

Light Tips from Byzantine Mosaics

by Margie Deeb

April 2007

The medium of beads is a close cousin to mosaics, and I often think of beading as a more structured form of mosaic. What drew me to glass beads was their exquisite dance with light (and thus color, because color is light). I've been studying how early Christian mosaic artists achieved luminosity and optical mixing with their bits of colored glass.

In early Christian art mosaics reached their height as a supremely luminous form of painting. Photius, a Patriarch of Constantinople in the 800's, wrote of walking under a mosaic dome "...it was as if one had entered heaven itself... and was illuminated by the beauty in all forms shining all around like so many stars, so one is utterly amazed."

Above all, early Christian mosaics exploited the effects of light.

Mosaics began with pebble covered walls and pavements. They evolved to the use of regularly cut natural colored stone cubes, then artificially colored terra-cotta or glass, which brought more color to the art form. Eventually metal tesserae of gold and silver were used. Along with metals, techniques to fully enhance and direct light, such as gold foil sandwiched between two layers of glass, developed.

Gold was a symbol for light, as seen in golden halos surrounding the head of saints, the Virgin Mary, and her infant. As painters have always used the lightest color in a painting to draw attention, so mosaicists used gold at the liturgical focus of the composition. Highlighting the robe or halo of Christ or the Apostles ensured the eyes of the viewer would always return to that most luminous, radiant part of the mosaic.

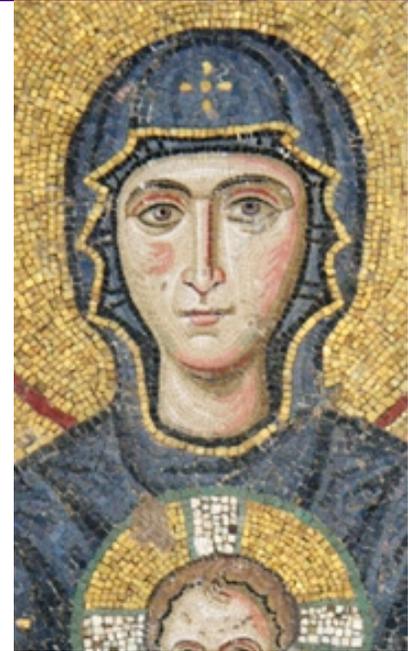
Mosaicists varied the angles of their surfaces, creating sparkle and shimmer as the viewer moved. Sometimes, in dark passages where it is difficult to see the mosaics, the tesserae are loosely set to catch the light at several angles. Deliberately irregular surfaces gave the metallics and colors a soft, fluid effect. More controlled surfaces contained some of the cubes positioned at a 30 degree angle so they would reflect light down to the spectators below.

These early artists thoroughly understood techniques and methods of optical mixing, a technique beaders, especially those working in seed beads, need to understand. In the 2nd century AD Ptolemy explained one reason for optical mixing: because the angle of vision formed by rays of light from very small patches of color is too small for them to be identified separately by the eye, many points of color seen from a distance appear as the same color.

The techniques used are as vital now as they were hundreds of years ago:

- Mosaicists heightened a range of analogous colors by including small amounts of contrasting colors. To apply this concept to beading: increase the apparent intensity of a group of blue and green beads by sprinkling a dash of orange or red. Or if you are a glass bead maker, heighten the swirls of blues and green with a dot of orange or red.

- Soften the hard edge of a color field by spreading bits of that color into other colors. This is referred to as "color spread." Mosaicists added touches of bright vermilion in and around flesh areas, not as part of modelling or highlights, but rather to add warmth and softness to the flesh areas. Likewise they added bits of green in the flesh colors to cool down the complexion. To apply this concept to seed bead weaving: bleed small amounts of colors placed next to each other into each other for softer transitions. "Night



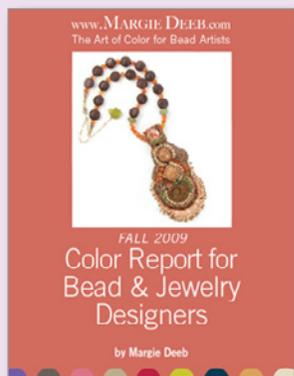
Gold symbolized light itself. Bits of green tile are used in the shadow areas to cool and soften overall flesh tones.

Maiden," a seed bead portrait pattern in the store section of this site, makes use of the color spread effect to soften the flesh tones.

- The setting bed of plaster was colored red so that the plaster between the cubes would add to the rosy glow. To apply this concept to beading: match thread color and beads with purpose. The more transparent the bead, the more impact the color of thread has on the finished "complexion." In strands, the colors of the small beads between larger and focal beads greatly influence the overall tone, so choose accordingly. Or make sure the tone of the metal you are using, like the silver head pins in the example on the right, add exactly the chromatic tone you want. When embroidering with beads, the color of the backing on which you sew impacts the color cast.

For exquisite online examples, visit the Kariye Museum website, one of most important Byzantine monument in Istanbul:

How Have You Lived without the Color Report for Bead & Jewelry Designers?



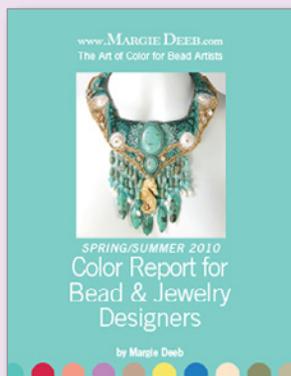
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Each season the *Color Report for Bead & Jewelry Designers* will expand what you can create in any medium - by introducing you to color combinations you've never used or even seen before. These seasonal PDFs contain over 40 palettes, descriptions, photos, gemstone and Delica bead suggestions, and ideas based on Pantone's fashion color report.

