

Conventional / Traditional Loom Beading

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Brief History :

Native American beadwork has been around for hundreds of years. Long before the European influences arrived here on the continent. These very early variations of beadwork were made of shells and natural materials. These were also known as Wampum. These recorded Laws and ceremonials and certain special events. With the colonization of the continent. The Europeans found that the European beads were of interest to the Native American people. Thus the trading began. The Native Americans would trade animal pelts and other wares for these beads. The Native Americans found that these European beads, were more uniform and easier to use than the beads that were made out of natural materials.

Loom Beading :

The use of looms also goes back to this early portion of the bead history. Looms were used to turn the Wampum into belts. These Wampum belts were what told a story, law, or event. With the influx of the more uniform European beads, the use of a loom was made easier. So this loom technique dates back to the origins of Native American beadwork.

Terms :

Loom - A device or apparatus to hold the warp threads of the beadwork.

Warp Threads - The threads that are running the length of the loom.

Weft Threads - The thread that is running through the beads themselves.

Bead Lane - The beads that are in between the Warp threads, running the length.

Bead Row - The beads that are placed in alignment going across the Warp threads.

Process : (Starting)

After designing a bead pattern on graph paper or a computer program.

String the Warp Threads onto the loom. With a double thread to the outside of the outer most Bead Lanes. If a pointed design is desired use an odd number of Bead Lanes. If a rounded design is desired, an even number of Bead Lanes is required.

With your Weft Thread on a beading needle. Pick up, the required amount of beads in the correct order of your pattern, for the first Bead Row. Place these under the Warp Threads. Push these up in between the Warp Threads. Then pass the needle and through the beads again. This time on top of the Warp Threads. Pick up, your next row of beads onto the needle. Pass these again under the Warp Threads. Pushing the beads up into the correct Bead Lanes. Then pass the needle and thread back through the beads on top of the Warp Threads. That is the basic process. You are going through the beads twice with the Weft Thread. Once under the Warp Thread and once on top of the Warp Threads.

Leave your starting thread, hang out of your first bead row. This will be used to finish off the beginning of your beadwork. After a few bead rows have been placed.

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Process : (End - Finishing)

After you have placed a dozen or so Bead Rows into place. You can go back and finish your starting end of the beadwork. Re-thread the beginning part of your thread onto a needle. Then weave this thread over and under the Warp threads of your beadwork. Continue going back and forth with this thread. Weaving a piece of cloth with your thread. Then apply a thin coat of glue to this area of threads.

To continue a thread in the middle of your piece of beadwork. Do not tie a knot to the outside warp threads. Instead zig zag the needle and thread back through several Bead Rows. The more zigs and zags that you do the better off. To start a new thread begin several Bead Rows back, in the middle, do the zig and zag to the end of the piece. Ending so that the Weft Thread is out of the end of the last Bead Row in place. Then pick up another set of beads for the next Bead Row onto the needle and continue on.

Once the bead piece is complete. Take the weft thread and weave over and under the Warp Threads as you did at the beginning of the piece. Apply the glue to this area. Allow to dry, then cut the Warp Threads at the end of each of these glued areas.

Resources :

Videos : Full Circle Videos, 1131 South College Avenue, Tulsa, OK 74104-4120

Books : " Indian Crafts and Lore " by W. Ben Hunt (Good section on beadwork for beginners.)
" American Indian Beadwork " by W. Ben Hunt and J.F. (Buck) Burshears
(Many more tribal designs, mostly colored plates. Also different methods.)
" Authentic American Indian Beadwork and How to Do It " by Pamela Stanley-Millner
(All black and white. Has a good description of process. Good design layouts.)
" Beads to Buskins " by Peggy Sue Henry (A series of Twelve (12) books.)
(Each book covers a different aspect of beadwork. All have design layouts.)
" The Complete Guide to Traditional Native American Beadwork " by Joel Monture
(Covers all aspects of Native Beadwork. With a basic Loom Beading section.)

Magazine : " Whispering Wind " P. O. Box 1390, Folsom, LA 70437-1390

Computer Programs :

" Beadesigner " <http://www.cs.umb.edu/~lkramer/software.html> (Windows) \$ Free

" Bedaville " <http://www.beadville.com/bdvlmall/vbw-cat.htm> (windows) \$ 95.00

Scanning program for Beadville " Autobead " \$ 39.95

" Beadscape " <http://www.gigagraphica.com/Beadscape/beadscape.html> (Mac) \$ 70.00

Suppliers : Buffalo Chips Trading Post, 327 South 24th Street West, Billings, MT, 59102
Crazy Crow Trading Post, P. O. Box 847 D-10, Pottsboro, TX, 75076-0847
Lone Fox Trader & Beadweaving, P. O. Box 401, Menomonee Falls, WI, 53052
Noc Bay Trading Company, P. O. Box 295, Escanaba, MI, 49829
Steve Eagles, 12335 Oregon Wagon Trail, Elbert, CO, 80106