



SEED

BEAD

PAINTING



EASY MIXED-MEDIA MOSAICS

By Katherine England

A new way to embellish surfaces

Twelve years ago I began a journey of teaching myself a craft that was new to me—mosaics. Lacking such fountains of information as the Internet or a support group for mosaic artists, I made about every mistake possible, but then slowly gained skill and confidence. Given my short attention span, I soon moved on from colored glass to other types of tesserae and eventually started playing with beads. I had seen work by Betsy Youngquist and was so inspired I had to try making mosaics using small gems.

I often mix traditional mosaic methods with this technique I developed, which is very different from the traditional use of glues and mortars. This process allows me tight control of how close my beads are and secures them immediately, thus giving me exactly the final product I envisioned. The great thing about this method is that you don't have to grout it afterward, since the epoxy creates a nice smooth background that complements whatever material I use. As a result, you can use a plethora of tesserae: beads, shells, jewelry, rhinestones, glass, crystals, and more.

materials

Focal piece: jewelry, glass, chains, tokens, shells, knobs, etc.

Glass bottle

TIP: I suggest choosing a bottle that has flat sides if this is your first attempt at mosaics. You can take on the challenge of a round surface when you feel a little more confident.

Permanent marker (I used a Sharpie®.)

Two-part epoxy, black (I used Aves FIXIT® Sculpt.)

NOTE: This epoxy is a little more expensive but it's much stronger than other epoxies I've tried, which allows me to use it on exterior pieces as well.

Kitchen scale

Baby wipes

Lotion (Any hand or body lotion is fine.)

Strung seed beads (I used sizes 10–12.)

NOTE: I always buy twice as many beads as I think I will need for the surface area. It is kind of a guessing game, but leftover beads will inspire you for your next project. A hank of beads will cover about a 4" square.

Craft knife or sharp palette knife

Dental pick (Toothpicks or tweezers will also work.)

Scissors, small

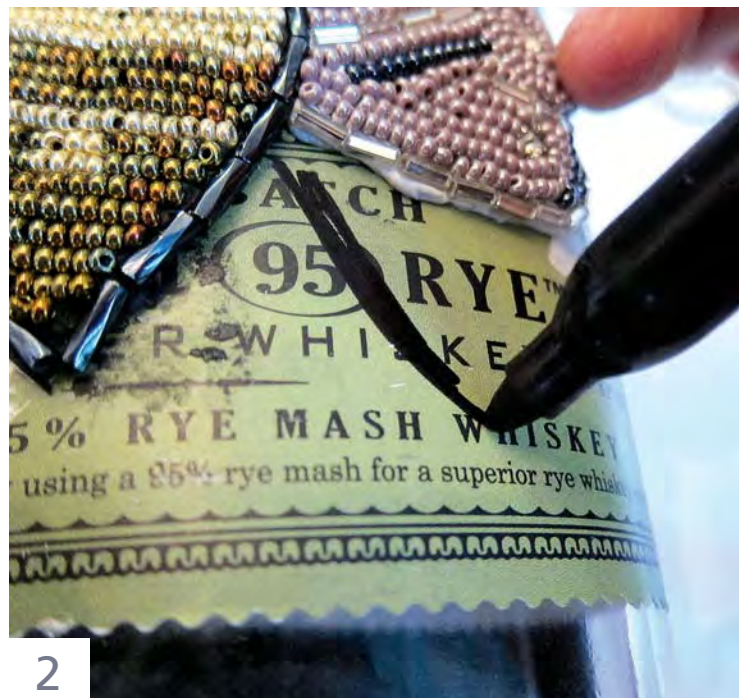
Paintbrush for coating small beads with clear acrylic

Protective finish (I used Minwax® Polycrylic®.)

NOTE: Because of the qualities of the FIXIT epoxy, you do not need to prime or prep most surfaces. There is no real prep for the bottle used in this article; you can even leave the label on if you wish. You can also use wood, plastic eggs, Styrofoam® skulls, or just about anything. Just be sure to clean your substrate with some glass cleaner.



Step-out photos by Katherine England





1 Choose your color scheme and design. My favorite pieces usually grow out of a special token. It might be a surviving earring, a family heirloom, or even a bottle cap found in the street. I like using taxidermy eyes or other unexpected finds, too. Any number of things can be used as a focal. **(FIGURE 1)** Sometimes your pattern will spontaneously occur to you as you create. Other times you may want to draw your design. I usually draw my design directly on the surface of my substrate. I use a Sharpie to get started, and I work from my focal piece outward. **(FIGURE 2)** Before I go too far I usually create the outside frame of my focal area. I might use a chain or small glass squares so the finished area is nicely edged. Otherwise your beaded area can simply stop wherever you wish.

