

# AFRICAN ART



POWER  
&  
ADORNMENT





Two Xhosa-speaking women photographed in a studio in Port Elizabeth in the late 19th century.

**I**N 2008 the DO Ubuntu Orphan Bracelet Campaign started a beading program in the Natal and Transkei regions of Southern Africa.

The beaded pieces provided by this program are taken from an out of print book (South East African Beadwork) depicting North Nguni beadwork made by Zulu-speaking women.

These pieces, found in the Zulu kingdom and the Colony of Natal, date back from 1850 to 1910. Little is known about beadwork from this region. However efforts are being made towards sensitizing art historians, collectors and curators to the extraordinary breadth of the field and the complexity and nuances in the designs of late 19th and early 20th century beadwork from south-east Africa.

Our beadworkers are drawing inspiration from these historical pieces and this is reflected in their beadwork. The beaded art offered by DO Ubuntu are adornments made by women who learned the fine art of beading from their mothers and grandmothers.

We have included four photos of the original beadwork allowing you to visually compare the re-created bead piece with the 19th century beadwork. If you are interested in a particular design and the original photo is not available check our website [www.orphanbracelet.org](http://www.orphanbracelet.org) or email your request. In addition we can provide a photo and information about the individual beadworker upon request.

The campaign provides employment to woman living with HIV/AIDS and 100% of the profit support food programs, sustainable gardens and school uniforms in the Eastern Cape of South Africa.



# South East African BEADWORK

1850-1910

FROM ADORNMENT TO ARTEFACT TO ART

Sandra Kloppe

*'The merchandise was exposed but out of the whole stock he {Molihaban, King of the Bechuanaland} selected only beads. It was agreed that for an ox should be given two pounds of fine glass and porcelain beads of various colours, or three pounds of small white, blue and green, or three and a half pounds of large blue and white glass beads (the value of about four rixdollars, fifteen shillings sterling); to the knives they objected, as cutting only on one side, whilst theirs were sharp on both; to looking-glasses, as being of no use; to handkerchiefs, as not being so strong as their leather caps.'*

*P.S. Borchers, An auto-biographical memoir, Cape Town, 1861, p.63*

As this quote from the memoirs of one of the members of the Somerville and Truter expedition to the Bechuana people in 1801 illustrates, beads were a primary means of exchange in southern Africa prior to the large scale European colonization of the region.

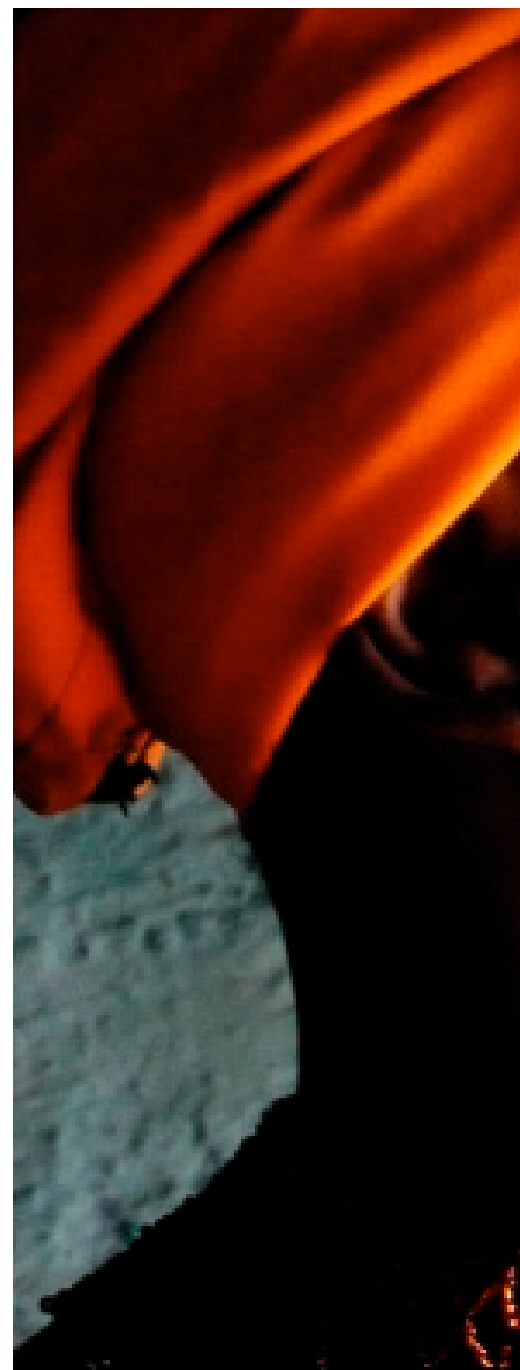
The re-emergence and sale of this beadwork, highlights a further aspect of this history; the gradual reclassification of various types of objects of African manufacturer, first from curio to artefact, and more recently, from artefact to art. The tradition of making beadwork in South Africa survived in spite of the fact that the fabric of society was torn apart under the apartheid government.

