HOW TO BEAD A ROGUE ELEPHANT
The Musings Of A Jewelry Designer:
Desire

[from a book I am working on called HOW TO BEAD A ROGUE ELEPHANT}

Jewelry brings our desires into existence.

The jewelry designer collaborates with assumptions, expectations, values and perceptions the universe presents us with to make good things happen.

Jewelry design is not about making money off of people's hopes and dreams.   It is about creating a story-telling vehicle which triggers a self-realization or self-actualization among both designer and client.   Triggers this, whether that story follows a road map, or more likely follows an iterative, back and forth process involving a lot of communication between designer and client (real or abstract).

Jewelry creates a type of foil: You look at the piece and ask yourself *Who would I be without it?*

Jewelry entices one to wear or purchase, by continuing to foster questioning:

> *Is what I think is true?*

> *If true, how likely is that to happen?*

> *If likely to happen, how important is this to me?*

How You Are Reflected Back In Your Own Work

A piece of jewelry, so designed, is an object of beauty and functionality.   But it is more than that.   Jewelry is a unique form of artistic expression.   It is not stationary as if hung like a painting in a museum.   It has a different type of relationship with the wearer or viewer.   It is meant to be worn on the body. It moves with the person. It adjusts positions as the person walks, sits, runs, turns, bends, maneuvers.   It relates to clothing and hair styles and body shapes and sizes. It flows through many contexts and situations.   Jewelry is expressive. Relational. Both an object and, more importantly, an intent.

It took me a long time after I got started to figure all this out.

I made things to match clothing.   To fit into different occasions and events.   I got very matchy-matchy.   In fact, too matchy-matchy where things I designed were tight sets of necklace, bracelet, earrings.   I tried to fit every client into my particular designs.

I did not realize that jewelry stands out because it has something to say about its context – not only about me. Jewelry represents a commitment to a *conversation* – between designer and self, designer and client, and less directly but no less importantly, designer and all the various audiences of that client.   Jewelry has something to say to the people who buy it and wear it.   Without this conversation, people would not wear the jewelry. Or buy it.   Or influence others to wear and buy it.

That conversation does not happen all at once.   It does not start and stop at the beginning of the design process.   It proceeds in fits and starts, sometimes in a clear direction, other times not.   It does not fully resolve itself even after the piece is finished and then worn or bought or shared.   That conversation continues as that piece is introduced to others and they react to it.   It might get amplified.   It might get simplified or made more complex and intricate.   But it might get dampened, squashed, disrupted, distorted or discontinued, perhaps as readily.

This conversation was scary for me.   Threatening.   Challenging my already uncertain and undeveloped ideas about good design.

The jewelry we design and make and wear speaks about ourselves as artists and our clients as persons.   The conversations it triggers are somewhat unpredictable.   The designer can be somewhat alone in conversation, but maybe never alone when anticipating the reactions of others.   In his or her head, but simultaneously complicit or perhaps collaborative with others, either in reality, or virtually and in the abstract. Design emerges from this dialogue, imaginative or otherwise.   And design only emerges with some level of commitment to a conversation.

I had to learn that commitment to a conversation, centered around any piece of jewelry, then is *progressive*. It is perspective shifting.   It is reflective.   It keeps going as everyone who interacts with the piece begins to formulate whether they like it or not. Whether it excites them or not.   Whether they would wear it or buy it or utilize it or not. Whether it feels finished. Whether it seems successful. Whether it would suit some purpose, or fulfill some agenda.   But the shifting perspectives and emerging collective, shared understandings and desires about the design always reflect back on the authentic performance of the designer.   Endlessly reflective.   In fact, there can never be an authentic performance by the designer without this commitment to a conversation.

Some designers are very aware of their thinking during their authentic performance in design; others are not.   While the former is a more powerful position to be in, all designers – consciously or intuitively -- will need to figure out – before, during and after the design process – what criteria these various audiences will use to assess any piece of jewelry as meeting their needs, desires and requirements.   How do they evaluate a piece of jewelry as coherent, relevant and resonant for them?   How do they know when

the piece feels finished?   How do they determine how much the designer's own design sense contributed to coherency, relevancy and resonance?   How do they determine the risk to themselves for touching the jewelry, trying it on, buying it or showing others?   How do they share these understandings and their desires with others as they wear the piece publicly?   What makes these understandings sufficiently contagious so that others get excited about the piece, as well?