NOTE: If I am working on a scene, I also start with the focal image, such as an eye, a piece of jewelry, a person, or an animal. After the main piece is set, I continue the beading out and away from it, or sometimes work from the bottom up.

2 Mix the 2-part epoxy. It is very important to weigh the two parts on a kitchen scale. The two parts have different densities, so this cannot be eyeballed; it must be weighed for accuracy.

NOTE: Don't mix more than 6 grams total, 3 grams of each (about the size of a small marble). You will learn over time when mixing more will work and not leave you with waste. When I do have excess epoxy, I begin a heart or ball shape that I add to until it becomes its own piece of art.

3 Put lotion on your fingertips to reduce stains from the epoxy. Spread some epoxy with your fingers over the area and set your focal piece. Make sure not to spread the epoxy too thin, but make sure it's thick enough to really grasp your focal piece. You want the piece to nestle in the epoxy. **(FIGURE 3)**



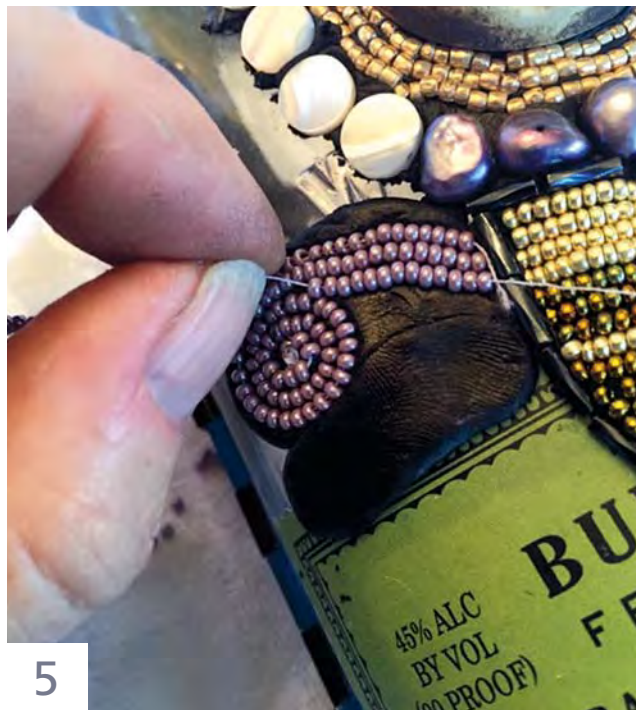
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TIP: Keep baby wipes handy to keep your fingers clean while building your mosaic. I almost always use black epoxy, which can sometimes leave fingers stained. Epoxy is also available in white, bronze, and beige, and you can add powdered pigments to it to create custom colors.

