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to Market Your Art

The Gang of
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Collective

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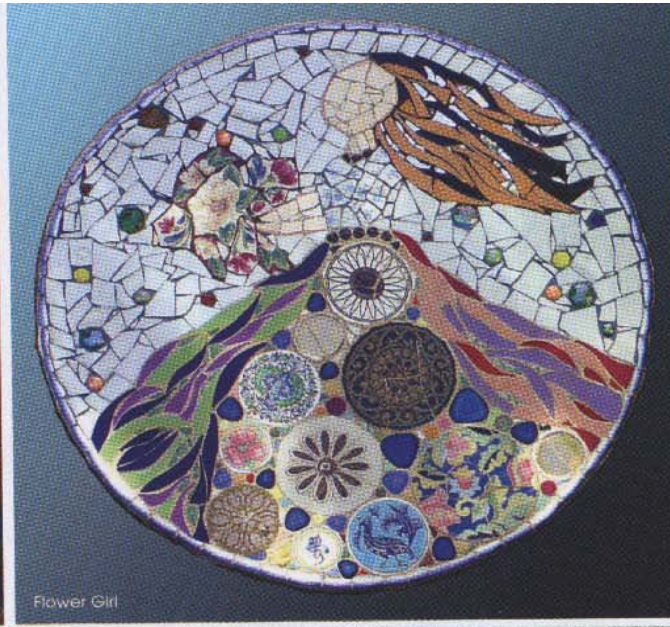
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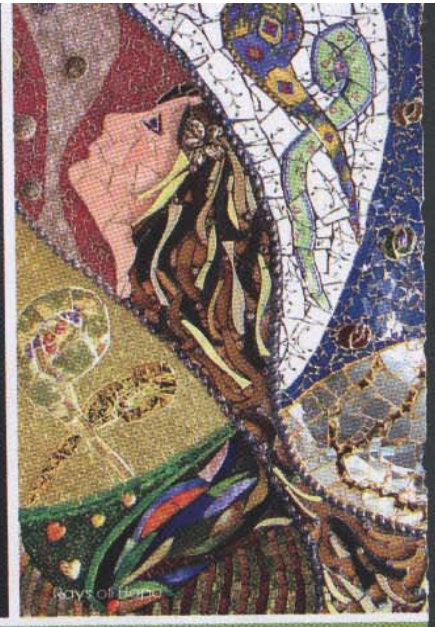
Special Arts Issue