Recently traditional pieces are assuming a different role in the lives of patriotic South Africans anxious to reclaim their past. Framed behind

glass and displayed on the walls of countless politicians, and business executives, these items of adornment have finally been transformed into art. It is therefore not only in the context of the gallery, but now also in the private homes of many of the descendants of the 19th-century beadworkers who made these pieces, that beadwork items have assumed a meaning that would have been unimaginable to their original producers and owners.



Report on Craft & Bead Work  
By: Ras Mpho Jeffrey Molapisi  
(Museum Anthropologist)



I really enjoyed evaluating the pieces that were made for the Export order to the United States of America.

Projects that focus on arts and craft, as well as the alleviation of poverty, are tremendously important in the Eastern Cape and we at the Museum are pleased when initiatives such as the DO Ubuntu Beading project appear. It is encouraging, not only to anthro-





pologists or exhibition personnel at the Museum, but a sign that there is willingness “out there” to maintain invaluable cultural traditions, which should not be, allowed to die. Bearing in mind that the work I have seen are copies, it is also encouraging to think that work of this calibre can be produced and therefore be as authentic as possible guides and tools to help keep the beading traditions alive.

I hereby heartily recommend this project to further train the youth in the art of beading. Considering that the theme of our Heritage month this year is Art and Craft, it doesn’t come at a more fitting time than this to promote the initiatives of the Ubuntu Beading project! Also, this project serves remote areas that now have the opportunity to use art and craft to better their standards of living and enhance opportunities

to improve their livelihoods in the long term.

Yours sincerely,  
Ras Mpho Jeffrey Molapisi

Somerset Street • Grahamstown • 6139 • Tel: +27(0)46 622 2312 • Associated Research Institute of Rhodes University [www.ru.ac.za/albany-museum/](http://www.ru.ac.za/albany-museum/) Established 1855

# Adornment to Art Replications

Crafted by Nodikida from Bathurst, South Africa

The two fertility dolls have traditional and modern patterns in them. Models traditionally used by our forebears influence the shapes of the dolls. The use of cow tail fur is further evidence to this assertion. The colors of the beads are fairly modern. Therefore the piece tends to create a sense of continuity from the past to the present. (See Below)

