

The Spirit of Beads Sharing our Stories Exhibition Resource Guide

October 25, 2020 - August 28 2021 Ukrainian Museum of Canada Ontario Branch



Presented by

Ukrainian Museum of Canada, Ontario Branch Native Canadian Centre of Toronto





We gratefully acknowledge the support of our sponsors









Wally Wyshniowsky

About the exhibit

The Spirit of Beads: Sharing our Stories is co-presented by the Ukrainian Museum of Canada, Ontario Branch and the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto.

This is the Museum's first collaboration with another organisation outside of the Ukrainian community, and we are delighted to have this opportunity.

The Spirit of Beads: Sharing our Stories celebrates the beauty of Indigenous and Ukrainian beaded artifacts, including clothing, jewelry, bags, and more. This exhibition includes historic and contemporary beadwork and explores how this art form has come to represent the complex identities of Ukrainians and Indigenous cultures in Canada. It begins with the history of the bead trade in North America and Ukraine, tracing the origin of beads from natural materials such as stones, shells, and bones, to commercially-manufactured beads. The exhibit features modern pieces of beadwork from contemporary artists alongside historical objects from the Museum's collection and the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, to demonstrate how modern beadwork reinvents and expresses past and present understandings of cultural identity. We have also been very fortunate to include pieces from private collections and individuals, making this exhibit very special.

We are delighted to make this resource guide available to complement the content of *The Spirit of Beads: Sharing our Stories*. We hope that this will be a valuable addition for both individuals and institutions to begin their research and learning.

Featured Artists



Anna Harasym

Born in Toronto to Ukrainian immigrant parents, Anna grew up immersed in the Ukrainian diaspora. She learned to bead from her mother as a teenager, using traditional motifs and patterns. Later, she drew from her experience working as an art director and graphic designer to explore more nontraditional patterns.

Maria Harasym

Born in the village of Mostysche, Ivano Frankivsk, Ukraine in 1929, Maria Harasym learned to bead from a family member. At the age of 12, she was abducted from her village and was forcibly moved to Nazi Germany as a slave labourer. After spending five years in England, she immigrated to Canada in 1952 and started beading again, remembering the very first pattern she learned on her aunt's knee as a child. She has been actively involved in sharing her knowledge of beading through individual teaching and demonstrations. Her belief is that this art form must be passed on and kept alive.

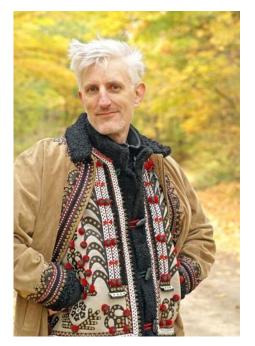




Katie Longboat

Katie Longboat is a Toronto based Indigenous (Mohawk and Cree) bead artist, originally from Six Nations of the Grand River. She has over 15 years of experience with both creating beadwork and facilitating beading workshops. Her style incorporates inspirations from the natural world, her travels, her family, and uses contemporary materials to create one of a kind jewelry pieces and art works.





Dave Melnychuk

Dave Melnychuk graduated from the Ontario College of Art and Design (then OCA), from the University of Toronto, and from the International Academy of Design and Technology. He studied Communications Design, Graphic Design, Fine Art History, and Interior Design. As he discovered and fell in love with other traditional arts and crafts, such as wood carving and leather work, he began to adorn his entire life with traditional Ukrainian patterns and symbols.

Maria Rypan

Maria Rypan is a recognized expert in Ukrainianstyle beadwork. Her specialties are netting, unique beadweaving and loomweaving techniques. Since 1995 she's been teaching internationally, produces a kit line and lectures on beading and global folk arts. Her research trips to Ukraine yield fresh material about folk costumes, adornments, and trends. Maria has also taught master classes and presentations in Ukraine since 2010.





Naomi Smith

Naomi is an Indigenous artist and educator. She has for over 20 years shared traditional teachings with various communities and groups. Her work focuses on the ways of the Indigenous people of the Great Lakes region from a historical and contemporary perspective often through the story of beads. Naomi's artwork embraces ancestral designs using quillwork, beadwork and other indigenous methods and materials. She has exhibited her work across Canada and internationally.

