

How I Made "Rosie, The Uncaged Hen"

By Robin Atkins



With full color pictures,
this little booklet shows and tells
how I made "Rosie" and "Her Garden."

I do bead embroidery improvisationally, without a plan for
the outcome. But once Rosie started to look like a chicken,
I let her have her way.

Here you can read about and see most of my steps
in the process of making her.

How I Made
"Rosie, The Uncaged Hen"

by Robin Atkins

I began to work on Rosie in July, 2000 at the Embellishment Conference in Portland, Oregon. I needed a piece to demonstrate how I work improvisationally. So I grabbed a square of fabric and a bunch of beads which appealed to me at that time, and began to sew. My method is to pick up a bead I love and sew it on someplace.

Sadly, I didn't begin to take pictures of Rosie until the bead embroidery was nearly complete. However, I did take "in progress" pictures of her garden, which you will see later in this booklet.

I began with the spiral of red triangle beads which make her eye, continuing the line into an "S" shaped curve. I added rows of beads in yellow, orange, and pink, and then a row of blue "stacks". The heart came next, followed by rows of green beads, a blue bear, and "fans" with orange centers. By



this time my work was beginning to look like some type of critter. One day I looked at it and thought "CHICKEN!" Although I continued to work improvisationally, choosing beads I love and sewing them on somewhere, I now had an idea of her outside shape. About this time, I began to think she might become a sculptural piece, a stuffed animal. She began to have meaning as well – to suggest artistic freedom from our/my own critical boundaries.

When I couldn't think of anywhere to put more beads, I decided she was finished. It was time to make her other side.

Again, I simply went to my fabric stash and selected something I really loved – resisting the temptation to use the same fabric or a “matching fabric.” This is the method I used to get her shape, so that it would be the same as her other side: I laid my completed side, face up, on a piece of acid-free paper, and placed both on a piece of corrugated cardboard. Carefully, I went around her whole body poking pin holes right next to the outside edge of beads, about 1/8” apart. When I finished, the paper had an exact replica of her shape in tiny pin holes – connect the dots, and there was a perfect pattern!

A note about the paper: I back my fabric with paper, sewing my beads through both fabric and paper, which keeps my work from puckering. Although any notebook or typing paper will do, I generally use museum quality, acid-free, interleaving paper. Since it remains permanently part of my bead embroidery, I prefer not to use acid-treated (normal) papers, because over time they could cause disintegration of the fabric.

This picture is the only one I have of Rosie's other side in progress. As you can see, she's almost finished here. I began with a necktie label from a good friend's tie. It says “endangered species,” which probably has something to do with my feelings about uncaged hens, uncaged artists, and uncaged me. I don't really try to understand it as I'm working. But, I do try to follow my gut instincts about what to sew



on the fabric and where to put it. When I'm all finished with a piece, I sometimes look at it with a deciphering eye. In this case, I notice that she has a little “womb” with two “eggs” in it, perhaps suggesting birth of more Rosie (= uncaged) in the future. And she has a small mirror for an “eye,” so that if I look her in the eye, I see myself!

I'll just take a minute here to tell you about my bead/project storage system. While beading and acquiring beads since 1985, I've gone through several storage systems. This one, storing beads in 4 mil plastic ziplock bags (2" x 3" size), is



definitely the most successful. Rubbermaid 7-cup "Servin'savers™" are the perfect size to hold around 70 filled ziplock bags. I store my beads in these Rubbermaid containers by color. When I'm ready to begin a project, I pull packages of beads that interest me and put them in a "project box," usually an empty 7-cup Rubbermaid container. Above you can see Rosie's beads.



These pictures show both sides of Rosie (now called the "heart" side and the "mirror" side). Below you can see my

stitches on the "wrong" (or paper) side. The next step is to tear away the outside borders of paper. I slightly moisten the paper along the outside edge of my bead embroidery to make tearing easier.