The better designer anticipates answers to these questions.   The designer uses this information as *evidence* in formulating and judging the smartness of the choices to be made when designing and constructing a piece of jewelry.   This evidence – good, bad or indifferent – forms the basis for *criticality*.   It is a measurement.   It states a position and measures the deviation.   That criticality guides the designer all along the way from inspiration to aspiration to design to introducing the piece publicly.   It encapsulates ideas about risks and rewards for the designer and for any one or more of that designer's audiences.

Evidence in this knowledge-building experience is assessed, managed and controlled. All designers want to get good at this.   It is their way of inspiring their clients to recognize the designer's power in translating thoughts and feelings into design, that is, to reflect back the designer in their own design.   We call this *coherency*. It is their way to excite their clients on an emotional level. We call this *resonance*. It is their way of influencing their clients to want to wear and buy their pieces.   We call this *contagion*. As the clients wear their jewelry publicly, we also want to get their audiences to see and experience coherency, resonance and contagion.

Coherency.   The degree that inspiration has been translated into aspiration and design with a clear recognition of the artist's hand.

Resonance.   The degree that the designer's audience(s) demonstrate their level of assumptions, expectations, perceptions, values and desire as fulfilled by the jewelry.

Contagion.   The degree to which the jewelry also appears coherent and resonant with the various client's audience(s).

Jewelry is both an outcome as well as an instrument for new shared understandings, new relationships, new behaviors, new reflections.   It is a two-way mirror. It is a catalyst for exchange.   It is a marker of validity.   Jewelry is a product of creativity. Jewelry is a tool of engagement.   Jewelry is a means toward criticality and legitimacy. Better designed jewelry shows the designer's conscious awareness of all these things and how they might play out in any situation.   Authentic performances in anticipation of shared understandings and with no apologies.   That's the goal, at least.

Why Shared Understanding and Desire Matters

For any design, it is a long journey from idea to implementation. This journey involves different people at different times along the way. The designer's ability to solve what is, in effect, a complex problem or puzzle becomes a performance of sorts, where the designer ferrets out in various ways – deliberate or otherwise – what the end users will perceive as making sense, having value and eliciting a desire powerful enough to motivate them to wear a piece of jewelry, buy it, utilize it, exhibit it, talk about it or collect it. The designer, however, wants one more critical thing to result from this performance – recognition and validation of all the creative and managerial choices he or she made during the design process.

People will not use a design if their agendas, understandings and desires do not converge in some way. They will interact with the designer as long as they are uncovering answers to this question: *Do You Know What I Know?*   If they get a sense, even figure out, that the answers are *Yes, they share understandings!* and, *Yes, the designer understands the basis for any or all of my desires!* – they then become willing to collaborate (or at least become complicit) with the designer and the developing design.

Sometimes this convergence of understandings and meanings and intents occurs in a happenstance sort of way. But more often, it won't happen without some degree of assertive leadership on the part of the designer.   It is primarily up to the designer to establish these shared understandings.   That is, the designer must take the lead to anticipate how they themselves should relate to their understanding of reality. The designer must invite the client to engage.   So the designer, too, will ask the same question of the client that the client has asked of them: *Do You Know What I Know?*

The answer to this simple question – *Do You Know What I Know?* -- is more than how the designer impresses the client and how the client impresses the designer.   It is deeper than that. It is not surface meaning. It is not something descriptive. It is something critical. At its core are ideas about *intent* and *desire*. Its vocabulary gets very caught up in ideas about *risks* and *rewards*. The conversation to establish these shared understandings – we might call this a *dance* – proceeds on many levels, some assumptive, some perceptual, some through expectations, some through values and desires.

The designer, in effect, bridges the gap between how the designer sees the risks and rewards within any design process and outcome, and how the client might see these same risks and rewards.   Both want to assess ahead of time whether the project will be satisfactory, feel finished, and meet their needs and desires.   Both want to assess ahead of time whether there will be consequences, and what these consequences might be, should these communications and shared understandings about risk somehow fail or not meet expectations.

The designer wants to avoid any *miscommunication*. Any frustration. Any discomfort. So an in-depth, intuitive knowledge about shared understandings and desires, how to

anticipate them, and how to incorporate them into the design process is necessary for the success of any design.

The designer should *not* assume there will be shared understandings. The designer should *not* assume that there will be a pleasant, conflict-free relationship with the client. The designer should *not* assume that any disagreement or miscommunication will be worked out at the beginning of the process and not have to be dealt with again. Nor, conversely, should the designer assume that any disagreement about elements of the design would negate shared understandings. The designer and client can agree to disagree as long as they share certain understandings, and as long as there is some level of agreement about the relationships the jewelry poses between risk and reward, thus desires.