Early Indigenous beadwork

Before the introduction of European beads, the Indigenous peoples of North America used organic materials including shells, bones, porcupine quills, plant fibres, birch bark, animal hair, stones, and minerals to adorn themselves. There is evidence that Indigenous groups had created their own beads for at least eight thousand years before European contact.

Quillwork is done by soaking and treating porcupine quills, which are then woven through hide or birch bark to create intricate designs. In the past, artists would soften the quills by soaking them in their mouth, but artists today typically use warm water. Quillwork is an ancient art form that many Indigenous artists are still working hard to preserve



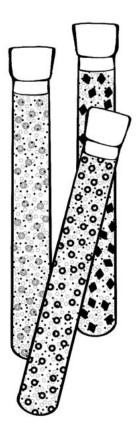
Photo: Ukrainian beaded vests on display at *The Spirit of Beads: Sharing our Stories*. Photo by Ivanka Haney.



Early Ukrainian beadwork

Ukrainians began using natural materials for necklaces long before the introduction of commercially-made beads. The first beads in Ukraine were made of naturally-occurring materials, including wood, clay, and semi-precious stones such as amber and carnelian. Initially large and irregular in shape, the beads were strung to be worn on the neck decreasing in size, with the largest at the centre.

Many neck adornments were initially worn as talismans to protect the wearer from evil spirits and ill health. It was believed that evil spirits would be too distracted by the shine and colour to harm the wearer. Beadwork later extended into other items, including clothing and headwear.



Bead trading and new materials in Ukraine

Beads arrived in North America and Ukraine through trading.

Beads were expensive and in high demand, especially when made of semi-precious stones and pearls, which were imported to Ukraine. Early beaded items were mostly worn by those of aristocratic status, high ranking members of the clergy, and the growing merchant class. The wearing of personal adornments became a signifier of status and wealth. In photographs or on special occasions, Ukrainian women and girls would wear every piece of beaded jewellery that they owned. Initially worn as an attempt to mirror the aristocracy, necklaces eventually became part of traditional Ukrainian festive wear.



Left: Walco Bead Company bead trading card on display at UMC OB. Photo by Ivanka Haney.

With the importation of beads from Byzantium and Venice, Ukrainians began incorporating new materials, including tiny glass beads called seed beads. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Bohemian beads integrated into Ukrainian women's village wear.

Now widespread in Ukraine, the creation of beaded adornments continues to persist in the western ethnographic regions of Western Volyn', the Boyko Region, Transcarpathian Region (Zakarpattia), the Hutsul Region, Bukovyna, and the Lemko Region. Masters of the craft can be found there today. Beadwork has also spread to the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada, the United States, and Europe, where talented individuals have mastered this art.

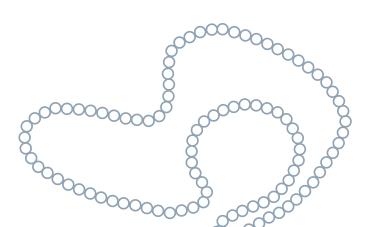
Glass Manufacturing

Glass was discovered around 1700 BC in the Middle East, likely as a result of a fire pit melting the nearby sand. This process was perfected to produce glass for function and adornment. Early glasswork was reserved for the wealthy and elite, and techniques were kept secret.

In 200 BC, glassmakers in Syria began glass-blowing to manipulate glass into various shapes and sizes. This technique spread to the Islamic and Byzantine Empires. Italian craftsmen learned glassmaking through trade, and brought the technique to Venice.

The crucial ingredient for glass-making is silicon dioxide (SiO2), which is found in sand. The silicon dioxide is melted and shaped at high temperatures, and cooled to create the finished piece. A variety of pure chemical elements can be added during this process to create different colours in the glass. To make most beads, molten glass is stretched into a hollow tube that is then cut, polished, and reheated as needed to create uniform sizes and shapes.

Venetian glassmakers were highly skilled and protective of their craft. They dominated the glass bead industry until the sixteenth century, when trade secrets leaked to Bohemia and other European countries. They began producing quality beads at a lower price margin, which eventually became available internationally.



Millefiori Beads



These necklaces are made with millefiori beads, a technique composed of many glass canes, which resemble a flower when cut. The word is a combination of the Italian words "mille" (thousand) and "fiori" (flowers). These beads were originally produced in Venice, and later in Bohemia.

