

# You Get What You Deserve

By far, the most frequent question that is posed to me is, *“How do I go about pricing my beadwork?”*. It is also the most difficult to answer. I will attempt to tackle this question. While I may not have a solid answer, hopefully I will give you something to consider while you are pricing your beadwork and other related items.

Beadwork is the Cinderella of the art world. We (beaders) are the scullery maids in the high nosed art society. While the high brows may enjoy our work, they don't want to acknowledge it as *Art*, or even wish to talk about who did the work. We don't quite fit in with the others of this exclusive click. We are still waiting for our proverbial prince charming to come and discover the beauty in what we create, and to elevate our standing within the royalty of *artwork*. We still hope to get noticed and enjoy the collective wind sucking of the snobs when they finally see us for what we are: ARTISTS.

There has been a lot of bantering and debate as to what constitutes “CRAFT” and what constitutes “ART”. Go look in the dictionary if you want a sterile definition. I will settle the debate for anyone who cares, at least for this discussion. Beadwork IS art. I won't get into the finer points of the question *“Is it art if I create something using someone else's design?”* I will leave that for another topic. The only point I wish everyone to agree on is that beadwork *is* indeed *Art*.

Does that really matter, you ask? Does it *REALLY* matter if you call beadwork art, or craft, it is still beadwork, it doesn't change how it looks. I would answer YES it does matter. If for no other reason than how you look at what you do, and ultimately how you label YOURSELF and YOUR work. And by extension, how you price your work.

Labeling is very important to the perception of value. I conducted an inspection at a tomato processing plant during the course of my day

job. I noticed that this particular plant was canning two different labels. One was a well know national brand, the other was a store brand. Being the curious type, and even though my question had nothing to do with the safety inspection I was performing, I asked....”so what’s the difference in the product between the 2 labels?”

The answer really made me think. The answer was “NOTHING”. The beginning of the canning run goes into the brand name, the end goes into the store brand. No extra salt, seasonings, water.... nothing. And since the product in question was a sauce, you couldn’t even argue that the beginning of the canning run had a better quality tomatoes since the mixture was identical throughout the process.

The same lesson came about while I inspected a T-shirt manufacturing company. They manufactured the basic no nonsense type of T-shirt. Same scenario. Two types of labels, designer and discount, for the same exact T-shirt.

Of course, not all products will fit this different naming, different value scheme. There are differences in quality for many products, I don’t argue that at all. But the lesson here that I wish to drive home is, how you label your beadwork and how you feel towards it, CAN and WILL have an effect on the buying public’s idea of how valuable your beadwork is.

## EDUCATION

Since beadwork has had a not so good label for years, it is up to us to educate the buying public as to the value and skill of our work. As a vendor at many of the Art and Wine Festivals, I find myself with all sorts of opportunity to try to change the negative perception of beadwork. Sometimes in a manner I did not intend.

A lady clutching a small dog came into my booth at an art and wine festival where I was a vendor. She looked around, then at me, with a curled lip she sneered” You want **\$45** for those earrings?! Are you crazy?”

The way she looked at me was in disgust. The way she asked the question was in disgust. I knew that there was NOTHING I could say that would convince her of the worthiness of the price I asked for, nothing would convince her of what I considered to be artistic talent.

I also knew that either I would rip her apart for being a rude, ignorant asshole, or I would have to change the subject to something else. I opted for the later.

If you own a Welsh Corgi, please don't be insulted, but this is a vital part of the story. I looked at the little dog she was clutching. She put it on the ground, so I thought I would ask her about the dog. At that time, I did not know a thing about Welsh Corgis. I didn't even know of the breed. To me, this was a misfit of a dog. Perhaps this was just a poor specimen of the breed. It had little stubby legs that did not fit the body, the head looked like it got ripped off a collie type dog and was horribly too big for the poor thing. The dog looked like it was a mixture of all sorts of left over spare parts.

I pat the poor sorry looking thing. I remarked to Ms Rude "What an interesting dog! How many breeds are in this dog?"

She turned white...then an interesting purplish red. I just KNEW I said something wrong. She screamed at me..." THIS IS A PURBRED WELSH CORGIE! I WILL HAVE YOU KNOW THAT THE QUEEN OF ENGLAND OWNS THIS BREED!!"

Not to miss a beat...I replied" Well, I guess we have both proven to each other that if you are ignorant in a subject, you will not be a good judge of the value of what you are looking at".

She scraped up that little sorry looking little dog and went off in a huff. I doubt that she learned the lesson. But I did. Understanding what you are looking at is very important to the "value" of a product.

## **Price Fixing**

In my previous ranting "IF its Not Free....", I touched on the subject of people offering free patterns, so you know a little of my opinion on that. It bears bringing up again. While I recognize the value of offering

a “teaser” pattern to get someone started, it is the people who offer whole websites of free patterns that get to me.

To those who are doing this, I ask again not just WHY? But **WTF** (or if you need it spelled out *What the Fuck*) are you thinking, moron! Do you enjoy giving something you worked hard at away for free? If so, heck, I have a lot of work I can have you do for me! I will state it again, if its **not** worth selling, then it is **not** worth your time or talent. If you think so little of yourself as a designer, that you feel you can't sell your patterns, then don't bother offering them. If its not worth selling, its not worth beading.

The many free offerings of patterns **DO NOT** help the perception of what designers do as a valuable commodity, or beadwork as an art. Oh, don't give me the BS of how you want to give the beading community something back, that you so enjoy what you do, you feel guilty asking for a few dinero. All you are doing is fostering the idea of “Why buy something if I can get it for free?” ....even if the free pattern is not of the same quality as something that is for sale. And you are nourishing the stingy vultures who think everything is due to them so that they can breed more blood-sucking vultures.