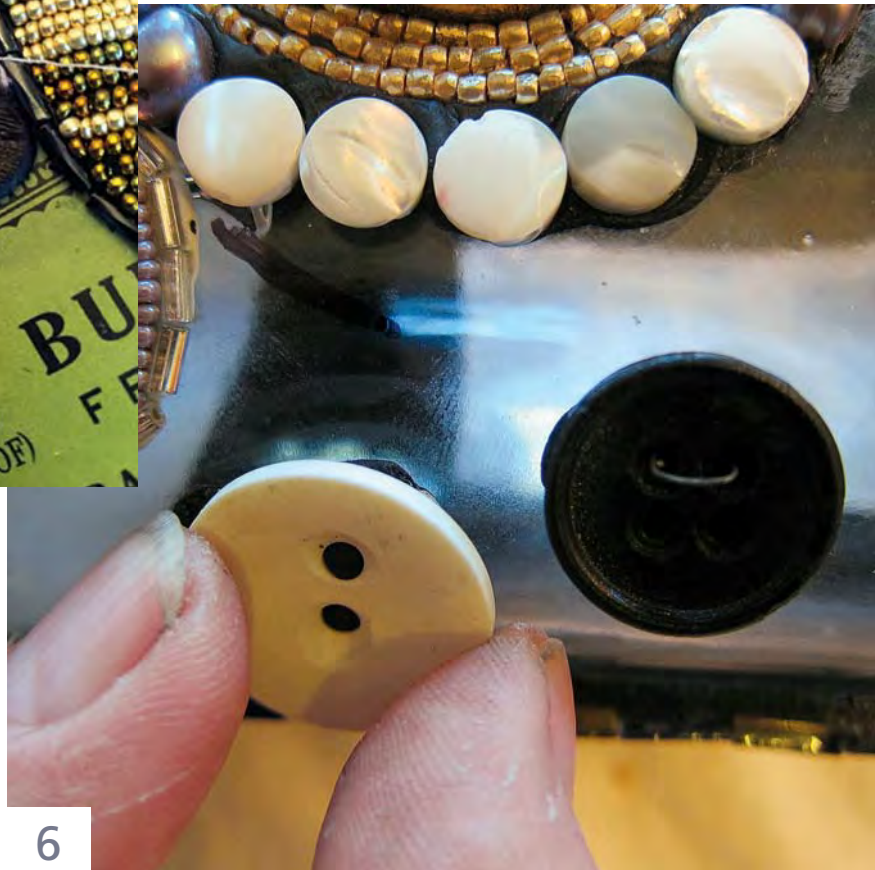


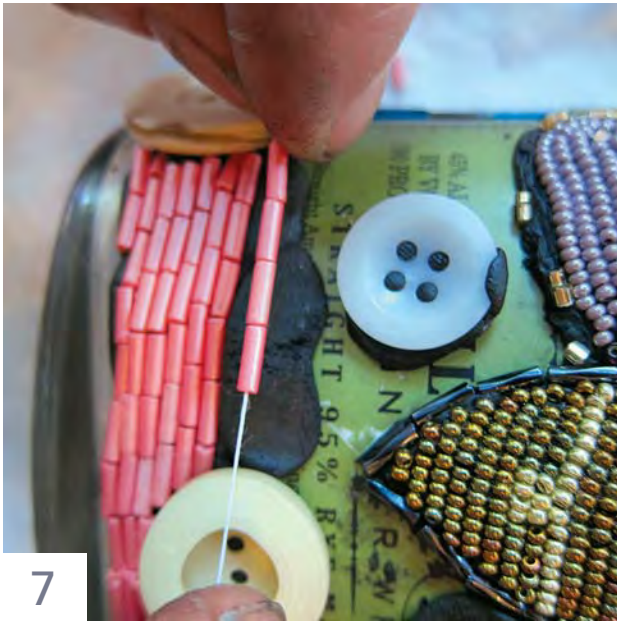
4 Choose a section around the focal to work next and add epoxy to that area. **(FIGURE 4)** Begin to “paint” with your seed beads. Grasp the open end of a bead strand and push the first few beads into the epoxy with your fingertips. Remember to hold the string taut as you work your way up the strand, pushing each bead in individually until you reach the end of the row. **(FIGURE 5)** Pulling on both ends of your strand allows you to keep the beads close together. You have about 45 minute working time with this epoxy.

TIP: Be sure to clean any excess epoxy from the edges of your design with a craft knife or sharp palette knife before you stop working on a section. This particular epoxy dries harder than concrete and is almost impossible to clean off once it’s dry. Your next section should seamlessly connect with your first without having excess epoxy visible.



5 When you are satisfied with the placement, release your hold on the open end of the strand and gently pull the string out. Set your next row of beads close to the first. Work in this manner until you’ve filled the desired area, pulling the string out at the end of each row. When done with a strand, tie and knot the end





7



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to keep the beads on the string . . . or lay it untied off to the side to use again during that sitting.

TIP: Set a pearl or larger ornament, like a button, in an area for an interesting effect. (FIGURE 6)

NOTE: On sharp curves or spirals it's easier to work with several small lengths of beads for better placement. Just pull the string out slowly as you work your way around the curve.

6 Lay all different sizes of beads next to each other to give your tapestry a lovely textured look. Push the rows of beads close together for a seamless effect. (FIGURE 7) Use a dental pick, tweezers, or a toothpick for small adjustments. I like placing a border around most of my pieces for a finished look. This part should be planned ahead so you can anticipate an end or framework.

7 Paint a coat of Polycrylic on the sections with smaller beads for extra hold. (FIGURE 8) Larger beads and ephemera have enough surface contact with the epoxy to guarantee a strong hold, whereas small beads sometimes need the extra insurance of a coat of finish. I only dab it on small beads.

Since developing this method I have made dozens of pieces, from tiny jewelry pieces to six-foot-tall sculptures with wonderful results. Be brave in this medium and try things you had only imagined before.

Katherine England teaches art in schools, in her studio, and at art retreats nationwide. Her favorite medium currently is glass, and she loves coaxing it into playful patterns and whimsical figures. Katherine's work can be seen in both private and public collections throughout the United States.

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