



Jacqueline Lillie, collar/necklace, 1995, glass beads each individually knotted, stainless-steel cabling

HIGHLY STRUNG AESTHETIC

Strong colour, crisp design and painstaking precision are the hallmarks of the work of Viennese jeweller Jacqueline Lillie.

Profile by Dorothy Erickson. Photography by Kohl and Olah.

ANTIQUE seed beads combined with precision catches and stainless-steel cable are an unusual pairing. In the hands of Jacqueline Lillie they appear made for each other. Precisely placed beads cover the surface of various geometric shapes – discs, spheres, cones, cylinders, rods and cords – with stunning results that have been exhibited internationally and are in the collections of the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, the Museum für Angewandte Kunst in Vienna, the Baden-Württemberg Landesmuseum in Germany, and the Corning Glass Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Cooper Hewitt Museum of Design which are all in New York. American writer Robert Liu has written of

Lillie's work: 'Her pieces truly communicate a lasting aesthetic and integrity ... she is blessed with the gift

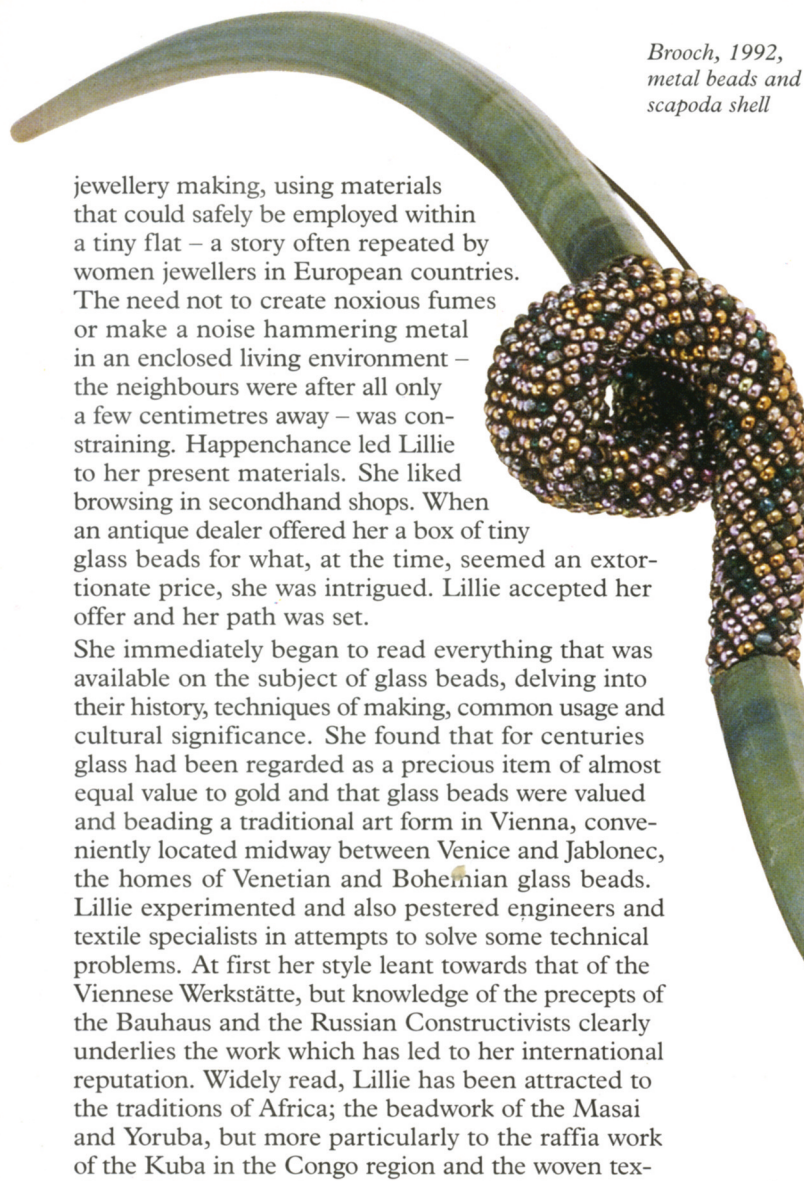
for making beautiful artwork that will endure.'

Jacqueline Lillie was born in France during WWII to Austrian parents active in the Resistance. After she finished school they insisted she qualify in something useful and so she trained initially as a social worker in Vienna. Her education in metalwork was undertaken as a mature student at the Academy of Applied Arts (Hochschule für Angewandte Kunst) under the tutelage of Professor Hagenauer, whose father had been a seminal force known for his strict forms and clarity of line. She left in 1965 to work as a designer for a rather traditional Viennese jewellery firm, but a clash of aims and ideals meant that her position there

was of brief duration. Marriage and children took up the next few years, but as soon as the children were at nursery school she went back to



Collar/necklace, 1994, glass beads and steel cabling



*Brooch, 1992,
metal beads and
scapoda shell*

jewellery making, using materials that could safely be employed within a tiny flat – a story often repeated by women jewellers in European countries.