Left: Necklaces from UMC OB permanent collection

"Painted Beads"

These necklaces are examples of Venetian "painted beads." Despite the name, these beads are not actually painted. The glass is melted and wound on a thin metal rod in a time consuming process called lampwork. These beads were expensive and highly regarded.



Above: Necklace on Ioan from Marianna Zaparyniuk

Right: Necklace from UMC OB permanent collection



Bead trading and new materials in North America

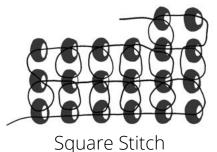
Many Indigenous communities in North America encountered glass beads for the first time during contact with early European colonists. Glass beads quickly became popular because they offered new colours and sizes that were not available in naturally-occurring materials. With the introduction of other European materials such as needles, silk, and new fabrics, bead production techniques were simplified and became very popular. As glass beads became more widely available and affordable, the range of colours and sizes allowed artists to explore new design possibilities. By the late eighteenth century, Indigenous peoples had adopted a variety of beads into their own traditional styles.

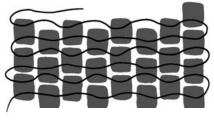
With the establishment of the fur trade, Indigenous peoples began trading fur pelts in exchange for European goods, including beads. However, the concept of an item holding monetary value was not part of traditional Indigenous society—beads were valuable because of their ability to visually communicate and encode social and cultural meaning. Indigenous peoples' belief that land could not be owned, sold, or purchased was eventually exploited for access to land and resources, supported by the idea that Canadian soil was "empty land" free for use and occupation. This perspective damaged Indigenous peoples' rights to land and self-governance, and led to acts of violence based on notions of racial and cultural superiority, including the violation of treaties, and the creation of the Indian Act and residential schools.

It is important to acknowledge the historical use of beads as a tool for colonial expansion, and the impacts of colonialism that continue to affect the lives of Indigenous people today. Despite this painful history, Indigenous artists living in Canada continue to demonstrate resilience by creating beadwork and reaffirming the vitality of their community.

Techniques

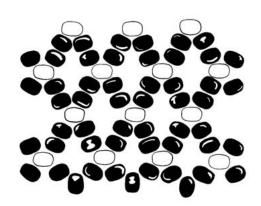
Beadweaving or "off loom beading": A technique where beads are interlaced without the use of a loom. This can be done on three dimensional objects or on flat surfaces. There are many different stitches that are used in beadweaving, including the peyote stitch, ladder stitch, brick stitch, square stitch, and many more.





Peyote Stitch

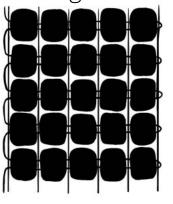
One example of a beadweaving stitch is **netting**, which is very common in Ukrainian beadwork. This technique is typically used in Ukrainian collar necklaces, including the kryvul'ka.





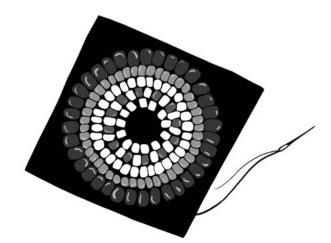
Left: Contemporary beaded *kryvul'ka* necklace from the collection of Maria Rypan. This piece uses the netting technique. Photo by Ivanka Haney.

Loomweaving: A technique where beads are woven into colourful designs using a loom, often following a pattern. This technique produces beadwork similar to weaving a tapestry.



Bead embroidery: A

technique used to sew beads onto the surface of an object as embellishment. The beads can lay flat or have dimension.



Types of beads

There are many varieties of shapes, sizes, and finishes of beads. These are some of the more common beads which can be found on display in *The Spirit of Beads: Sharing our Stories*

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Seed Beads: Uniformly shaped, small glass beads the size of a "seed", available in many different colours. These are the most common beads used for loom and off-loom beadwork. The largest size of a seed bead is 1/0 and the smallest is 24/0, which is about the size of a grain of sand. Anything smaller than a 15/0 has not been in production since the 1890s.



Pony Beads: The next size up in beads, these are made in size 5/0 or 6/0



Cylinder Beads: Uniformly shaped and cylindrical beads with larger holes for threading. They have a flat and smooth texture. Delica beads are an example of this



Bugle Beads: Cylindrical beads that are longer than their thickness, resulting in a "tube" shape. These are very common in the Ukrainian vests on display in this exhibition.