Offering patterns or beadwork at a ridiculously cheap price is every bit as bad. Since you know the value of the work and beads as well as talent and practice that went into your product, you should set a price accordingly. Selling it cheap, since YOU have intimate knowledge of the value of what you are selling, **SCREAMS: THIS IS CHEAP, NEARLY WORTHLESS SHIT! That's why I don't want much for it. Just take this trash away, please! And treat it like the trash it is.**

So think about what you are selling. If something took you 10 hours to make, (not counting materials, the learning curve and all other expenses that the money grubbing, thieving IRS **RECOGNIZES** as allowable deductible expenses) for \$30 dollars, let me ask you this. Would you work slinging grease burgers over a hot stove for \$3.00 per hour?

No??

Then why are you selling your work for the cost of labor of an indentured servant?

## **Excuses for not selling at a good price:**

***This is a hobby, I am just happy to earn a little money.***

Then leave it to a professional. As soon as you sell your beadwork, it is not a hobby, it is a business! Find another hobby and a charity to work for.

***Where I live, no one will pay a decent price***

Look around you...what kind of cars are people driving? What kind of high priced coffee are they slurping down every morning? If they can afford \$4-\$5 for a daily cup of coffee, they can afford to pay more than \$20 for a pair of earrings that you spent 3-4 hours to make. Don't be an enabler to their caffeine addiction!

If you live in Cheapville, then you need to sell outside of Cheapville. It's so easy these days. The Internet has so many options. Websites, online stores, easier contact to galleries outside of your area. Do a little footwork and get way from the Cheapville bazaars.

***My skill isn't good enough***

Then what are you doing selling CRAP? You are helping to keep beadwork keep the sleazy cheap name.

***The beads were cheap:***

So is canvas and paint...have you priced an original painting by a well-known artist? Ask why the price is so high since the materials used were so cheap. Gee, maybe I can go and buy a Monet for about \$30. Materials were cheap back then, not to mention that his works are now getting old and maybe even dusty.

**It makes me happy to give something to everyone.**

Go out and do charity work for those who TRULY need things, so that those of us who try so hard to create a sustainable business don't have to be undercut by you. Volunteer time at an old folks home, drug rehab, or City beautification project.

***CHEAP COME BACKS to the butt holes that might insult you (and these are some of the things I have heard!)***

***My friend knows how to make those and she GIVES them to me.***

Oh, I see those earrings hanging from your ears. Did she really make them? Don't worry, I am sure that over time, she will get much better at it. She's lucky to have a friend who isn't embarrassed to wear such beginner's work.

***I know how to make that, I would never buy beadwork!***

Do you really? Did you come in here to steal my designs and Ideas then?

***Your work is out of my price range. I would never pay that for beaded stuff!***

I am so sorry you can't afford something classy. There is a Cheapmart down the street where you can buy something within your price range, and it might even make you look classier than the second hand throwaways you are wearing.

***I saw earrings like that at Cheapmart for less***

If you don't see the difference, then these are too classy for you. Go back to Cheapmart, and buy the quality you deserve.

***How do you justify your beadwork prices since the materials are cheap?***

Do you know the cost of materials of that expensive dress/shoes/hat you are sporting? And that the dress/shoes are created by third world labor! Have you now shame in encouraging those horrid conditions and human abuse?

### ***Its hippie stuff***

Have you seen the prices of retro stuff? These are antiques...worth much more than what I am charging. Think of it as an heirloom. I am so happy you recognize my work as being old, and collectable.

### **So how DO you come about prices?**

Find a bead artist who is doing well, has been in galleries, shows. Check out the prices. Strive to come in line with that artist. Sure, you might not be as good or as well known YET! But that doesn't mean that your work has no merit. Think along the price lines of the artist you admire most.

A general guide used by the arts and crafts industry is this:

WHOLESALE PRICE= 3X the cost of materials plus hourly wage.

Wholesale price is generally  $\frac{1}{2}$  of retail.

Cost of materials includes beads, thread, storage, cost of display, ads, computer and other selling charges, taxes to be paid on income...in short anything and everything that the IRS will allow you to deduct as a business expense.

While using this formula is not the end all to pricing, it should at least make you consider the full tangible costs of creating your product. Also consider the intangible costs. Did you take classes to learn your skill? How many hours of practice did it take for you to become proficient enough finally consider selling your first item.

So, now for a more definitive example:

If you made a pair of earrings, and sold them inexpensively at \$10, and you sold 25 of them, you would make \$250. Taking out expenses lets say you clear \$125 (50%).

Now lets suppose you sell the SAME earrings at \$25. And lets say you sell 5 of them. You bring in \$125. With a profit of \$62. Your profit would be half based on materials alone.

Now take into consideration the TIME spent. Lets say that these earrings took you 2 hours to make. In the first example, it takes you 50 hours (25 pairs of earrings X 2 hours each). Divide the \$125 by 50 hours and your hourly pay is \$2.5 per hour.

For the second example, at 5 pairs of earrings X 2 hours= 10 hours. \$62 / 10 hours= \$6.20 per hour.

If you really consider this, in the first example you might have the thrill of selling 5 times as many earrings, but you are working at a much lower paid rate.

In the second example, you have not sold as much, but you are working at a higher rate, and you have more earrings left for your next show, and don't have to work as hard to maintain your inventory.

Which conditions would YOU prefer?

Put all this together and those little earrings, that little pattern with all the diagrams, and photos should really be reflective of your talent, skill and artistry. Don't sell yourself or the beading community short.

Now go forth, create, sell, and don't be afraid to get what you so rightly deserve!