## Fertility Dolls



16 in long  
Made from Cow tails

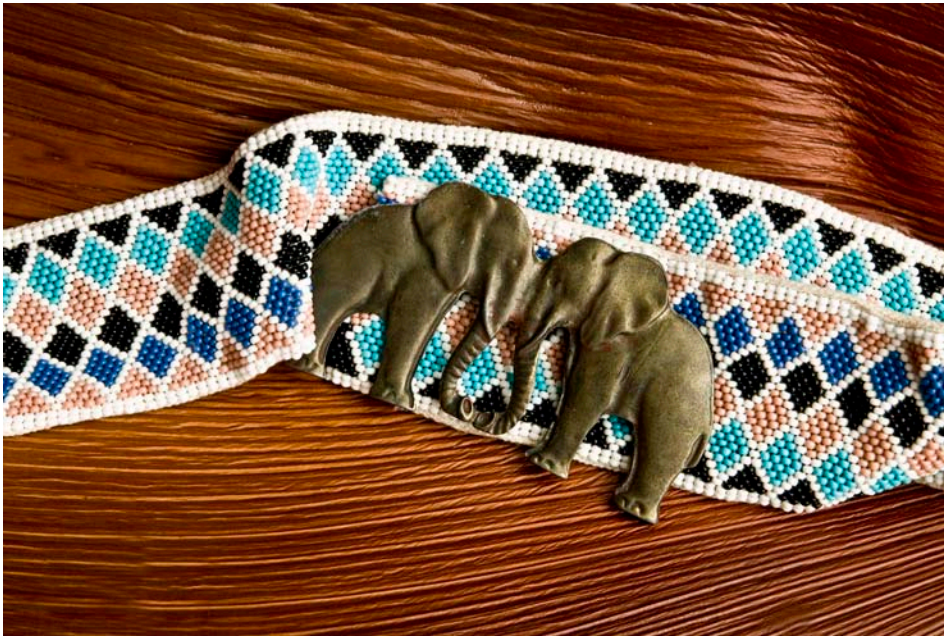


Swazi Horsehair and bead fertility  
figures *late 19th century*



## Waist Band on Fabric

Crafted by Lulama, Port Alfred, South Africa

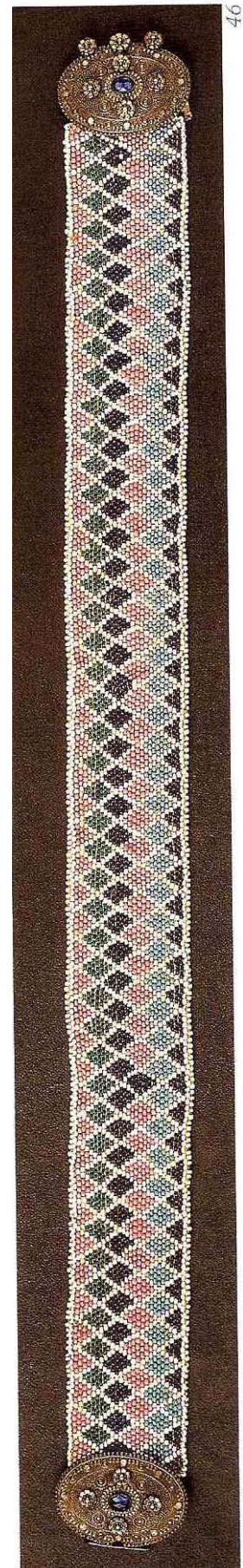


These two belts represent the best bead-work pieces in the list. They clearly indicate the importance of a passion in an indigenous skill, which many do not take into consideration. It is a brilliant piece, which appeals to both traditional and modern times.



Small: 24 in x 2.5 in (Above) Large: 38 in x 2.5 in (Below)

Image Far Right: South Nguni or South Sotho Beaded cloth backed waist band with clasp *late 19th century*.





# North Nguni Neckpiece



18 in x 6 in



North Nguni Neckpiece *late 19th century*

Crafted by Lulama, Port Alfred, South Africa  
This bead piece is nicely designed and the colour chosen have traditional symbolic meanings. This item, to my mind, is flawless.