The need not to create noxious fumes or make a noise hammering metal in an enclosed living environment – the neighbours were after all only a few centimetres away – was constraining. Happenstance led Lillie to her present materials. She liked browsing in secondhand shops. When an antique dealer offered her a box of tiny glass beads for what, at the time, seemed an extortionate price, she was intrigued. Lillie accepted her offer and her path was set.

She immediately began to read everything that was available on the subject of glass beads, delving into their history, techniques of making, common usage and cultural significance. She found that for centuries glass had been regarded as a precious item of almost equal value to gold and that glass beads were valued and beading a traditional art form in Vienna, conveniently located midway between Venice and Jablonec, the homes of Venetian and Bohemian glass beads. Lillie experimented and also pestered engineers and textile specialists in attempts to solve some technical problems. At first her style leant towards that of the Viennese Werkstatt, but knowledge of the precepts of the Bauhaus and the Russian Constructivists clearly underlies the work which has led to her international reputation. Widely read, Lillie has been attracted to the traditions of Africa; the beadwork of the Masai and Yoruba, but more particularly to the raffia work of the Kuba in the Congo region and the woven textiles of Mali. These latter two show the infinite variations that are possible with basically two colours and a heightened sense of the geometric – features also found in the mosaic work of Renaissance churches in Tuscany which have also provided inspiration. She is often to be found in museums accessing the essential institutional memory. Mondrian is acknowledged as inspiration for the patterning on one piece, as is the Italian knitwear designer, Missoni, for another while nature is claimed for others. Lillie has absorbed many diverse traditions and inspirations to create work that is very much her own, even to the extent of inspiring commercial imitators in recent years.

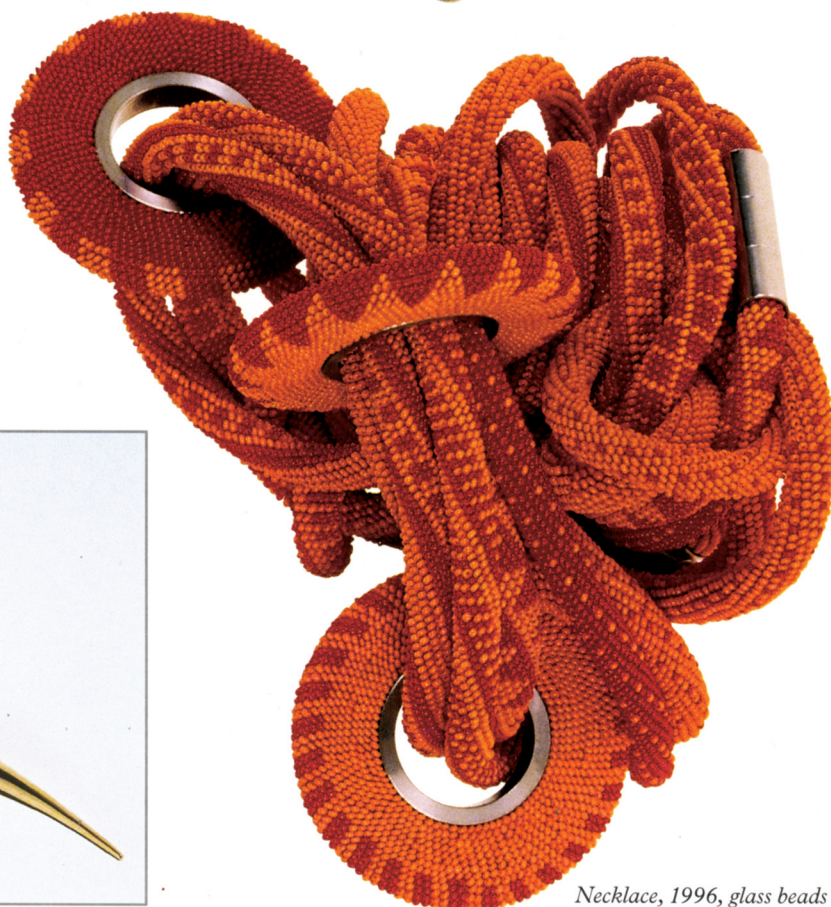
Craftsmanship and artistic content, not material value,



