

Are You Stuck in a Rut or Just in the Groove?

What I Learned from My Fuglies

By Diane Woodall

Do you have a box of “fuglies” that you look at from time to time and wonder, “What the heck was I thinking when I made that one?” I have fuglies scattered all over the place, and it’s those pitiful little beads that nobody loves that inspired me to write this article. I was sorting through a pile of my rejects the other day and it occurred to me that all of them started life as a good idea that went bad. I had a vision that somehow morphed from brilliant to hideous somewhere between my head and my hands. But what I didn’t see in that box of misfits were the successes that came as a result of my many failed attempts. Those lovely keepers have moved on to bigger and better things while their stepbrothers and sisters still sit in my fuglies box as a reminder that the surest way to achieve success is to fail a few times along the way.

When you go to your studio to make beads do you ever feel uninspired? Are you in a rut? A rut is a deep ditch that you can’t seem to get out of. Or...are you just in the groove? Perhaps you make the same beads, or type of beads, over and over again because you and your customers love them and you enjoy making them. That’s what I call being in the groove. But when being in the groove starts to feel like a rut you can’t pull yourself out of it’s time to start making some fuglies and learn a little something new.

If you are in a rut because you are tired of making the “same ol’ thing”, ask yourself what it is about the bead that makes it worth making so many times and apply that in a different way. Vary it just a bit, add some silver, introduce another color, texture or design feature, or simply change the shape. Each time you make a small change you are helping your bead to evolve into something new. To be comfortable with your work you need to hold onto something that is familiar to you, but to grow you have to reach outside your comfort zone and try something new.

Janet Robinson, our newsletter editor, keeps a “color book” where she stores images that inspire her to try new color combinations. She believes that color is what motivates most buyers and I agree. Sometimes the most beautiful beads you’ll make are the result of a color combination that is unexpected.

A new design idea can come about in an unexpected way as well. Lisa Diamont makes the most amazing “flame” beads which have become one her signature styles. Believe it or not they were the result of a failed attempt to create a peacock feather design. What started out as a “woops” ended up as a “woo hoo”!!! She may not have achieved a peacock feather, but what she got was so much better! She has gone on to make that design in a number of beautiful color combinations, and all because her original idea didn’t work out the way she had planned.

When asked how she comes up with new designs, Ann Ricketts posted on Lampwork Etc. back in February 2006, “I go back to old sets I've done and re-do them in different colors. I love doing the brights but they drain me sometimes! Another thing I've done when I get in a funk is close my eyes, pick up some rods on my table and use those colors! You'd be amazed at what you can come up with when your eyes were closed!”

Another creative bead maker, Vanessa Torres, had this to say on Lampwork, Etc. “Look through a magazine and find a picture that you like, doesn't matter what it is, just that you like it. Now try to interpret the picture in your beads. Sounds corny, but it really pulls me out of a block when I'm in one. I actually think my most creative beads come from doing that. Now I save catalogs etc and keep a pile in my studio for when I'm having a creative block.”

Vanessa continues: "Most days I enter my studio with an idea of what I am going to make because I tend to make the same types of beads over and over again. But every week I allow myself one day to play and let my muse take over. On those days, I start by cleaning off my work table completely, starting with a fresh area in which to work. Then I'll pull out my "idea book" where I've made notes on things I want to try. I'll browse my glass supply and begin pulling rods for the different beads I want to make that day. Sometimes my table is so piled with glass, frit and tools that it looks more like a junk yard than an artist's studio, but Thomas Edison once said, "Inspiration can be found in a pile of junk. Sometimes, you can put it together with a good imagination and invent something."

In closing, here are a few tips that have helped me move out of my rut and get in the groove:

Every time you see a photograph, piece of fabric, greeting card...anything that inspires you, add it to your idea book. It's fun and challenging to try and make a bead based on a photograph or swatch of fabric. I love to buy wrapping paper to use as inspiration. Used book stores have hundreds of inexpensive books that you can cut up to your heart's content.

Keep a notebook with you to jot down design ideas. You'd be surprised at how many ideas will slip through your mind if you don't write them down. Likewise, as you sketch out new ideas those ideas will fuel new ideas which will fuel new ideas that will...you get the idea. I write down everything I can think of that I can turn into a bead.

Explore the Internet for interesting sites that feature art, fabric, fashion...anything that inspires you. I love to look at photos at www.bigstockphoto.com for ideas for beads. With thousands of photos to choose from you have the world at your fingertips. And if you want to explore a wonderland of glass art <http://www.njmgallery.com> will be like a trip to Disney World.

Try moving outside your comfort zone by using colors you haven't touched in awhile. Commit to try one new design each time you go to your studio, even if it's just rolling frit in a color you'd never thought of before. I spent one whole day trying different frits on different base colors and didn't have a single bead worth repeating. But at least I know now what NOT to do again. You may succeed in creating the world's ugliest bead, but even if you do you've accomplished something!

If possible take a demo or hands-on class with an artist you admire. You will come away from every class with something you can apply to your own work. The Hotties has a wonderful library of books and DVDs that are there for the sole purpose of educating and inspiring you. This is a wonderful resource that no other ISGB chapter in the country has.

And lastly, do not be afraid to draw inspiration from the work of others. You don't have to copy to be inspired by them, to use their ideas for shape, form or color and apply it to your work. Inspiration and imitation are two entirely different things. Salvador Dali said, "Those who do not want to imitate anything, produce nothing."

Go forth and make fuglies dear friends. What have I learned from my fuglies? That they are the parents of very beautiful children.