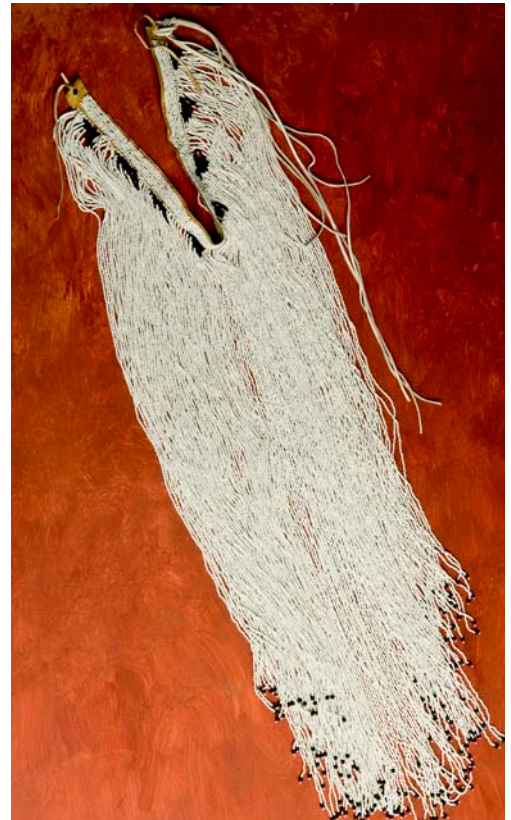


# South Nguni Beaded Breast Cover

South Nguni Beaded Breast-Cover  
mid 19th century



Small: 32 in x 14 in



Large: 36 in x 21 in

Crafted by Nomzamo, Transkei, South Africa  
December 2008-March 2009

The practice of wearing beaded breast coverings of this kind was comparatively common both among Xhosa speaking groups and some of their Sotho speaking neighbors. These beaded garments which commonly reached to the knee, were worn only on festive occasions.

# North

G pair of 8 -roll anklets

U

N

I



12 in x 3 in

Crafted by Mrs. Papu  
Completed by Nodikida  
Bathurst, South Africa

The beaded anklets show high quality and professionalism. The amount of work required to put together all the ingredients need-ed to complete a single anklet shows the technology involved in the work. Once again the technology used in putting together this piece appeals to both traditional and modern eras. Depending on the colors chosen it is possible for one to access information about the wearer of the anklets.

## Beaded Necklaces



Small: 9in x 6.5 in Large: 10in x 8in

Crafted by Nodikida from  
Bathurst, South Africa

Two necklace's, thin and thick, two striking pieces with even patterning with a clearly authentic look. The thick necklace shows a melting pot of time lines in our history and future portrayal. It is a good piece that suggests a link between what was made in the past and what is available in the present.



# Beaded Wall Hanging



36 in x 12 in

Crafted by Mamtshawe  
Transkei, South Africa

This beadwork piece has undergone several phases before being finally approved. This is a very attractive item and very well made. The beadwork is neatly spaced and clearly evidences a lot of dedicated workmanship. The shape is well maintained during the difficult process of creating a piece of this length and width. There are no visible flaws and the pattern is held well.

# Blue Wall Hanging

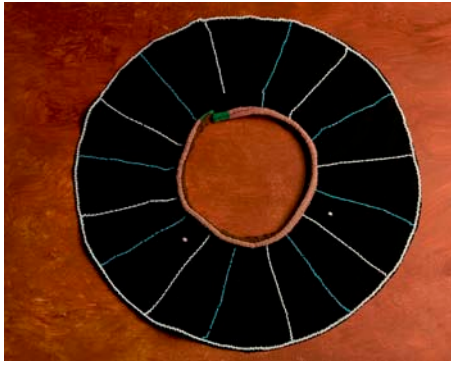


42in x 9in

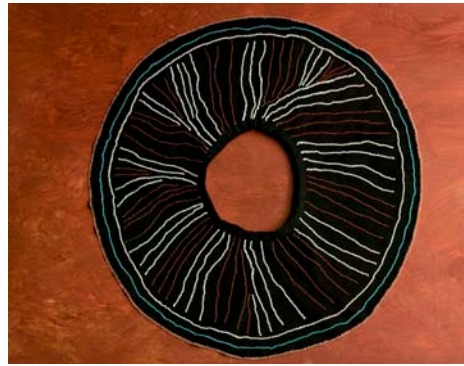
**C**rafted by Nokuzola  
Gramstown, South Africa

The bead piece is well designed. The patterns and design of the beadwork hanging have some reference to the traditional forms of amaXhosa beadwork. The color choice of the beadwork tells an outsider of the originality of the bead artifact. The amaXhosa people of the Eastern Cape have for centuries adopted white and light blue together in their bead pieces which have deep traditional and spiritual symbolisms.