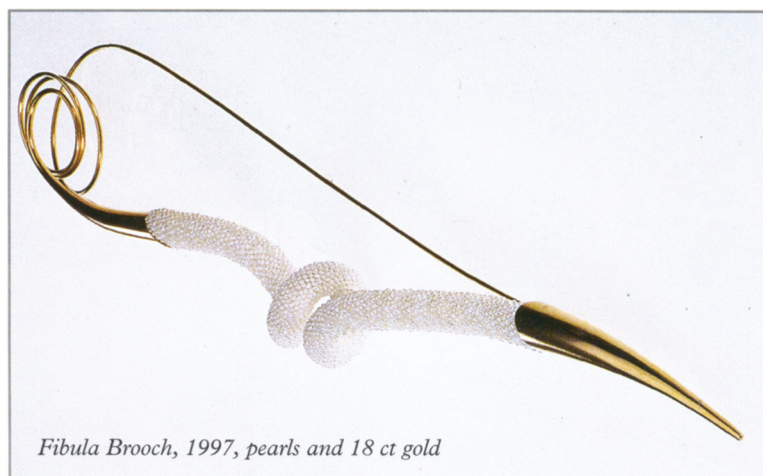
Necklace, 1993, glass beads and stainless-steel cabling

are important to her. She says, 'Jewellery is no longer an expression of status, hence my insistence on crafting with simple glass beads and clasps that owe their roots to precision engineering. Jewellery is a reflection of one's attitudes towards life and one's surroundings. At the same time, the pieces should draw on traditions of the past and take them a step further.'

Every piece has to meet certain aesthetic requirements as well as stand up to the rigours of its working life. A necklace, for instance, has to be able to be twisted and knotted to suit the mood of the wearer. She has developed her own F3 formula of form, function and flexibility. She believes that flexibility is essential to allow the jewellery to adapt to the wearer and become an extension of their character. Using a restricted set of shapes, she composes the struc-



Necklace, 1996, glass beads

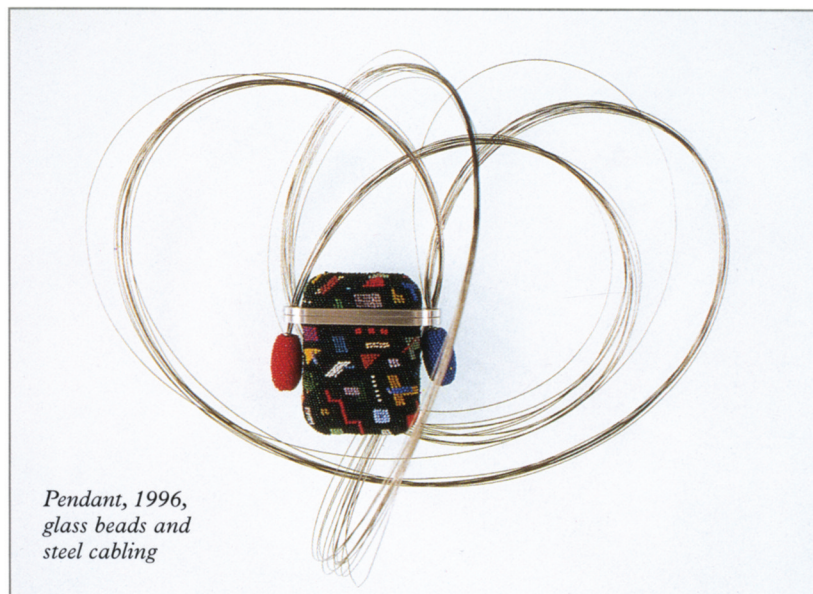


Fibula Brooch, 1997, pearls and 18 ct gold

ture of her artworks and then embellishes them with meticulous beaded patterns, which are sometimes formal, sometimes random, but each with careful consideration for the weight of one colour against another. The colours and knotting, spiral or otherwise, add to the design. The clasps and catches are precision-made by a medical technician to a prototype worked out by Lillie herself. One is an adaptation of the bayonet catch on a camera lens.

Each piece contains thousands of minute antique Bohemian glass, metal or pearl beads threaded on silk and knotted – a laborious task requiring hundreds of hours and not for the faint hearted. A necklace with pronounced segmentation can take days to work out the sequence, as the horizontal pattern has to be conceived in vertical terms on a very long silk thread and she has to move in her mind's eye from one plane to the next. She always uses antique beads smaller than a millimetre in diameter if possible because they are more regular in size, the dyes are better and of hues is greater. Each bead is individually knotted, which means the pieces can never unravel and the knotting is done in such a way as to provide the suppleness and flexibility.