One of the most fun aspects of creativity is color: using new colors and harmonies. If you're like me, your beadwork soars when you're challenged and inspired. And it becomes exponentially more fun.

It thrills me to work with colors I've never seen or tried. Watching how the hues interact with each other and how I interact with them gives me such joy. And I want to learn more, go further, reach higher and create more.

Join me in exploring the exciting new colors of each season.



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Responses to Margie's *Color Report for Bead & Jewelry Designers*:

"I really like the color report - particularly because there are colors that I probably would not have considered or noticed and this gives new directions to travel. I also REALLY appreciated the listing of the gemstones."
- Kathy L.

"Very helpful. I tend to work in certain palettes over and over again, but seeing a different palette helps me move out of my comfort zone."
- Susan K.

"I appreciated the fact that you mentioned your initial reaction to some of the Pantone colors for this season and yet after exploring them, your reaction to them changed. It reminds me to be open to colors I might not usually consider for jewelry (or wearing)."
- Rosalynn B.

*"I know I will not care for every season's colors but *The Color Report for Bead Artists* still gives me an idea of what to look for when designing for the next season. It is very helpful knowing that what I make will work with what is in the stores for those months."*
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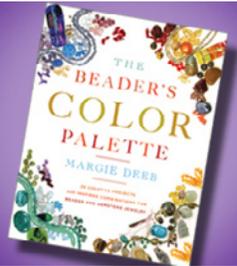
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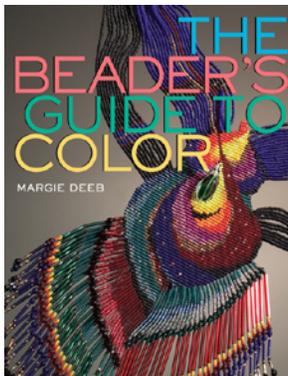
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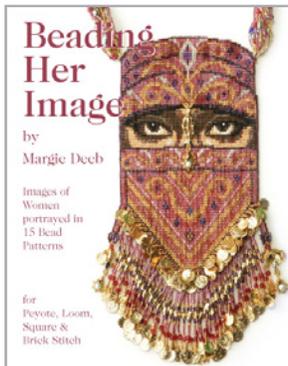


[The Beader's Color Palette: 20 Creative Projects and 220 Inspired Combinations for Beaded and Gemstone Jewelry](#) Gather from history, culture, and our planet to create stunning color schemes for beaded creations. (Paperback, 192 pages) \$24.95 US Dollars



The only book of its kind written specifically for bead artists, [The Beader's Guide to Color](#) teaches bead-ers of all levels everything they need to know about color to create unique and vibrant bead-work designs. Margie discusses psychological and symbolic color associations, and ways in which color can be used to create and accentuate pattern, rhythm, and movement. 21 color schemes are described and illustrated in detail with accompanying projects for all skill levels. (Paperback, 144 pages)

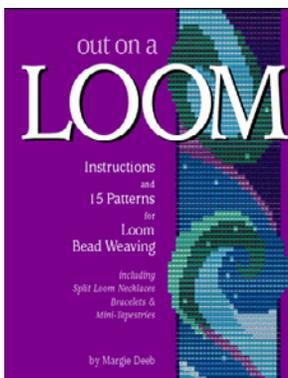
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[Beading Her Image](#) illustrates the power and beauty of the feminine in 15 seed bead patterns for **peyote, brick, square stitch, and loomwork**. Women from a wide range of times and cultures are woven into tapestries, necklaces, and bracelets. The stunning and gorgeous color palettes that artist Margie Deeb is known for adorn each piece.

Includes loom building instructions, finishing split loom necklace instructions, and peyote, brick, and looming instructions. (Paperback, 44 pages)

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[Out On A Loom](#) is a creative journey through color, design, and form for the beginning to intermediate level seed bead artist.

The soft cover book features 32 full-color pages of detailed instructions, patterns, illustrations, and diagrams for creating loom woven bracelets, mini-tapestries and split loom necklaces. Professional and creative finishing techniques are provided so each finished project can be a work of art.

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Artist, designer, musician, and color expert

Margie Deeb is the author of several beading books, including the popular [The Beader's Guide to Color](#) and [The Beader's Color Palette](#).



Her color palette book was named the **Best Craft How-To Book of 2009** by the prestigious Library Journal.

She teaches color courses for artists, interior designers, and bead-ers. Her free monthly color column, [“Margie's Muse,”](#) is available on her website. She produces a free graphically enhanced podcast, [“Margie Deeb's Color Celebration,”](#) available on iTunes.

Her articles have appeared in [Bead & Button](#) and [Beadwork](#) magazines, and she writes a regular color column in [Step-by-Step Beads](#). She has appeared on the PBS show [“Beads, Baubles, and Jewels”](#) speaking about color. Visit Margie's website for her books, patterns, jewelry, inspiration, and more.

Margie's Blog:

colorforbeadartists.com

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"But Margie," you say, "we're not mixing colors! We're using beads, a pre-mixed solution!" (I took the words right out of your mouth, didn't I?)

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