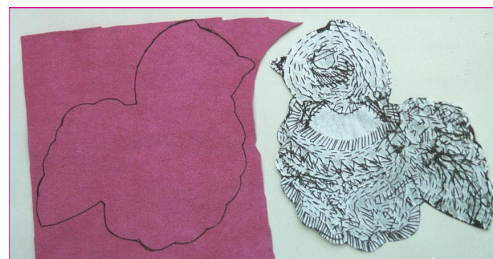
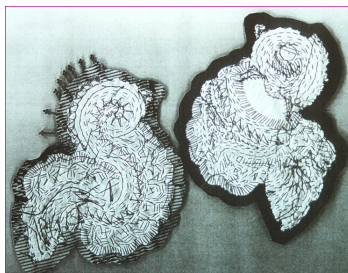


Now came some important decisions. How could I make her nicely plump and 3-dimensional? The best way, it seemed, was to give her a “belly” piece. I figured that the “belly” piece could also be the place to attach her legs, which at the time I didn’t know how to make. How could I fit a “belly” piece to her sides, especially when they had scalloped, rather than round edges? The method I chose was to line both sides, then sew the “belly” piece to the lining in a smooth curve.

The steps shown here for lining a piece of bead work are only one way to do it. But, it’s a way that has always served me well. I use Ultrasuede-light™ for the lining, because it doesn’t fray, and therefore doesn’t require turning in a seam allowance. To prepare the sides for lining, I first tear away the extra paper as mentioned above, then cut away the extra fabric leaving a ½” seam allowance. Next I put both pieces on a scanner or copy machine, paper side down, and copy them at 98%. This gives me a perfect pattern for the lining, just a tiny bit smaller than the piece to be lined. I cut out the copy along the outside seam line, and trace around it onto the lining fabric. The lining

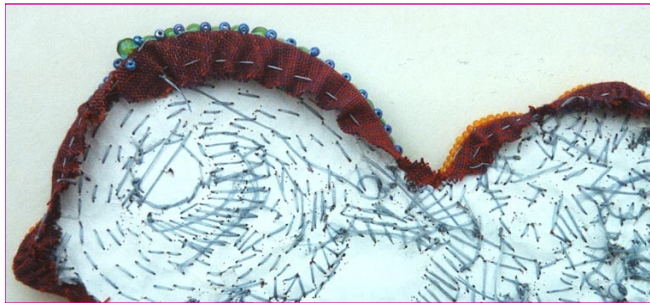


pieces, guaranteed to fit, are now ready to cut out and sew.





Before attaching the lining, there are two necessary steps. The first is to clip the seam allowance at the inside curves, as shown to the left. The second is to make short lines of running stitches along each of the curves. Gather



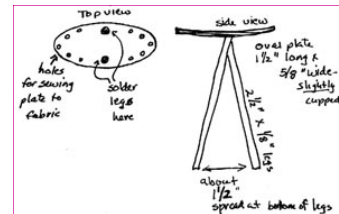
each curve inward by pulling on the thread and knotting it off when the curve is properly tightened into place

(see above). Use a matching thread color and tiny whip stitches to sew the lining in place. Notice below that you can see the stitches. Later I will use a beaded picot edge stitch to join the two sides, and it will hide the stitches.





With both sides lined, it was time to consider the “leg problem.” The photo above shows how I sketched the legs on paper to get an idea of proportion. I then designed an armature to be made in metal, which could be sewn inside the belly piece. This is my sketch, although in the end I made her legs parallel. A jeweler friend constructed this piece from copper sheet and 1/8” diameter brass wire.

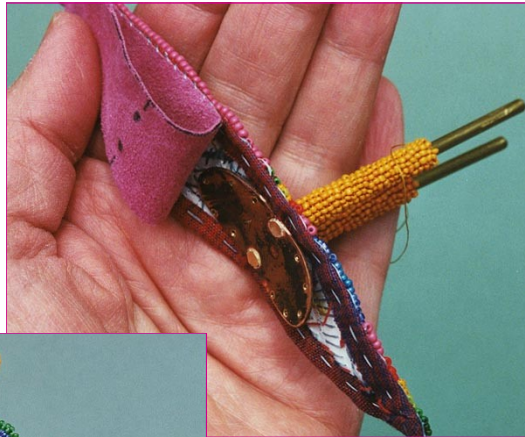


The other “challenge” was how to make a pattern for the belly. This I accomplished by sewing the two sides together (using a picot edge stitch), then “eyeballing” the belly opening, and cutting out paper patterns until I got one which fit properly.