Hidden Face

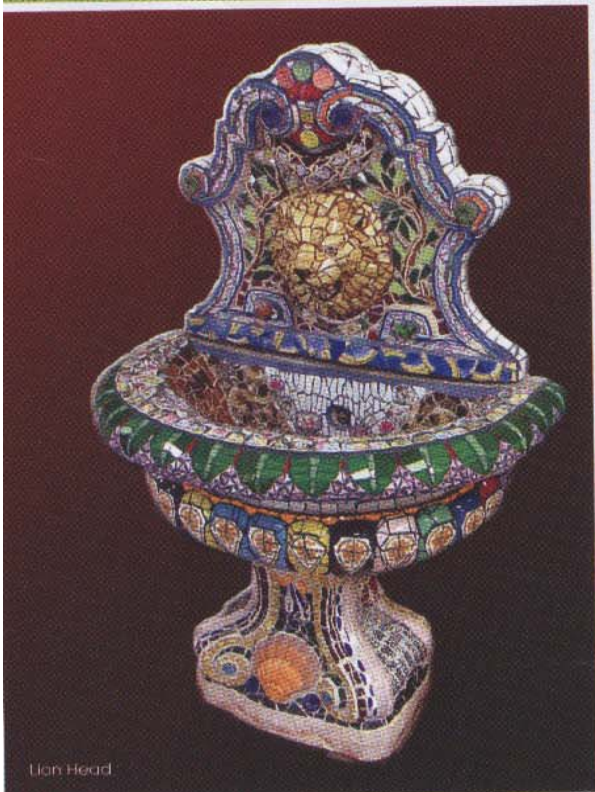


Flower Girl



Rays of Light

Mosaic Artist



Lion Head



Yin Yang

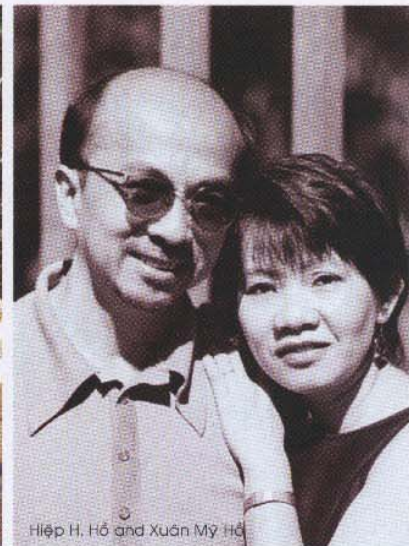
by Đỗ Lê Anhdào | artwork courtesy of Xuân Mỹ Hồ



The Lovers II



Students



Hiệp H. Hồ and Xuân Mỹ Hồ

Xuân Mỹ Hồ

A Renaissance woman of sorts, Xuân Mỹ Hồ has garnered success in both the arts and sciences. Her mosaics have been widely featured in art books, fairs and exhibitions around the country. Yet mosaic art is not her full-time occupation. By day Hồ is an accomplished IT software development manager. Although she's quickly building a reputation for herself in the art world, Hồ enjoys balancing her life between technology and art.

There are few Asian artists recognized in the world of mosaic art. Hồ's work is distinguished by its diversity of textures. She uses organic materials to create everything from birdbaths, water fountains, wood and wrought-iron tables to statues, sculptures, flower stands, mirrors, and wall hangings.

NHÀ: Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to talk with **NHÀ**. Can

"Creating mosaic art relieves any stress I experience during the day in my technical work. It's a sort of therapeutic and meditative treatment for me. The moment I walk into my studio, surrounded by soft music and my mosaic creations, I'm at peace."

you tell our readers a little bit about yourself and your background?

XMH: I came to the United States as one of the boat people in 1979, four years after the war ended. By then, I had completed half of the coursework toward a degree in

medicine from the Medical University of Sài Gòn. After being in the United States for six months, I married my childhood sweetheart and we decided to start a family. I changed my major to Computer Science. I've worked in this field for the last 20 years and am currently employed full-time as an application development manager in a large software company. At first, I regretted not pursuing medicine, which had long been a part of my dream. However, over time, I've found I truly enjoy my work and career in computer software. It gives me financial stability and it's the place where I can exercise my analytical and management skills. The mix of technical and art fields, along with my family, balances my life.

I'm glad that besides working in the corporate world, I have time everyday to devote to mosaic art, which is my deepest passion. I've worked on my mosaics almost every night and weekend for the past eight years.

NHÀ: How did you get started in mosaic art? When and why did you begin making mosaics?

XMH: My husband, who's an architect and particularly interested in aesthetics, always encouraged me to take art classes. In 1999 I took my first mosaic class at a Community College and fell in love with this genre of art.

NHÀ: What made you choose mosaic art over other types of art?

XMH: Before discovering mosaic art, I took three classes in black and white and color photography. I found that I didn't have much skill in this area. Then during a trip to Spain I was truly inspired when I saw Antoni Gaudi's work in mosaics. I returned home and took my first mosaics class. Soon after that I made some mosaic stepping stones and a small coffee table. That was when I discovered that I both love mosaics and have a natural creative ability for mosaic design.

Eventually, as the collection of my artwork began to grow, friends suggested I introduce my work to the public through community art fairs. My first show was the Kings Mountain Art Fair in Woodside, California in the summer of 2001. I was very motivated by the overwhelmingly positive responses and encouragement I received from fair-goers, and quickly sold a number of my pieces. Neil Young, the legendary rock composer and performer bought my iron table set "Four Seasons" as a gift for his wife! I was ecstatic. I thought to myself, not bad for a hobby that brings me such pleasure!