Shared understandings and desires are about recognizing intent and risk. *They are about*

- Getting a sense of where the ideas for the design originate
- How the design process is to unfold
- What the design might be able to accomplish and what it might not
- What happens if conditions or intents and desires change over the course of the process
- How adaptable the designer is
- The chances the final design will feel finished and successful
- What criteria the final design needs to meet

If neither designer nor client understand intent and risk as each other sees it, there will be no shared understandings. The design will be ill-defined and poorly articulated. The role of desire will be misinterpreted or ignored. The designer's performance will be inauthentic. There will be no trust. No legitimacy. No satisfactory outcome.

While the need for establishing shared understanding in the design process might seem obvious, it does not often occur. Designers too often assume this will happen automatically. They present designs as *fait-accompli* – their success predetermined and prejudged as successful. They lose some level of management control when the client responds negatively. They fail to adapt or become too inflexible when the situation changes. The designs get implemented imperfectly. Worst of all, when the client takes possession of the design, the relationship ends.

Failure To Share Understandings
Often Results In The *Design Dogma* Dilemma

When designers approach their work with nonnegotiable beliefs, their professionalism suffers. Their acceptance as something more than a technician is diminished.

But, yes, too, I sometimes can fall into the trap of getting too dogmatic.   Usually I am in a tired or cranky mood.   The client doesn't seem able or willing to connect with my vision.   I cannot elicit from the client their concerns or misunderstandings.

In this situation, I have to step out of myself, and tell myself I'm in the wrong.   I'll get the project done to the client's needs, values and desires – eventually.   I need to change the questions I am asking, and listening more closely to what the client is trying to say. It should never be *us* vs. *them*.   They have to wear the piece.   They have to buy the piece.   I have to make it for them.

SHARED UNDERSTANDINGS AND DESIRES:
THE CONVERSATION CENTERED WITHIN A DESIGN
How Assumptions, Perceptions, Expectations,
Values and Desires Come Into Play

The Primacy of Subjectivity

The designer *needs / wants / demands* some level of acceptance by the client for the design.   It is important to anticipate and assess how the client will form an opinion and make this kind of *judgment*.

For the client, some things will be accepted as true and right without proof.   We call these things *assumptions*.

Other things for the client must be interpreted as to what they mean – a mental map or impression.   We call these things *perceptions*.

The client will also have certain beliefs about what will happen or should have happened.   We call these things *expectations*.

Last, the client will have certain preferences about what will or should happen which motivate the client to make certain judgments.   Judgments are the result of assessments of risks relative to rewards, and what relationship of risks to rewards the client will put up with.   We call these motivational preferences *values* or *desires*.

Thus the idea of desire is the result of a calculus of rewards relative to risks within a situation.   This calculus is very determinative of whether someone will wear, buy, talk about, exhibit or collect any piece of jewelry.

Clients Have Opinions and Judge

We all know that clients have opinions and judge. When we first meet the client, they have opinions about us and judge us. As we are working on the project, they have opinions about us and judge us. When we hand over the project to them, they have opinions about us and judge us. When they show their friends and families the pieces we have made for them, they have opinions about us and judge us. This is OK. This is natural and to be expected.

- *Do they like it or not?*
- *Is it exciting to them or boring?*
- *Ugly or pretty?*
- *Useful or not?*
- *Worth it to them or not?*

Values and Desires

Values and desires are motivational. They signal a predisposition to act. They are a measure of the tradeoffs between the risks involved and the expected rewards. A social or economic calculation. A cognitive evaluation further affecting behavior. As such, they are a form of understanding.

Values and desires have a great impact on the assumptions people bring with them to the situation, and which ones they do not want to challenge. Values and desires have a great impact on the expectations people have, and which ones they want to prioritize. Values and desires have a great impact on the perceptions people have of the world, and which perceptions they want to act on.

Values and desires have two key components – the contributions of the designer and the motivations of the client. First, there is the value the designer places on the work, given the resources involved, the time spent, the skill applied, and meanings represented in the piece and importance to the designer. Second, there is the value the client places on the work, given their assumptions, perceptions, expectations, previous experience, and the socio-cultural-psychological context they find themselves in.

People project their feelings and thoughts and sensitivities onto the designed object, whether it be jewelry, an interior design, or a digitized representation online. These projections, however, can have many roots. Self-esteem. Self-expression. Social advantage. Tool of negotiation. Power.

Values and desires sometimes are expressed in monetary terms. Such and such a thing is priced at some dollar amount or assigned some worth also in monetary terms.

