

# The Ugly Necklace Contest

What happens when you deliberately avoid unity? Can you achieve ugly? Each year Warren S. Feld, owner of the Land of Odds bead store, holds The Ugly Necklace Contest. Warren has contributed greatly to beaded jewelry design with this competition, for there is much to be learned from jewelry born of the attempt and the interpretation of “ugly.”

Mediocre is easy to achieve. We all can do it when we feel lazy and uninspired or we're not using our intuition or challenging ourselves. Mediocre falls in the middle of the spectrum between beautiful and ugly. Both beauty and ugliness encompass what this book is about: the deliberate application—or lack of application—of design theories. Surprisingly, like beauty, ugly isn't as easy to achieve as you might think.

On his website ([www.LandofOdds.com](http://www.LandofOdds.com)) Warren writes, “Our eye and brain compensate for perceived imbalances: they try to correct and harmonize them. We are wired to avoid the disorienting, disturbing, or distracting. Thus it's easier to design jewelry that is inoffensive rather than downright revolting. Ugly goes against our nature. It's hard to do.

To achieve a truly hideous result requires making choices we're unfamiliar with. It takes us inside ourselves to places we usually avoid. We have to ask questions such as:

- Can I design something I do not personally like and am unwilling to wear?
- Can I create a piece of jewelry that represents a painful emotion or experience I'd prefer to avoid?
- Can I make something I know others won't like and may ridicule me for?”

Warren continues his discussion of ugly:

“Jewelry designers who attempt to achieve ‘Ugly’ for this contest have to exert control and discipline to override intuitive, internally integrated principles of artistic beauty. We've found that the

Warren writes, “This piece fails to sustain a satisfying rhythm. No pattern is established, and there are no points of interest to motivate the viewer to want to see the whole piece from end to end.”

No kidding, Warren!

**Nivya Raju**  
Untitled, 2008  
81 x 61 x 26 cm  
Glass and plastic beads,  
metal, memory wire,  
foam, steel wool, nylon,  
badminton shuttlecocks;  
stringing, wire wrapping



best jewelry designers are those who can prove that they can design a truly ugly necklace.”

One thing I found interesting was that entries that focused more on the ridiculous were not necessarily ugly. While they were over-the-top in their absurdity and far from beautiful, I wouldn't consider them ugly. Ugly must consciously defy sound design principles.

**Lynn Margaret Davy**  
 Untitled, 2008  
 72 x 38 x 9 cm  
 Glass and plastic beads,  
 metal, wire, feather,  
 rubber, string, velvet,  
 foil, ceramic; peyote  
 stitch, stringing, wire  
 wrapping, brick stitch



**Corrine Zephier**  
 Untitled, 2008  
 76 x 51 x 15 cm  
 Glass and plastic beads, metal, wire, wood, insects,  
 plastic, brass, string, fabric; peyote stitch, stringing,  
 daisy chain, brick stitch

The criteria for judging includes:

- lack of balance
- lack of focus
- lack of movement and bad rhythm
- violation of color principles
- disorientation (no sense of top or bottom)
- wearability (piece must be wearable and as ugly or uglier when worn)
- overall hideousness
- parsimony

Warren describes parsimony as “the degree the piece is over- or underdone. For example, one entry used over 20 plastic trolls while less would have made the point and been uglier. Repeating the same ugly component doesn’t necessarily result in an uglier necklace. In fact, the repetition led to more unity.”

What do all the entries pictured here share? Lack of unity: not enough repetition for cohesiveness, too much variety, no regard for proximity, no continuation or closure. Examine them and you’ll find the rest of the design principles outlined in this book have been deviated from or ignored. We bestow the title of “ugly” upon them because of their flagrant lack of unity.