

# Visual Balance Study

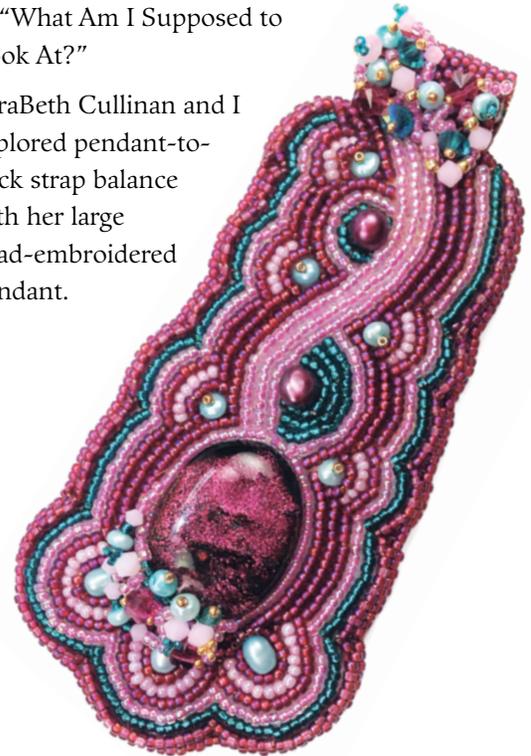
IT'S A DILEMMA MANY OF US designers know well—precariously inching our way across the tightrope of pendant-to-neck-strap balance.

You'll know the artist didn't make it when a large pendant hangs heavily from a comparatively wimpy necklace strand. You can almost hear the necklace creaking as it strains under the weight of the pendant, digging a deep red groove in the back of the wearer's neck. And you fear that at any moment it'll break and beads will fly.

The opposite is just as disturbing: a dainty, simple pendant overpowered by thick, complex, densely beaded strands.

The focal bead is lost and you're now playing the confusing game known as "What Am I Supposed to Look At?"

SaraBeth Cullinan and I explored pendant-to-neck strap balance with her large bead-embroidered pendant.



**SaraBeth Cullinan**  
*Raspberry Sorbet*, 2003  
12.5 x 5.5 x 1.3 cm

Dichroic glass cabochon, seed beads, freshwater pearls, crystals; bead embroidery, peyote stitch, surface embellishment



**1** Because of bead color, shape, and size variations in the neck strap, it competes with the pendant, which is already quite busy. The overall effect is visually confusing. The eye wants to follow the pale pink curve of the pendant down to the cab, but it can't because the necklace demands so much attention.

**2** A neck strap of the dominant color creates a stronger piece. We now have the luxury of following the gentle S-shaped path downward to the cab. The width of the necklace (0.5 cm wide), however, is too thin to counterbalance the weight and substance of the pendant.

**3** A thicker neck strap (1 cm wide), simple in color and design, creates the strongest piece. There is no competition between strand and pendant; we can focus on the beauty of the cab and the beadwork surrounding it.

# Challenge Yourself

## 1 Symmetrical Balance

- Browse jewelry catalogues or websites for examples of vertical and horizontal symmetry. Find examples that simultaneously display both. Which kind of symmetry do you find more in earrings? Necklaces? Bracelets?
- Sketch several pair of earring designs using vertical symmetry.
- Do the same using horizontal symmetry.
- Sketch several pair of earring designs using both vertical and horizontal symmetry simultaneously.
- Vertical symmetry is common in necklaces and earrings. Horizontal symmetry isn't as common, and is rarely seen without vertical symmetry also being present. How do you feel about horizontal symmetry in a necklace or in earrings?

Do the images below display vertical symmetry, horizontal symmetry, both, or neither?



## 2 Asymmetrical Balance

Because you physically feel asymmetry, it helps to work with it when you're solidly "in your body," not in your intellectual, analytical mind, where many of us spend our days.

### Drawing Asymmetrical Balance

Make 4 copies of the human form template for necklaces (page 84) and 12 copies reduced by 50%. Beginning with the half-sized templates, make rough, quick sketches of shapes and lines balanced asymmetrically representing necklaces. Use the shapes on page 83 for inspiration. Set a timer and spend no more than two minutes per drawing. After you've drawn 12, take a break of at least 30 minutes. Return and look at the pages. Do any of the compositions stand out as either exceptionally well or poorly balanced? Use your senses and intuition in addition to your analytical mind when assessing.

Select two of the drawings you feel are well balanced and re-draw them on the full-sized copy of page 84. Draw as slowly or quickly as you want. Can you improve the balance? Move, add, or subtract shapes. Notice how each change affects balance.

Choose two you feel are lopsided or awkward. Can you determine why they are unbalanced? Redraw them on the full-sized copy of page 84. Draw as slowly or quickly as you want. Can you improve the balance? Move, add, or subtract shapes. Notice how each change affects balance.

Think about how you would take one of these drawings from sketched idea to finished necklace. What kinds of beads, stitches, and techniques would you use? If the design presents the challenge of more weight being on one side than the other, how will you resolve it?