

5 | Shape



When looking at a piece of jewelry from a distance, its shape is the first thing you see. You can't discern individual beads or intricate surface embellishment. Your eye immediately perceives the essential shape (figure 5-1).



Figure 5-1

When seen from a distance, all we recognize is the shape of a piece of jewelry. Only when we are closer can we distinguish elements such as texture, materials, design motifs, and surface embellishment.

Jewelry makes a tactile, sensual experience out of shape. As we wear a carefully crafted shape of beauty—for that's what jewelry is—it becomes an expression and extension of who we are. Shape contributes to that expression.

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When you understand the visual language of shapes and what they convey emotionally, you'll be able to design jewelry that says exactly what you want it to. You'll be closer to creating the impact you want your designs to have.

I've seen bead artists challenged by the concept of shape design. Enthralled by the sparkle and color of beads, they enter a trance. Eyes glazed, fingers twitching, they want only to sew beads, many beads, many colors, many stitches, for as long as possible. I'm reminded of an experience I had with my young nephew. He desperately wanted me to teach him to draw a dragon. He was not, however, interested



iStockphoto/webphotographer



Figure 5-2

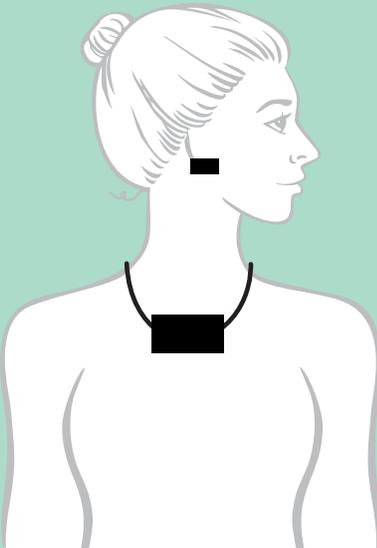
Both the overall shape and the lampworked beads are elongated. Elongated shapes are flattering for jewelry because they draw attention vertically.

Maureen Buckley McRorie
 Untitled, 2009
 61 cm long
 Silvered-glass lampworked beads, sterling and bali silver, crystals

in understanding the shape of the dragon—the placement of the wings in relation to the head, tail, and feet. He wanted to skip that “boring stuff” and draw hundreds of scales and fire billowing from the nostrils. I know that itch well! And it’s natural for an 8-year-old to want to skip the underlying foundation to get to the “fun stuff.” But that approach won’t do for a jewelry designer.

Obsessed as we are with surface embellishment, it can be tempting for bead artists to minimize the importance of the shape of the jewelry we are designing so we can get to the “good stuff,” the intricacies of stitch wizardry and surface ornamentation. When this kind of myopia is in place, design suffers. The most extraordinary beads woven into fascinating patterns amount to little if they are part of a sloppy or confusing shape.

So let’s fall in love with shapes. Let’s learn all we can about their movement, style, and language. Our jewelry will be more beautiful because of it.



Very Vertical

Fashion convention is to elongate and use any contrivance necessary to draw attention vertically. We are vertical creatures, much taller than wide. So vertical compositions are a more natural format for necklaces and earrings than those with horizontal emphasis (figure 5-2).

When the body is wider, wider necklaces can be worn, as long as the width is balanced with ample depth. Don’t emphasize width unless you want the eye to be drawn across the body, accentuating girth.

In this simple example the vertical shapes—those longer than they are wide—feel more natural and are more flattering to our vertical human form.