They more often are expressed with words. We hear words like *beautiful*, *satisfying*, *appealing*. And other words like *ugly*, *boring*, *scary*. Or phrases like *worth it*, *I want it*, *I want to buy it*, *I want to collect it*. Or more phrases like *the designer's pieces are*

in demand and rare, or *the designer spent so much time making the piece*, or *the object contains several rare jewels*.

Sometimes the meanings associated with these words are relative, comparative or proportional.   That is, they reveal more about values and desires.   We hear phrases like *more satisfying*, *not as ugly as…*, *rarer than…*, *not as large as…*, *takes longer to make*, *about half as bright*, and so forth.

Values and desires, then, involve direction (*positive or negative*) and intensity (*a lot, somewhat, or a little*).   Both designer and client, more often than not, have to filter their assumptions, perceptions and expectations a bit and sensitively trade-off various assumptions, perceptions and expectations each brings to the design situation.   They do this by establishing value and desire.   They establish value and desire by communicating about risks relative to rewards.

Communicating about risks and rewards takes the form of (a) identifying various design or design process options, (b) talking about their pros, cons and consequences, (c) attaching a sense of measurability (absolute or relative) to each option, and (d) selecting preferences for what should happen next.

Effective Risk Communication

One way to define the designer's role is to view it as *risk communication*.   Effective risk communication involves understanding people and issues.   This means an ability to elicit assumptions, expectations, perceptions and values and desires.   This means an ability to clarify.   An ability to either soften or intensify.   An ability to organize and guide.   An ability to prioritize, group, categorize, select among options.   An ability to coordinate and resolve.   An ability to maintain consistency over what could be a long period of time.   An ability to share expertise and insights. An ability to restate things in measurable terms – exact numbers (*10 hours of work*) or relative concepts (*slightly longer than the last project*).

The client's opinions are influenced by trust in the credibility of available risk information.   This could relate to little things like identifying why one color might be a better choice than another.   This could relate to bigger things like identifying what location sales should occur which might be better than another.   Or what situations or contexts wearing the jewelry might be most appropriate or rewarding.   Or like what to perform better in-house, than not.

There are many such risks which must be assessed, measured, conveyed and agreed upon in the design process, including, among others, …

- *Making tradeoffs between beauty and function*

- *Resolving conflicts between designer values and desires with those of the client*

- *Over-doing or under-doing the project*

- *Choosing the wrong materials and techniques*

- *Mismatching materials with techniques*

- *Determining a stopping point for the project*

- *Incorrectly anticipating the context within which the design is to function*

- *Managing the design process over a period of time, without losing motivation, commitment or focus*

- *Handling budgets, administration, product development, or marketing tasks*

How is this trust established?   First off, the designer's competence and expertise should be on display.   Next, the designer should be able to demonstrate empathy, honesty and commitment.   The designer should be able to delineate options for each task or goal. The designer should be able to understand and accept the developing assessments of risk in the choices to be made.   The designer should be able to explain why something would not be a concern.   Finally, the designer should be organized and prepared, a good communicator, and show a willingness to coordinate or collaborate, if need be.

**How Do You Convey Trust,
And Elicit Desire
From Your Rogue Elephant?**

The question before you: How does the jewelry you want to make for your Rogue Elephant relate to his desires?   Is there some meaning of life that your Rogue Elephant seeks?   Does your Rogue Elephant question the nature of his existence?   Does he need jewelry for any kind of validation or reconfirmation or self-esteem?

This may be anthropomorphizing your Rogue Elephant too much.   But there is a *there* there.   He is calling you.   There must be a purpose for that.   He is driven to the extent that you are.   Some desire. Freedom. Authenticity.   A reflection of your unique perspective and values.

But there is always an underlying tension here.   The freedom to pursue desires has limits.   It bumps up against the realities of uncertainty, socio-cultural limits, and anxieties.

If, as a professional jewelry designer, you fail to bead your Rogue Elephant, you have to some extent give up on your search for authenticity and meaning in the face of these challenges.

About Warren Feld

*For **Warren Feld**, Jewelry Designer, (www.warrenfeldjewelry.com), beading and jewelry making have been wonderful adventures. These adventures have taken Warren from the basics of bead stringing and bead weaving, to pearl knotting, micro-macrame, wire working, wire weaving and silversmithing, and onward to more complex jewelry designs which build on the strengths of a full range of technical skills and experiences.*

Other Books By Warren Feld (in kindle, ebook, print formats):

CONQUERING THE CREATIVE MARKETPLACE:

Between the Fickleness of Business and the Pursuit of Design

SO YOU WANT TO BE A JEWELRY DESIGNER

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Learning Bead Stringing Is More Than Putting Beads On A String And Tying On A Clasp