

Sally Chaffee

(Interviewed in 10/2015 Newsletter)



For the second time, Sally Chaffee has the opportunity to frame her gorgeous beadwoven jewelry for display on the wall of the gallery. *Cornucopia: A Retrospective Duo*, opening September 30, features the work of Sally along with that of decorative folk art painter Marie Sakellarion. Sally will have about two dozen framed pieces on the wall, with more positioned on traditional jewelry displays as well. Is bead weaving a “left brained art?” Looking at the smooth, iridescent surfaces of some of her pieces, where tiny beads align and mix to form a blanket of pattern, one does imagine that, like knitting, this takes an enormous amount of planning and precision. How many hundreds of little glass beads go into something like her beaded necklace showing the bridge of flowers? How many hours with an almost invisible needle and thread does it take to plan and complete such tiny masterpieces?

Given the nature of her art, it isn't too surprising to find out that Sally's longest career has been a business systems analyst. In programming, Sally explained, “you aren't sure how to get to where you are going and you have to kind of ‘map’ your way. I always looked at programming as a game, it's really fun. I really enjoy planning how certain systems work with the user's needs.”

To help map her way with some of her beadweaving, there is software available, and Sally sometimes will design her pattern or scene with it. Other times, she does a more freeform, random style. While some of her pieces lie flat and undulate against the skin in that cool, heavy way that woven beadwork has, other motifs are three dimensional sculptures, or have pendants with beaded bezels. She has even made bead woven chessboards that are both wall



displays and practical game accessories.

It was a class at the 92nd Street Y in New York City about 30 years ago that gave her the skills to create jewelry for the first time, but she was inspired by personal adornments at an earlier point in her life. In particular, while she was

in the Peace Corp in the mountain regions of Iran many years ago: “they have these necklaces for the donkeys, with this certain blue bead, and there was so much color everywhere, and so many things to find at the bazaar.” She also found the NYC craft fairs very inspiring, though not because there was a lot of bead weaving for sale. Such works of art are generally too expensive to vend at fairs.

Carole Horn was the teacher of many of the classes she took, and was so popular that people would line up at 6 a.m. to register for them. Sally took as many lessons as she could and when she mastered enough technique, she started teaching classes herself.

“There are about four stitches that are kind of basic. That’s the interesting thing about beading, too, you can just use a different size or shape with the same method and it doesn’t look at all similar” explained Sally. To that effect, of course, beaders usually amass lots of beads! Sally is no exception, though she hides her bead stash behind a wall in her studio. Bins of beads are organized by color, size, type, etc. “I probably have enough here so that I don’t need to buy anymore for years!” she laughed.



However, jewelry trends change, and new bead items come along, making it hard to stick to a vow not to buy more. Right now, a new style of bead featuring two holes is on the market and Sally plans to try using them soon, after the show is up.

Trending right now are Sally’s crocheted bead necklaces. (It used to be her flat woven bracelets, but fashion interest is always changing.) All the beads on these necklaces have to be strung in advance, and then she crochets the different strands together, slipping the beads up into the matrix as she goes.

Prior to when she joined the Co-op in 2007, she hadn’t really sold her jewelry anywhere. Former member Jane Chang was the person who suggested she apply to the gallery. Sally was instrumental in creating a website for SAC, something she first learned to do by making one for herself, and she remains in charge of updating it.

Cornucopia will be on view from September 30 through October 26. There will be an opening reception on Sunday October 4, from 3 to 5 p.m. with refreshments.