Skin backing should be soft and supple with no holes on the underside.*
- *No loose or missing beads – there may be an exception if the item is very old.*
- *No backing material should show through because too few beads were used.*
- *Know your artist or dealer – all IACA members are carefully vetted and commit to selling genuine American Indian art, correctly and accurately labeled for the consumer.*
- *Older glass beads can be affected by discoloration caused by white crystals known as 'glass disease'. This can cause the beads to fracture or become misshapen.*

