

HOW TO BEAD A ROGUE ELEPHANT

The Musings Of A Jewelry Designer: An Introduction

By Warren Feld

To exist is to be. But what does that mean? To be *what? How? Why?* And you learn this isn't so much as a *Why*. Just an *Is*. You make a life choice. You take responsibility for it. It shapes you, your values, your decision making, your directional compass, and prepares you for the next choice. And you become what you take responsibility for becoming next.

Through a very round-about way, I became a jewelry designer. It was nothing predestined. Not a requirement, an expectation or a goal. Something I fell into. Something I loved. So I kept making choices and taking responsibility for those choices to become a very literate, fluent, adaptable, successful jewelry designer.

To be is to exist. If I reverse this truism, then the perspective changes. The question, for me, eventually became *What does it mean to exist as a jewelry designer.* I think about that a lot. While I design each piece. While I make it. While I reflect on all the things I learned and experienced and tried and succeeded or failed along the way in order to design and make the piece I am working on.

And it's become ever clearer to me that it is impossible to separate my life as a jewelry designer from all the other aspects of my life. To become the jewelry designer I am today, to have the insights and prescriptions for designing jewelry to be worn and bought by others, I have to understand my choices in the context of me as a whole person.

Each piece of jewelry results from the interplay of inspirations, desires and shared assumptions between designer and client. It channels emotions. Self-awareness. Self-esteem. Value. An intentional conformity or violation of cultural and social norms. Successful jewelry design depends a lot on my powers of empathy and my innate abilities to reflect and be aware of the implications which result from the choices I have made.

Jewelry, for me, has become an expression of personal identity and values. It relates to the human form, in fact, it uses its relationship to and placement on that human form to trigger conversations, instigate interactions, channel how people want others to relate to them or not. Jewelry explains emotions. It exploits them. It somehow comingles emotions with explanations.

The design of jewelry, then, necessitates a process. Something that does not happen all at once. Something that emerges from nothingness into something-ness. A collection of choices, some deliberate, some experimental, some random, some purposeful, some organized and directed.

To design jewelry, I believe, is to take ownership of your own experiences in this world. Representing the living of an authentic life. And living with the resulting consequences.

And one more thing. If we don't share these ideas with each other, we lose things. We lose the opportunity to fully develop our values. We lose the power to know what is good and what is bad, and why, and how to fix it. We lose the support of other designers, in fact, we lose the support of jewelry design as an emergent field of professionals, as we relinquish more and more control over what we do to the technical engineering of steps and the capabilities of technology to perform the design tasks we are so passionate about in our own careers and avocations.

Contemplation

This is my story. A fable for all jewelry artists who aspire to become one with Design. How to Bead a Rogue Elephant is a collection of personal perspectives and experiences on the issues and inspirations that drove me, and that drive other bead and jewelrymaking artists in their designs.

Design is the operative word here. A Rogue Elephant does not present an obstacle, nor create any opportunities, for the jewelry designer, unless that designer understands, follows through and is committed to Jewelry as an Art Form, and realizes that jewelry is art only as it is worn.

Jewelry as art isn't a happenstance. It is made up of a lot of different seemingly disparate kinds of parts. These must be strategically and thoughtfully brought together. They are brought together as a kind of construction project. The results of this project must be beautiful and appealing. They must be functional and wearable. The result should be more appealing and more satisfying and more better in every way than its parts. And this all comes about through design. Jewelry must be designed. And designed it is.

Rogue Elephants are big, and jewelry design is a big task. Rogue Elephants move in unpredictable, yet forceful ways. And jewelry must be designed with movement in mind. Rogue Elephants come with a surface scape, texture and environment, against which the jewelry must look good. And again, good jewelry emerges primarily from the design philosophy and the control of the bead, and all the other incumbent parts by the jewelry designer.

Each person must find and pursue their own Rogue Elephant, if they are so predisposed to do so. Not a requirement, but a more fulfilling way to lead one's life as a jewelry designer. I learned this over time. But Rogue Elephants are not stupid. They do not blindly appear and head towards you. They want something from you in return for

letting you bead them. They have desires. They seek value, and wander off when they think there is none. The jewelry designer cannot ignore all this. Or substitute their own values for his.

Most beaders and jewelry makers don't pursue their Rogue Elephants. They don't even think about getting into the hunt. They never get to the point where they can fully answer the question: *Why some pieces of their jewelry get good attention, and others do not?* And they don't think about this question. They have fun making things. They match outfits. They give gifts. They sell a few pieces. They use pretty beads and other components. And sometimes they get compliments. Other times they do not.

Most people who make jewelry do not necessarily know what to do with the pieces they are playing with. What are they made of? What happens to them over time? Should they be included within the same piece of jewelry? What should they be strung on? Will anyone appreciate the materials? Are the materials appropriate for the technique? What happens when the shade and positioning of the light source changes? If necessary, what can be substituted for some pieces preferred, but not found?

These jewelry makers don't control these pieces, or the process of combining them. They follow patterns and instructions. And do these again. And again and again. Their artistic goals are to complete the steps and end up with something. They might stick to one or a few techniques they feel comfortable with.

There is an unfamiliarity with the *bead* –What is it? Where did it come from? What makes it special as a medium of art and light and shadow? How does it relate to other beads or clasps or stringing materials or jewelry findings? When they look at the bead, what do they see? Will the wearer and viewer experience the same sense and sensibility?

All this is OK. No one needs to bead their Rogue Elephant. It is something they have to want to do. It takes effort and self-reflection to create an opportunity to do so. In order to bead their Rogue Elephant, they will have to know how to leverage the strengths of the materials they are using and the strengths of the techniques they want to employ, and minimize any weaknesses.

Luckily, beading for many jewelry designers is an evolving obsession. It is not something learned all at once. This obsession, hopefully, strategically, leads them to contemplate the bead and its use. The bead and its use in art. The bead and its use in jewelry. The bead and its use in design. The bead and its relationship to the designer's studio. Beads are addictive.

Their addictiveness, perhaps, eventually leads the beader or jewelry maker to seek out that Rogue Elephant that haunts them along the distant horizon. They know they want to bead it. They're not sure how. But they steer themselves along the pathway to find out. This pathway isn't particularly straight, level or passable. But it's a pathway nonetheless. And the ensuing possibilities for learning and growing as an artist and designer along the way reap many worthwhile and satisfying rewards. To bead one's

Rogue Elephant is to preserve and present all that is authentic in oneself as jewelry designer.

They may not have their Rogue Elephant on their radar screen. Yet. *Yet*, is the operative word here.

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