Lillie is married to a globe-trotting Englishman who worked for the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation. Their home in the leafy 19th-century district of Vienna is a multilingual setting with a wide range of nationalities and cultures being welcomed, entertained and from which to learn. Fluency in three languages is helpful. She also travels widely, exhibiting and lecturing in Europe and North America. Being a Viennese is also a multicultural experience. The Austrian Empire once stretched from present-day Poland to Italy, encompassing 11 distinct nationalities, most of which are represented in the city, which is still elegant, glamorous and cosmopolitan. The former ruling family, the Hapsburgs, married across Europe and are still part of the social milieu. In a distinguished career which gathered momentum in the late 1970s, Lillie has taken part in many group exhibitions in countries such as the US, Germany, Switzerland, Singapore, Japan and the Arab Emirates. This has included such events as the Venice Biennale in 1984 and Europalia in Brussels 1987, Prague 1992 and Budapest 1993 and "The Universal Bead" at the American Crafts Museum in New York in 1999. In 1992 she was awarded the prestigious Rakow Glass



*Pendant, 1996,
glass beads and
steel cabling*

PHOTO: ROBERT ZAHORNICKY

Commission of the Corning Museum of Glass, NY. She held her first solo exhibition in 1980 at the legendary Galerie am Graben in Vienna. She then had 20 more in the same number of years, including three in Sydney: at the Macquarie Galleries in 1985, Contemporary Jewellery Gallery in 1988 and with Anne Schofield in 2000. Some members of her family had emigrated to Australia during the war to escape Nazi persecution, so there has always been an interest in this continent. Apart from Austria, where she shows regu-



*Brooch, 1992,
metal beads
and bronze*



*Ring, 1999,
knotted coral beads
and 18 ct gold*

*Below left: Ring,
1999, silver and
glass beads*

*Ear clips, 1999,
aluminium and
glass beads*





Square Brooches, 2000, knotted glass beads and silver, with magnetic closure



Earrings, 1993, metal beads and 14 ct gold

Coiled Neckpiece, 2001, four strands of individually knotted glass beads



larly, Lillie has had solos in New York in 1986, 1988 and 1995; Washington in 1990; Arizona in 1994; Toronto in 1997 and a special invitational show at the Musée des Artes Decoratifs de Montreal in 1998. Lillie makes primarily neckpieces, pendants, large fibula-type brooches and earrings. Some pieces are monochromatic. Others are brighter in hue; those with pearls being particularly striking. She also incorporates bone and shell into some works and echoes the shape in metal in others. Some of her works are comprised of beads strung on stainless-steel cable. Some

are rigid, others are flexible ropes. Some can only be worn one way. Others have detachable parts which can be rearranged and worn in a different configuration. The wearer of one of these pieces thus becomes part of the artwork by their involvement in its arrangement. Some of Lillie's recent works incorporate magnetic catches, allowing the pin to be completely removed. One wondrous piece is a very large brooch which has terminals in 18 ct gold curved and tapered into the form of scapoda shells. Between the ends is a looping curve completely covered in myriad tiny pearls. The pin extends from the point of one gold cap, loops several times to create a tension, and then proceeds forward to clip into the other golden end, which is formed as a catch. In the tiny freshwater pearls she has also made an elegant beaded choker glistening with tiny beads and closed with a bone and gold clasp. Among Lillie's celebrated works is a suite of beaded ropes in red and purple, evoking the rich colours and patterns of a Caucasian carpet. Highlights of mauve, peridot and tangerine add spice to the mixture. One catch has been enlarged and beaded to form a focus. Also strikingly colourful is a necklace consisting of red and tangerine ropes threaded with large beaded discs in the same two colours. The restricted palette complements the strong geometric shapes in this forceful work created in 1996. Visually sublime is an earlier suite in which four black-and-white beaded ropes are combined in one necklace. The simple, key-hole catches do not interfere with the line of the rope. Recent work has been more minimalist – a result of a commission to design for a young girl and to a budget. A cigar-shaped pendant, primarily covered in deep blue beads, is also a container. It is threaded on three strands of stainless-steel cable terminated with red and green beaded finials. More *outré* is the birds nest of steel cable clasped with a large red, beaded catch. A recently made cigar-shaped pin, measuring 20 cm long with subtly coloured beadwork, incorporates the