Left: Ukrainian beaded vest on loan from Sonia Holiad which shows bead embroidery with bugle beads. Right: Haudenosaunee beaded card case, depicting a bird in seed beads. Photos by Ivanka Haney.



Exhibit Themes Politics and Beadwork



Beadwork is a powerful symbol that can reveal a lot about the wearer and the artist. Historically, beadwork has been worn to show wealth and status. Symbols, motifs, and colours of beadwork can also point to political affiliations and identity, often in times when expressions of cultural identity were punished. Through beadwork, wearers preserved their cultures and practices in subtle ways for future generations.

Ukraine under the Soviet Union

Under Soviet control, all national Ukrainian symbols, such as the trident, lion, and the colours of blue and yellow side-by-side were banned in accordance with the communist regime. Anyone who demonstrated Ukrainian national identity would be severely punished. Ukrainians nevertheless maintained their traditions and cultural practices by occasionally placing blue and yellow beads sideby-side, or embroidering small symbols in their clothing. Today, the combination of blue and yellow celebrates Ukraine's regained independence and is widely used.

The Trident (*Tryzub*)



The trident is a pre-Christian symbol that was officially adopted by Volodymyr the Great, the Grand Prince of Ukraine from 980 to 1015. It was adopted in 1917 by President Mykhailo Hrushevsky as a national symbol for Ukraine. During the Soviet era, the trident was forbidden and was severely punishable. As of 1992, it was established as the national coat of arms of Ukraine. Today, the trident has evolved to become a pervasive symbol of national identity for Ukrainians, and appears on clothing, jewelry, and many more items.

Watch Fobs

These watch fobs or *cotillions* were named after an Austro-Hungarian dance event from which they originate. They were made by young women, and given to the man with whom they would like to dance with, to be worn under the breast pocket. During the war, *cotillions* were worn on the soldier's uniform as a protective talisman. These items were always beaded, occasionally featuring the wearer's initials, a date of significance, or symbols indicative of their Ukrainian heritage, such as a trident, or the colours of the Ukrainian flag. Although this tradition no longer exists in Ukraine, they are an interesting glimpse into the social and cultural practices that existed during wartime.







Left: The design on this watch fob shows a trident. In early beadwork, there were no designated beadwork patterns, so artists typically used embroidery patterns to create beadwork

Watch fobs from UMC OB collection. Photos by Ivanka Haney.



In 1876, the Government of Canada passed the Indian Act: a document that determined how the Canadian government would interact with Indigenous peoples. It defines who qualifies as a "registered" or "status" Indian and what their rights are, including in education, healthcare, and land use. Under the Indian Act, many families were forcibly relocated to reserves—areas of land owned by the government that were set aside for the exclusive use and residence of Indigenous groups—often in remote locations and outside of their traditional lands. Living conditions were often poor, and communities had limited healthcare services and poor infrastructure. Today, there are still reserves in Canada with boil-water advisories.

While living on reserves, many Indigenous artists began to make souvenir items that catered to European tourists who passed through central attractions including Niagara Falls. They often integrated European designs or motifs into their work in order to create items that appealed to their buyers. By selling their work, artists were able to provide for their families.

Raised beadwork came into popularity at the end of the eighteenth century, when handbags became a popular accessory for women. In response, Indigenous artists began making beaded bags, as well as picture frames, cushions, and ornaments with Victorian tastes in mind. These intricately crafted items are significant for understanding the history of Indigenous beadwork in Canada.

Raised Beadwork

Many raised beadwork pieces trace back to Niagara Falls, which was a local hub for selling these pieces. There are documented accounts of tourists in Niagara Falls as early as 1795. By the 1800s, it was a bustling tourist destination, and there were a variety of markets and shops that sold the work of Indigenous artists from nearby reserves. By the 1900s, these raised beadwork pieces were very popular and could be found in almost every shop in Niagara Falls.

These pieces were typically made by local Haudenosaunee artists in Niagara Falls and surrounding regions, though similar ones were made by Wabanaki in New England and the Maritime provinces. Although Niagara Falls was the most popular venue for the sale of raised beadwork, other centres included New York, Montréal, Saratoga Springs, and the Thousand Islands.



The raised beadwork technique is created with a classic lane stitch, using numerous beads. The beads bunch as they are sewn onto fabric, creating a sculptural effect.

