

OBJECT GUIDE

South African Beadwork



ACKLANDARTMUSEUM

Please return to holder or Information Desk.



Version 8.25.2017

Questions? Contact us at acklandlearn@email.unc.edu

ACKLAND ART MUSEUM

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Campus Box 3400
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3400
Phone: 919.966.5736

MUSEUM HOURS

Wed - Sat: 10 AM - 5 PM

Sun: 1 PM - 5 PM

Closed Mondays & Tuesdays.

Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, & New Year's Day.

PLAN YOUR VISIT

[Directions & Parking](#)

[Current Exhibitions](#)

[Museum Store](#)

[Contact Us](#)

INTERACT

Like us on Facebook at [Facebook.com/AcklandArtMuseum](https://www.facebook.com/AcklandArtMuseum)

Follow us on Twitter [@AcklandArt](https://twitter.com/AcklandArt)

Sign up to receive the [Ackland's E-News](#)

Explore the Ackland's blog at ackland.org/category/blog/

Unidentified artist
Mfengu (South Nguni) peoples
South East Cape Region
Collar necklace, early 20th century
glass beads, buttons, and sinew
Gift of Norma Canelas Roth and William
Roth, 2017.17



- The variations in the beadwork in the different rows of this fine collar give a subtle dynamism to its visual effect.
- Mfengu peoples fled the Zulu kingdom in the mid-nineteenth century and migrated south, becoming integrated into Xhosa speaking cultures. Mfengu means “refuges” in Xhosa.
- The color palette of this piece is typical of the softer shades (blue and pink) that seem to have been preferred by the Mfengu by the turn of the twentieth century.
- Collar necklaces of this type would be worn by either men or women on important occasions such as weddings or significant tribal dances.
- The mother-of-pearl buttons may be modern-day equivalents to cowrie or ostrich egg shell. With no loss of beads or the leather ties, this piece is in exceptionally good condition.
- The donors note that this collar was previously owned by the Diamini family of the Ntshamase clan in eMazizini, suggesting a provenance from the coastal area north and east of Port Elizabeth in South Africa.

Unidentified artist
Zulu (North Nguni) peoples
South East Cape Region
Neckpiece with Panel, 19th century
glass beads and thread
Ackland Fund and Gift of Norma
Canelas Roth and William Roth, 2017.19.1



- Pieces like this have popularly come to be known as “love letters,” reflecting the idea that the colors and patterns may be a nonverbal language that can be interpreted with close study. Recent research suggests that there was no consistent meaning, though beadwork items such as this were certainly given as tokens of affection and commitment.
- Note the delicate touches of asymmetry in the placement of the single blue beads in the field of white and in the touch of red beads at the lower left.
- Given their irregular nature, some of the glass beads may be older than the nineteenth century, when manufacture became more uniform.

Unidentified artist
Zulu (North Nguni) peoples
South East Cape Region
Necklace or armband, 19th century
glass beads, brass buttons, and thread
Ackland Fund and Gift of Norma Canelas
Roth and William Roth, 2017.19.2



- Notice the brass buttons in this piece, the use of which is evidence of contact with the British military forces and their uniforms.
- The colors of the beads in this Zulu piece (black, white, dark red) suggest a relatively early date.
- The six bands of very small beads are wrapped around fiber to make this piece, which might have been either a choker-style necklace or an armband.

Unidentified artist
Zulu (North Nguni) peoples
South East Cape Region
Snuff container, 19th century
wood, glass beads, and fiber
Ackland Fund and Gift of Norma
Canelas Roth and William Roth
2017.19.4



- Snuff was and remains important for social life in and sociability throughout South East Africa.
- Especially in eastern and southern Africa, men and women still carry snuff containers made from a variety of materials, often decorative in nature.
- Here, beads have been wrapped around a wooden container.

Unidentified artist
Zulu (North Nguni) peoples
South East Cape Region
Neckpiece with panel, 19th
century
glass beads and thread
Ackland Fund and Gift of Norma
Canelas Roth and William Roth,
2017.19.5



- This diminutive size of this piece indicates it was designed for use by a child.
- The two larger red beads would be adjacent when the clasp was closed.