Earrings, 1999, glass beads individually knotted, silver



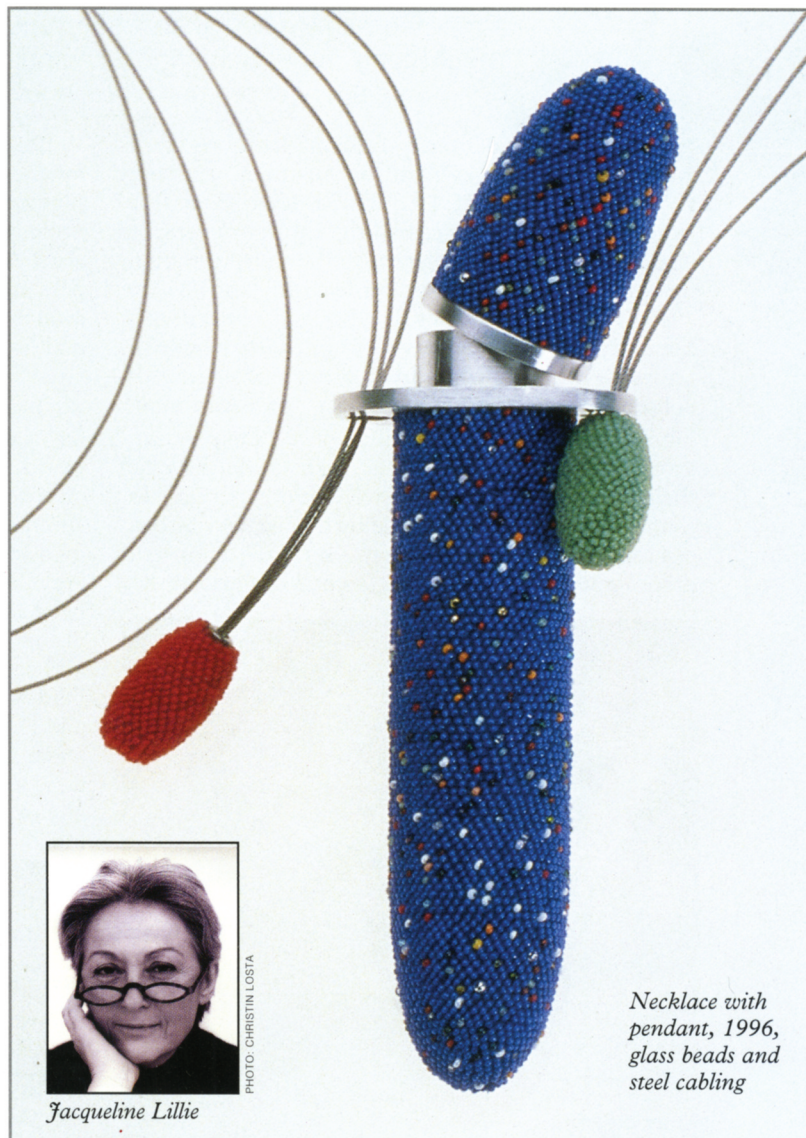
Necklace, 2000, glass beads individually knotted, silver, with magnetic clasp

newly developed magnet catch which is completely detachable. Although simple in concept, this elegant piece has incredible presence – a hallmark of her work. Lillie continues to search for solutions that are both mechanically sound and aesthetically pleasing. The ever-present problems that occur in jewellery design, such as the search for efficient clasps, unobtrusive ear fittings and alternatives to the standard brooch pin, are somewhat of a crusade for her. As already mentioned, she has designed clasps that use a mechanism similar to a camera lens, also clip-ons for earrings which incorporate a tiny powerful spring, as well as a clasp based on magnets so as to avoid puncturing the wearer's clothes – a boon for wearers of fine silks. Lillie enjoys a high profile in the US, where she held two solo shows in California and Michigan in 2000, while 2001 sees her exhibiting again in Austria. She has been listed in the last two *New Glass Reviews* – a worldwide competition selecting 100 innovative works in glass. Her works in 2000 were selected by all four of the jurors – only 11 artists out of some 900 had that distinction. This reinforces what David McFadden of the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York wrote in the introduction to her first catalogue: 'In Jacqueline's hands, beads are given an organic energy, resulting in her skill in combining colour with texture, solidity with fluidity. If total mastery of any technique merits attention and acclaim, Jacqueline has succeeded.'

Her own requirements are more artistic. Lillie says, 'The ultimate test with any piece of art is the impact that the piece has on the person looking at it, or in my case, on the person wearing it. My work is very much a labour of love in which I have tried to meet the client's urge for self-adornment and satisfy my own desire for poetry and elegance.' Indeed, the work of Jacqueline Lillie is both poetic and elegant.

Dr Dorothy Erickson

Dorothy Erickson is an Australian artist/jeweller, art historian and critic who exhibits regularly in Vienna.



Necklace with pendant, 1996, glass beads and steel cabling



Jacqueline Lillie

PHOTO: CHRISTIN LOSTA