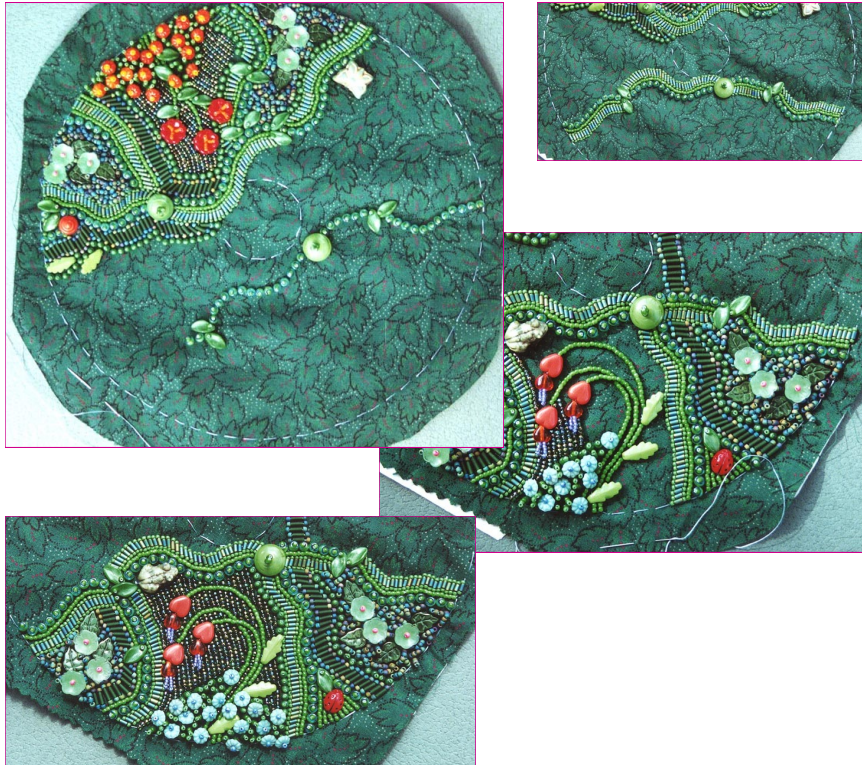
Here you can see the finished “belly” piece, the armature, and Rosie’s “leggings” which are tubular peyote stitch woven with vintage size 20 beads. After sewing the armature into the belly piece, I whip



stitched the piece to the inside lining of her sides, creating the illusion of wing flaps. The stuffing is polyester.

About the same time that I began to work with her legs, I started making “her garden.” The plan entailed getting a piece of wood “turned” into a lens shape, about 1” high and 7” in diameter. A carpenter friend helped me with this job. I then began to embroider a circle of fabric to fit over the wood, leaving two “holes” for Rosie’s legs, which would fit into holes drilled in the wood. The reason for this was so that she could be disassembled and “travel” in two sections.

The following pictures show her “garden” in several stages of completion. The small circle of running stitches in the center indicates where her leg holes will be. The outside basting stitches are slightly larger than the 7” bottom of the base in order to accommodate the dome. As with Rosie, herself, this is worked improvisationally, with no drawings or plans. I begin working in a section, and when I get stuck there, I move to another section. Eventually they all are connected. You can see the progression here, as I began, then completed the area, adding whatever inspired me at the moment.





Above you can see the holes I poked with a blunt pointed tool (a rope working tool works well for this) for her legs. I whip stitched around the holes to secure them. And, to the left, I have embroidered Rosie's feet in her garden! A few areas remain to fill.

Here is the finished garden, ready to put over the wood base.



You may notice in the detail picture below that I haven't crowded the bead embroidery around the outside edge. This is because it needs to be gathered to fit the dome of the base. Solid beading would pucker, so I've left small open spaces. To make a "puff" shape to fit over the base, I make a line of small stitches around the outside



the outside edge so it can be gathered around the base.



The top right picture shows the bead embroidery gathered around the bottom edge of the wooden base. To complete this step, I cut out a circle of Ultrasuede™ in a nice green color, and whip stitched it to the fabric right at the edge. There were a few little places that needed to be filled with beads to finish the base. In this lower picture, you can see how Rosie fits into her garden. The last step, was to add a little fringe to Rosie's tail.