NHÀ: What are some of the challenges you've faced in this field?

XMH: Pricing my pieces has probably been the biggest challenge. It's always a challenge to price a piece so it's affordable and yet doesn't compromise my time and expenses. Mosaic work is highly labor intensive, especially the ceramic cutting part, and it takes a long time to complete each project.

NHÀ: What are some lessons you've learned?

XMH: I've become increasingly assertive when introducing my pieces to people who are interested in my work, including potential buyers at art shows.

NHÀ: Why do you think your work appeals to mosaic art lovers? What is fresh and different about your work?

XMH: It's the artistic theme and uniqueness of each piece. Also, the way I execute each design differentiates me from other mosaic artists. Most mosaic works are created using smalti and vitreous glass; few use ceramics. I use ceramics as my main material and I carry the basic concept further by adding more organic materials such as marbles, precious stones, glass beads, mirrors, tempered glass, sea shells, and stone chips, which enhance the texture of my work.

NHÀ: What is the theme that recurs most often in your work?

XMH: Very often I use curves and non-linear shapes. The roughness and durability of mosaic materials such as tiles, glasses, stones, pebbles, and curvatures enhance the contrast and bring a softness to the design as a whole. I achieve a similar effect to painting, using a medium that is quite different than a brush. In my most recent pieces, women figures with flexible and dynamic movements of the composition recur the most.

NHÀ: Why is this theme important to you?

XMH: The flow of a woman's hair, either blowing in the wind or naturally flowing against her figure always inspires me as it forms the flexibility and curvature. When I was a teenager I loved to draw, and the faces of young girls always appeared in my sketches. The curves also reflect the beauty of nature such as earth, sky, mountains, waterscape...and of the world around me which has significant influence on my design ideas.

NHÀ: Can you talk about the different types of mosaics that you do?

XMH: I love the design challenge of using a wide variety of shapes. I work with two- and three-dimensional objects: functional objects such as birdbaths, water fountains, outdoor tables, animals, flower stands, and decorative art pieces like wall hangings, mirrors, and sculptures.

NHÀ: How do you manage your busy schedule? What is your typical workday like?

XMH: When you have a passion to achieve something you make the time for that passion. Instead of watching television at night I work on my mosaics. Now that my two boys are in college, I can devote most of my spare time to coming up with new designs and working in my studio. Also, my husband helps me cut the ceramic pieces.

NHÀ: It sounds like your husband is very supportive of what you do.

XMH: My husband is very helpful and fully supports my passion. He helps me cut the majority of my ceramic pieces (dishes, bowls, and cups). For the first year, when I started working on mosaics, he gave me his input on colors and design concepts and bought me books and magazines to read, especially those related to architectural concepts. My oldest son designed my original website and my younger son maintained it, so everyone in the family pitched in. Recently, my niece totally redesigned my website. Now that both my sons are in college I maintain the site myself.

NHÀ: Your artwork has received a number of different awards. Can you tell us about some of them?

XMH: Most recently, I received an Honorable Mention Award for my "Lion Head" water fountain from the 2nd Biennial International Juried Exhibition held in San Francisco in August 2005. This piece is also featured in the *Book of American Art Collector, Western Region* by Tom Palmer

(2005). Two of my other pieces are featured in *Mosaic Art and Styles* (2005) by JoAnn Locklov and *Creative Garden Mosaic* by Jill MacKay (2003). My "Pieces of Life" is included in the Society of American Mosaic Artists Exhibition, which is currently traveling around the country.

NHÀ: Which piece are you most proud of?