Left: Selection of raised beadwork on display at UMC OB. Photo by Ivanka Haney

Residential Schools

As part of the Indian Act, the Canadian residential school system was created. Residential schools were compulsory boarding schools for young Indigenous students, funded by the Canadian government's Department of Indian Affairs, and run by Christian churches. The intention of these schools was to assimilate Indigenous children into Canadian culture by removing them from their families and community. After being separated from their families, children between the ages of six to fifteen were forbidden to speak their own languages, and severely punished for expressing non-Christian beliefs. Malnourishment was common, and children were exposed to physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. Students were banned from wearing traditional clothing, including beadwork, and possession of these articles was severely punished.

Today, residential schools have been recognised by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada as an act of cultural genocide. The enduring psychological and social effects have caused complex intergenerational trauma.

For many artists, beadwork can strengthen familial relationships and inspire them to become more in touch with their history, teachings, values, and ancestors. Many artists feel that creating beadwork is important for reclaiming their history, and ensuring that their traditions and beliefs endure. For some contemporary artists, continuing to create beadwork is a way of healing from the pain that their families endured in residential schools. It also ensures that this traditional art and the resilience of their culture is not forgotten. In addition, the physical act of beading is often described as a meditative and healing process that requires personal reflection.

Wealth and Status

Beadwork can be a powerful tool. It has often been used to encode political messages about wealth, power, and status.



Jewelry with coins: Wearing coins as neckpieces predates mass-produced beads in Ukraine. These items were accessible to those who could afford them. Coins could also be worn across the forehead, draped from the front pieces of hair, or on the temples. Single or multiple coins could be worn as neckpieces. In Bukovyna women wore elaborate bibs covered in coins called *salby*. Some coins were made of copper or brass, while the aristocracy could afford gold or silver. Coins worn on the temples later evolved into earrings.

Coral: These necklaces are called *korali*. Although coral is not native to Ukraine, it was in high demand. Pale coral indicated illness and vibrant red indicated health. As a result, bright red coral was most popular. Coral was expensive, and the number of strands on the necklace were representative of the individual's status and wealth. This would encourage people to wear numerous strands of coral, sometimes incurring financial debt as a result. Before coral was imported, Ukrainians would bake amber, which made it a darker colour. This unfortunately could result in cracking during the baking process.



Identity and Beadwork

Indigenous art is always deeply connected with the land, which shapes the aesthetics, practice, and philosophy of making art. Beadwork requires a stillness and concentration that necessitates an awareness and contemplation of the space around the artist. Since early beadwork materials came exclusively from the land, artists often paid homage to the beauty of the natural world through their work.

There are many diverse Indigenous groups in Canada, each with their own complex beliefs, traditions, and histories. However, many groups share a common worldview that all things are sentient, interrelated, and possess spirit or life force. All of creation requires some of this spirit, which is provided though complex networks of interrelation. Humans are responsible for upholding harmony within the natural cycles and beings through ceremonies and rituals.



Left: Haudenosaunee/Mohawk floral beaded Glengarry cap circa 1830-1840. Photo by Ivanka Haney.



Plants and flowers are an important part of this harmony for their ability to nourish and heal other beings. The presence of plants and flowers in Indigenous art often points to their role in upholding balance and harmony through food or medicine.

Plants and flowers commonly appear in both Ukrainian and Indigenous beadwork.

Strawberries

Strawberries are often referred to as "heart berries" because of their shape and position in the centre of a complex system of leaves and roots. They help us understand the connection between the mind, body, and spirit. Strawberries were also one of the two plants (the other being tobacco) that descended to Earth with Skywoman in the Mohawk creation story. It is the first fruit to ripen in the new year, coinciding with harvesting events and festivals that encourage community, celebration, and reflection. The fruit is rich in vitamin C, and the plant helps with digestion, skin problems, and strengthening the uterus during and after pregnancy.

Today, strawberries are a symbol of reconciliation, and maintaining lasting relationships through care, compassion, and love.