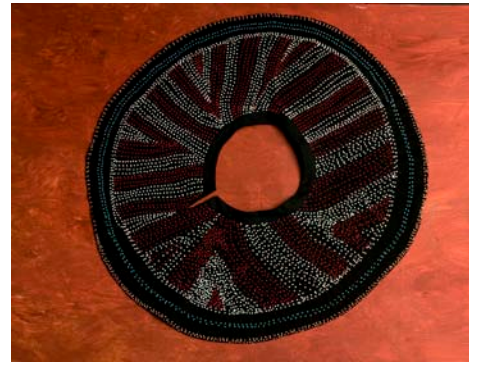




Dimensions: 9in x 26in



Dimensions: 9.5in x 26in



Dimensions: 10in x 27in

# 3 beaded skirts

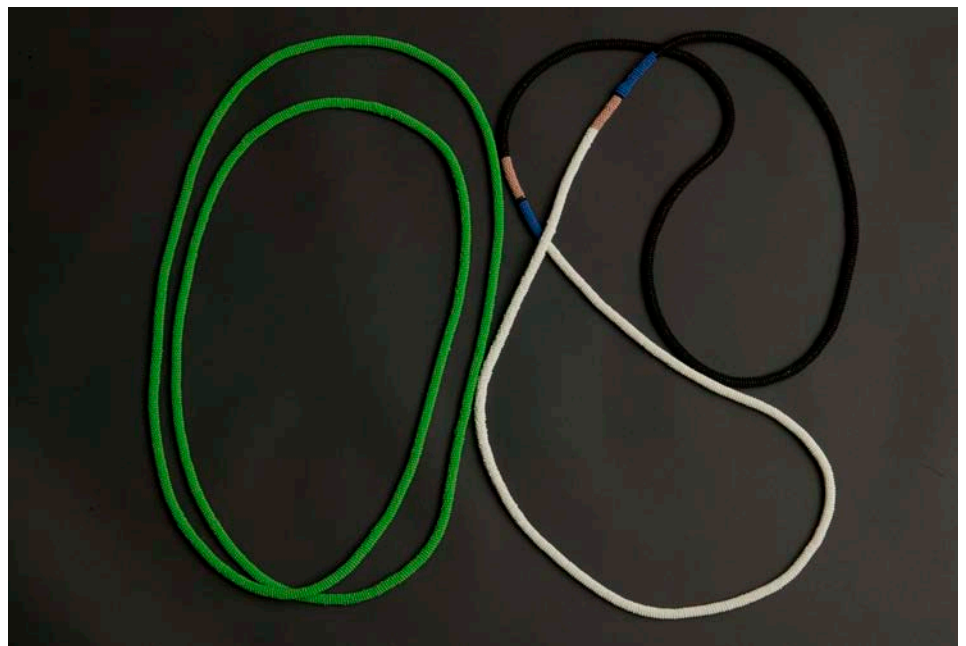
**C**rafted by Nodikida and Magadebe from Bathurst, South Africa

The three beaded skirts traditionally worn by youthful ladies are well designed with beads. The choice of beads is really the prerogative of the designer. At the same time some of the colors of the beads especially white and light blue tend to have traditional symbolic meanings. These symbolic meanings are attached to status, power, and charm and so on.

## Glass Beaded Necklaces

**C**rafted by Magadebe, Grahamstown, South Africa

An identifying factor of beadwork is the small beads wound within a “color section”. The technique is exhibited here in unusually long necklaces. There are plain long necklaces with this same technique. The sizes of the beads used were well chosen. Although the pattern chosen belongs to the past, the colors still appeal to modern times. This also shows continuity of traditional skills reproduced and blended to fit in well in the modern times. They are well made and rendered in a variety of attractive colors.



Sizes:

Small: Aprox. 30 in. Aavailable in: Green, Blue, Red, and Orange

Medium: Aprox: 32 in. Aavailable in: Gold, Pink, Brown, Green, Black, White, Multi (pink, blue, green)

Large: Aprox: 36 in. Aavailable in: Green, Multi (black, pink, blue)

# Glass Beaded Necklaces





# Amagqirha/ Diviners' Headpiece



Crafted by Maggie from Bathurst, South Africa

The piece is perfectly done and indeed symbolizes a diviner's headdress. There are no improvements needed on this piece of beadwork. The skill expressed clearly shows that there are crafters that have kept alive material culture of some of the indigenous peoples of South Africa. This piece of beadwork is governed by taboos. A person who has not graduated in divination cannot wear this piece. The piece forms part of the package of diviners clothing given at the last phase of divination when one graduates.