XMH: For each category, I have at least one piece that I'm proud of. "The Lovers II" (sculpture), "Rays of Hope" (wall hanging), "Flowers in the Vase" (birdbath), "Flower Girl" (tabletop), "The Rooster" (a garden piece), and the "Vortex I" (a coffee tabletop in my living room). I'm also extremely proud to have a patron who has nine of my pieces in her collection.

NHÀ: Who are some of your influences?

XMH: Antoni Gaudi has had the most influence on my design. While visiting Barcelona, I fell in love with his work, which can be seen throughout the city. I recognized right away that broken pieces of tiles with many different colors and other organic materials could be melded together to achieve an abstract form. Contrary to conventional belief, I've found that the applications of mosaics go far beyond church and temple decoration. I'm also inspired by Van Gogh and Gustav Klimt's impressionism; my work often reflects that style.

NHÀ: Can you describe the process of creating a mosaic piece?

XMH: I'll simplify a fairly long and complicated process into five basic steps:

1. Design the artwork: come up with the forms, shapes and colors for a piece.
2. Cut the pieces: If ceramic is the primary mosaic material, this step requires a lot of hard work because you have to cut the pieces into fragments.
3. Place the cutting pieces together and glue them to form the design on a substrate surface.

4. Grout.

5. Clean.

NHÀ: What's the longest amount of time it's taken you to complete a project?

XMH: Two months. That's how long it took to finish my latest piece, a sculpture called "The Lovers II". It's nearly a full-size shape of a man and woman embracing (from the waist up). About two years ago I took a sculpture class using the traditional clay method, and since then I've been trying to incorporate what I learned into my mosaics. Because solid firing-clay or concrete sculpture is too heavy to use under layers of mosaic materials, I'm experimenting with Styrofoam as the inner core of the sculpture to reduce the weight. Typically, it takes me about a month to finish one piece.

NHÀ: You also teach mosaic classes?

XMH: Yes, I teach around two to four classes a year near where I live at the Kings Mountain Community Center in Woodside, California.

NHÀ: Can you talk about the swan motif in your work?

XMH: "Swan" is similar to the pronunciation of my name Xuân in Vietnamese. My husband designed the swan icon as my signature logo on each piece that I create. Each logo is made by fired clay with different glazing colors. Of course, the logos are "manufactured" from the tiny kiln in my studio. It's funny because during art shows when I'm talking with potential patrons, I often see their children searching for the swan symbol on each of my pieces.

NHÀ: How do the other members of your family feel about your mosaic work?

XMH: My parents passed away before I started working in mosaics, but I'm sure they would have been very proud of me because I'm probably the only member in our family in many generations who is an artist.

NHÀ: What do you like most about mosaic art?

XMH: Creating mosaic art relieves any stress I experience during the day in my technical work. It's a sort of therapeutic and meditative treatment for me. The moment I walk into my studio, surrounded by soft music and my mosaic creations, I'm at peace.

NHÀ: What do you like most about yourself?

XMH: My creativity. I'm constantly thinking of variations of mosaic design for new pieces, even when I'm sleeping!

NHÀ: Where do you see yourself in 10 years? What are some of your long-term goals?

XMH: I love challenges and I'd like to work on larger projects such as murals or sculptures for public arts. After I retire from my day job I plan to be a full-time mosaic artist.

NHÀ: What advice would you give to an artist who aspires to specialize in a rare genre such as mosaic art?

XMH: Don't hesitate to explore your hidden skills. Take a variety of art classes until you find the right genre for you. Embrace your passion.

NHÀ: Are there any other mosaic artists of Vietnamese ethnicity that you know of? Asian ethnicity?

XMH: Of the members listed on the 2005 roster of the Society of American Mosaic Artists (SAMA), my name is the only one of obvious Vietnamese descent. As for Asian ethnicity, only one Japanese surname is on the list. ☺

Xuân Mỹ Hồ's mosaic art pieces are currently on display at the Pescadero Gallery near Santa Cruz. To see more of her work go to www.swanmosaic.com. Email: myxuanho@hotmail.com. (Tel) 650.868.5937.