Unidentified artist
Zulu (North Nguni) peoples
South East Cape Region
Purse, 19th century
glass beads, reeds, and thread
Ackland Fund and Gift of Norma
Canelas Roth and William Roth, 2017.19.6



- This unusual piece is made of natural fibers (reeds) tightly bunched and beaded.
- Except for the side and top borders, the back panel of this piece is unadorned.
- Note the two loops for a carrying strap at the opening on the top edge.

Unidentified artist
Zulu (North Nguni) peoples
South East Cape Region
Belt, 19th century
glass beads and leather, with metal
clasps
Ackland Fund and Gift of Norma
Canelas Roth and William Roth
2017.19.7



- This strip of leather is fully beaded in classic Zulu colors on one side.
- It was probably used as a belt.

Unidentified artist
Zulu (North Nguni) peoples
South East Cape Region
Neckpiece with Panel, 19th century
glass beads, thread, and brass button
Ackland Fund and Gift of Norma
Canelas Roth and William Roth, 2017.19.8



- The dynamic zigzag pattern on the panel contrasts with the linear patterning and variant color of the necklace strap.
- In addition to possible use as a necklace, this might have been used as a hip panel or a woman's modesty apron (a so-called cache-sexe, as it shielded the pubic region).

Unidentified artist
Zulu (North Nguni) peoples
South East Cape Region
Neckpiece with Panel, 19th century
glass beads, thread, and brass button
Ackland Fund and Gift of Norma
Canelas Roth and William Roth, 2017.19.9



- The presence of a two-color fringe on this piece enhances the textural variety of the beadwork.
- As with other similar pieces in this gallery, the exact function of this one is not yet determined. It might have been a neckpiece, a hip panel, or an apron.

Unidentified artist
Zulu (North Nguni) peoples
South East Cape Region
Neckpiece with Panel, 19th century
glass beads, thread, and brass buttons
Ackland Fund and Gift of Norma
Canelas Roth and William Roth,
2017.19.10



- This piece may have been used as a waistband with panel, rather than as a neckpiece.
- Both the larger panel in front and the smaller panel in back would have hung down from the double pink strands.
- The brass buttons in the front served as clasps, while the ones in the back seem to have been simply decorative.

Unidentified artist
Ndebele peoples
South East Cape Region
New Bride's Ceremonial Apron, c. 1920-
1930
leather and glass beads
Ackland Fund and Gift of Norma
Canelas Roth and William Roth,
2017.19.13



- An apron such as this would traditionally be made before or after marriage by bride's mother-in-law for use on ceremonial occasions.
- The design on this relatively early piece is minimal, with wide unadorned areas and restrained colors.
- The leather used is probably either the skin of a goat or an antelope.

Unidentified artist
Ndebele peoples
South East Cape Region
New Bride's Ceremonial Apron, c. 1940-
1950
leather, glass beads, and brass rings
Ackland Fund and Gift of Norma
Canelas Roth and William Roth,
2017.19.14



- The all beaded ground of this piece reflects the traditional Ndebele preference for white.
- Many Ndebele motifs may have been transferred to beadwork from their practice of painting houses and yard walls with colorful geometric motifs, a practice apparently begun as a way of asserting tribal identity when under threat.
- Note the use of metal fasteners along the top edge.

Unidentified artist
Ndebele peoples
South East Cape Region
Doll, after 1940
glass beads, straw, nuts, and fiber
Ackland Fund and Gift of Norma
Canelas Roth and William Roth
2017.19.20



- This doll is made of beads wrapped around a core of straw.
- In a sign that these figures were used by multiple generations, it is possible that arms, armbands, headdress, necklace and apron, etc. are later additions, perhaps some three decades after initial manufacture.
- Beaded Ndebele dolls are made for adolescent girls either by their mothers or by the girls themselves as beadwork samplers.
- Such dolls are also given to girls who are soon to marry. The girl cares for the doll, and gives it a name which is then later also given to her first child.

Unidentified artist
Ndebele peoples
South East Cape Region
Healer's Headdress, c. 1950
wool, cotton, and glass beads
Ackland Fund and Gift of Norma
Canelas Roth and William Roth
2017.19.24



- This headdress would be worn by a *sangoma*, the traditional healer and diviner in South Africa.