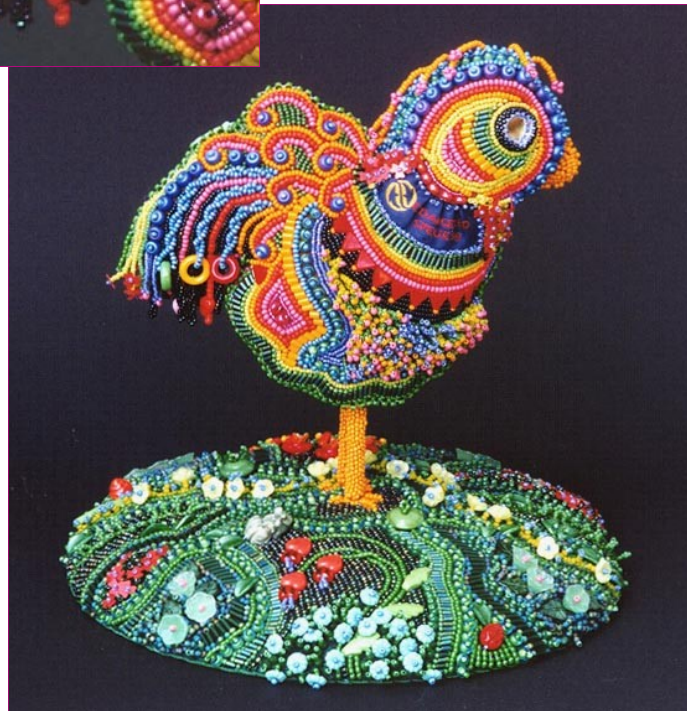
Whenever possible, I add fringe last, so that it doesn't tangle with my thread as I'm sewing. Here you can see that I've extended Rosie's tail feathers beyond the glass rings.

"Rosie, The Uncaged Hen" is finished now, except that I want to get a round, black granite "lazy Susan" base to go under her "garden" so

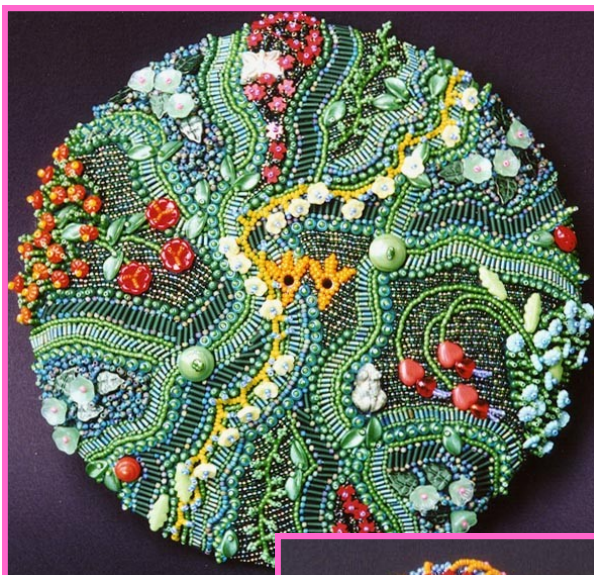
that she can be turned easily for viewing.

Now that she's finished, I see Rosie as a guardian angel, whose purpose is to help us to be free of our critical minds

that want to judge everything and prevent us from freely expressing our full potential.



Photography: I took these pictures using a Cannon EOS Rebel 35 mm camera and natural outdoor light. Though I've never photographed my "process" before, I'd certainly do it again.



"Rosie" is a 3-dimensional sculpture. Her "Garden" is a domed base from which she can be removed easily. I worked more than 300 hours on this piece, which to me is about freedom!

Note: Rosie is the featured art work on the cover of **500 Beaded Objects** an awesome book published in 2004 by Lark Books.



© Copyright
by Robin Atkins,
2001



Please visit my website and check out my other books, including *One Bead at a Time*, *Finishing Techniques for Bead Embroidery*, *Spirit Dolls*, and *Heart to Hands Bead Embroidery*.

www.robinatkins.com