

# MOUNTAIN HOME

Image by JetKat Photo



## Xuan My Ho's Mosaics in the Mountains

- ❖ CUT KITCHEN CLUTTER
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COVER STORY

Xuan and Hiep Ho. Photo by JetKat Photo



# Xuan My Ho's Mosaics in the Mountains

By Abbie Burgess

**M**osaic artist and Woodside resident Xuan My Ho was born and raised in Vietnam. Despite a limited art program in school and no one in her family having an interest in art, Xuan loved to draw as a child. In 1978, while studying medicine in Saigon, Xuan left her homeland as one of the "boat people"—the refugees who left Vietnam by boat after the war ended in 1975. Upon settling in the United States in 1979, she reunited with her childhood sweetheart, Hiep Ho, who had come to the US four years earlier. Six months later, they were married and living in South San Francisco.

Around this time, Xuan decided to change her career path. She studied computer science, and, over the course of her 30-year career in Information Technology, held various positions ranging from Software Engineer to Applications Manager and Quality Assurance Engineer. In 1998, when their two sons were in their teenage years, the family moved

to the Kings Mountain neighborhood in Woodside. Today, son Daniel is a Software Engineer at Google who has two daughters of his own, and son Dylan is a Technical Product Marketing Manager at Salesforce.

Xuan's husband retired from his career as an architect in 2011, and in 2016 she decided to join him. She took early retirement to finally pursue her lifelong passion for art, specifically making mosaics.

## Passion for Mosaics

Xuan's dream has always been to find a hobby that could become a lifetime pursuit. During a visit to Barcelona, Spain in 1998, she was awestruck by Catalan Modernist Antoni Gaudi's use of mosaics in his architecture. This ignited her passion for mosaics.

After working on mosaics as a hobbyist for over two years, she started participating in the Kings Mountain Art Fair in Woodside in 2001. To her surprise, Neil Young, the legendary rock artist, came to her booth and bought her "Four Seasons" table set! "Needless to say, that was a huge encouragement and made me feel that I could call myself an artist," she says.

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Xuan with her piece  
"Fond Memory" - 14"x12."  
Image by JetKat Photo.



Xuan has taken many mosaic classes from well-known national and international mosaic artists to learn different technical skills and styles, developing her own mosaic style along the way. The inspiration for her art is derived from her experiences as a refugee, as well as from her imagination and perception of her external world—from a vision as small as the softness of a woman's hair blowing in the wind to the immense grandeur of the natural landscapes around her. She strives to capture the beauty of the earth, sky, mountains, and waters by using soft colors and curved shapes but also enjoys adding depth and complexity by incorporating rough materials such as stones, slate, ceramics, as well as stained and fused glass. These materials offer a world of inspiration, possibility, and new design challenges.

"My work has evolved from only using ceramics to incorporating a wide range of materials in my mosaics," she says. "I create wall hangings, animals, sculptures, mirrors, water fountains, birdbaths, and even small mosaic pieces such as jewelry." She explores different styles and techniques in her designs, incorporating impressionism, storytelling, still life, and architecture in her mosaics.

The uniqueness of her wall hangings is that most have a three-dimensional look. She uses different thicknesses of textual materials to add design interest. She adds, "Most of my pieces are triggered by materials that give me the 'excitement' of how to use them, after which subjects come to mind naturally!"

Her studio space is a place for her personal time, Xuan says. What she enjoys most is being able to work on mosaics while listening to news, music, and sermons at the same time. "Entering my studio always motivates me in creating," she shares.



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Water Gallop. Materials: stained glass, crushed stones, quartz.



### Swan Mosaic

Her first name, "Xuan," is pronounced "Swan" in English—hence the name of her website, [www.swanmosaic.com](http://www.swanmosaic.com). Each of her pieces has a swan icon as her signature. The swan logo is designed by her husband, Hiep.

To Xuan, the true success of her art is when the emotion she is conveying in her work is seen and felt by others.

### Public Art

The beauty of Kings Mountain fuels Xuan's nature appreciation and inspires her creative mind. She has created works of public art as a gift to the Woodside community. In 2009, Xuan led the community to create five mosaic benches at the Kings Mountain Community Center (also called Kings Mountain Firehouse), the site of the King's Mountain Art Fair that takes place on Labor Day weekend each year. The benches are functional as well as aesthetic, giving fairgoers beautiful places to enjoy and rest during the art fair.

Then in 2011, Xuan organized a community project making a 5' x 9' mural titled "Hiking on Kings Mountain." Kings Mountain residents donated their time and contributed to the fundraising for having donors' names on hand-made ceramic leaves on the mural. And in 2017, she led the creation of a mosaic sign for "The Cookshack" where food and drink are sold during the art fair.

These projects took anywhere from three to 15 days to complete. "These were very fun projects with 30-40 volunteers working together; enhancing the bonding with people in the community," she says.

In addition to Kings Mountains Art Fair, Xuan also participates in the Filoli Art Walk, Saratoga Rotary Art Show, Fine Art in the Park, and Los Altos Arts & Wine Festival. She is a member of The Main Gallery, a co-op art gallery, in Menlo Park.

### Accomplishments in Art

Xuan's artwork has been featured in three mosaic books (2003, 2005, and 2008) and two bilingual (English & Vietnamese) magazines —VietHome and Nhà. Two of her wall hangings, "Nature" and "Thirst," were accepted into the juried Mosaic Arts International Exhibition 2009 at San Diego's Museum of Man and 2014 at The Williams Tower Gallery in Houston.

Xuan's art can be viewed in person at The Main Gallery in Menlo Park and online at [www.swanmosaic.com](http://www.swanmosaic.com).

Santorini II. Materials: stained glass, stone chips, quartz, vitreous glass.



SF Conservatory of Flowers. Materials: Stained glass, aluminum ceramic, glass beads & spaghetti stringers, slate, quartz.



Three Sisters. Materials: China & handmade ceramic, victorian buttons, jewelry, millefiori, glass beads, coral, seashells, fused glass.



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