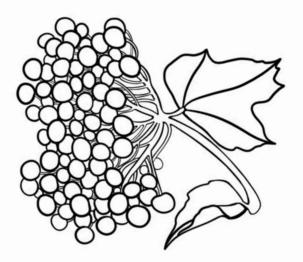
Above: Beaded strawberry pincushions on display at UMC OB. The pincushion on the far left is made by Indigenous artist Naomi Smith. The others are Victorian historical pincushions. Photo by Ivanka Haney

Kalyna Berries

These red berries are an important symbol in Ukrainian folk art and culture. The flowers of this plant are traditionally placed on wedding breads and tables as decoration, and the berries are used to make tangy juice, baked goods, jams, and other traditional foods. The plant was also known for its medicinal uses, notably for healing hemorrhaging in childbirth. Under Soviet rule, Ukraine's national anthem was banned, to be replaced by the people with a song called Chervona Kalyna. Eventually this song was also banned.

Today, Kalyna is a popular name for Ukrainian women and girls.

A North American species of this plant known as the highbush cranberry grows freely, and is used by many Indigenous groups for its medicinal properties. The berries are rich in vitamin C, and the bark can be boiled down into a tea to relieve pain and act as a sedative. It is also used to prevent postpartum infections in new mothers. In the Cree language, the word for this plant means "summer berry." Today, it is most commonly known by its genus name, *viburnum*.



Spirituality and Beadwork



Beadwork can often have strong spiritual significance, both for the wearer and the artist who made it. In some cases, the beads themselves are regarded as having spiritual meaning, and embellishing items with beads can point to their high status and importance.

In Ojibwe, nouns can be categorised as either animate or inanimate. Beads are considered to be animate objects because of their ability to "make things happen." In Naskapi, an Algonquin language spoken by Cree Naskapi people, beads are referred to as "spirit berries." They are revered as "gifts from the spirit world" or "eyes of the manitou."

Beading is almost mathematical in nature, leaving little room for mistakes. However, if you look closely at some objects, you may spot a single bead that does not match its neighbouring colours. This is done intentionally to demonstrate humility to the Great Spirit—the only Being capable of perfection. With a single mismatched bead, the artist acknowledges the flaws existing within their creations and themselves. This bead becomes a link to the "unseen world," or a spiritual bridge to guide the artist.

Beadwork is often worn at special spiritual and cultural events. One example is the powwow. Powwows are important cultural and spiritual events where Indigenous attendees gather to perform ceremonies and honour their traditions. Dance is a ceremony, and participants proudly wear their traditional regalia. There are many types of regalia, depending on the type of dance. Regalia is typically made from cotton or buckskin and is adorned with beads, feathers, porcupine quills, ribbons, and metals. An individual's regalia is personal and unique, and is often an artistic presentation of their values, family, feelings, and interests through symbols, colours, and motifs. Spirituality in Ukrainian beadwork is also very important. There are many forms of Ukrainian beadwork that have deep spiritual and religious significance.

One example is pysanky. Pysanky are decorated eggs that were originally used as a protective symbol. Each motif that is drawn on the egg has deep meaning and significance. Pysanky were originally pagan creations that were reinterpreted into Christian symbols representing new birth and resurrection in connection with Easter. The name is derived from the Ukrainian verb "to write." Traditionally, the egg is decorated using molten beeswax and dyes to create intricate patterns. Methods have changed with advancements in technology including electric styluses and synthetic dyes. Some contemporary artists adorn pysanky with beadwork.

Another example is the *zgarda*, which is a traditional Hutsul neck adornment featuring decoratively-enriched metal crosses. They were once worn by women and girls as a symbol of protection, and could also feature coins with rulers or spiritual symbols.



Further Reading

Indigenous Beadwork

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Beadwork History

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Related Resources and Recommended Reading

Indigenous Peoples' Atlas of Canada https://indigenouspeoplesatlasofcanada.ca/

Native Land https://native-land.ca/

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Final Report on Canada's Residential Schools The History: Part 1, Origins to 1939 http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Volume_1_History_Part_1_English_Web.pdf

This free guide was written by exhibition Curator Lily Stafford and Museum President Daria Diakowsky. Edited by Kendra Guidolin. All photography and beadwork diagram drawings by Ivanka Haney.

Please visit our website www.umcontario.com to view the interactive virtual tour of The Spirit of Beads: Sharing our Stories. There is additional educational content available including activities and colouring pages for students.

If you enjoyed this guide please consider making a donation to our small museum at www.umcontario.com/donate. We are a volunteer-run museum and your generous donations ensure that we can create this type of content in the future.



Ukrainian Museum of Canada Ontario Branch

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