I can’t believe the year is already three-quarters of the way over! Entries for the Mosaic Arts International 2013 exhibition at the Museum of Glass in Tacoma, Washington, are coming in, and the panel is preparing to jury them. Conference registration starts in only six weeks, and we’re all quivering with anticipation to see what’s in store for us.

While you’re waiting, please enjoy this issue of Grountline. We have another mosaic travel installment from Richard Davis, who regales us with sights from a recent trip to Vietnam, on page 3. Next, Deborah Verfaillie introduces us to the Mosaic Arts Association of Japan. How many of you realized that mosaics were part of the landscape in far eastern Asia?

The 2011 Robin Brett Mosaic Scholarship recipient, Carol Shelkin, files a report on how she used the award to further her mosaic education on page 10. Hopefully, her experience will encourage you to apply for the scholarship next year. Coincidentally, another recipient (Debora Aldo) shares her love and knowledge of pebble mosaics in this issue, while Karen Ami answers the question “To Frame, or Not To Frame” in our “Ask A Pro” column on page 7.

So sit back, relax, and enjoy the read. I think everyone will find something to pique their interest and inspire them.
The two-mile-long mural in Hanoi, Vietnam, which stretches along a very busy and chaotic four-lane road, recently set a Guinness World Records as the world’s longest mosaic. Work on the mural, which began sometime in 2006 or 2007 in commemoration of 1,000 years of Hanoi history, took its many artists and volunteers more than three years to complete. The height of the wall varies, but the average is about nine feet. Although the mural displays no apparent overall style or theme, the mosaics appear unified because most are constructed from locally made ceramic tiles; only the portions made by foreign artists are of different materials.

Many of the mosaic sections celebrate local crafts and important moments in Hanoi’s history. Mosaics at the northernmost end contain the contributions of many non-nationals and reflect a more international outlook; for example, one such area emulates Van Gogh’s painting style. Along this traffic-filled corridor, we see a variety of human figures, plants, and animals, as well as many styles of architecture. Generally, the mosaic wall sections are flat; but occasional embellishments of larger, thicker pieces of fired pottery add texture.

Hanoi’s mosaic mural is difficult to photograph because there is no vantage point that doesn’t place one in danger of being run over, skewered by a bamboo pole laden with goods on their way to market, or bashed by a cage of pigs or ducks! Many of the existing photos are shot at extreme angles because this is as close to the mosaic as one can safely get.

Installing the mosaic must have been difficult in the extreme, especially since the artists would not have been able to step back and check image resolution and perspective; nonetheless, because the indirect method was probably used for much of the work, this would not have been a particularly vexing issue.

For the best vantage points, you can walk on a narrow, five-foot-wide sidewalk. You can also slowly drive along the length, but this is a hazardous undertaking because you must dodge the multitudes of bicycles, motorcycles, cars, and trucks all weaving around your vehicle. Overall, viewing the entire length of the project is similar to watching a slide show without a dissolve between images—one discreet image follows the next. To read more about the Hanoi Mural, visit hanoimural.vn and read the entries under the “Category” menu.

Editor’s Note: This story is an excerpt from Richard’s complete travelogue, which is available on the SAMA website. The story also covers Hue’s Imperial City, the tomb of the Emperor Khai Dinh, An Bang’s City of Ghosts, and mosaic artist Bui Ngoc Mo, whose style is reminiscent of Ferdinand Cheval. Richard’s original photos accompany the travelogue.

Richard Davis is owner of Richard Davis Mosaics in Clinton, Washington, where he creates fine mosaic art and installations. He is co-chair of SAMA’s Tacoma 2013 conference. Two of Richard’s architectural installations are included in the new Mosaic Art Today, published by Schiffer LTD. richarddavismosaics.com
The 1994 AIMC Biennial Conference held in Kamakura, Japan, led to the establishment of the Mosaic Arts Association of Japan (MAAJ) in 1995. MAAJ promotes and supports mosaic art and artists and raises public awareness for the art of mosaic. The group presently has 49 members, primarily from the Tokyo-Yokohama area. MAAJ holds a Mosaic Biennial exhibition and competition; the eighth exhibition took place in 2011. These exhibitions are usually shown within the Tokyo Metropolitan area; later, the best pieces in the show will travel to other venues in Japan.

Most Japanese mosaic artists use natural stone, which they cut with the Japanese-style hammer and hardie. These hammers differ from the Italian style because they have one sharp end and one flat end. Some artists also use imported Italian smalti and Bizzaza vitreous tesserae. A glass tesserae factory operated in Japan from 1957 to 2005. Although the products made there were not as high in quality as imported mosaic glass, most artists used them because they were less expensive than those imported from Italy.

Unexpected materials sometimes show up in Japanese mosaics. Haroshi, an avid skateboarder and artist, creates mosaic sculptures out of recycled skateboard decks. The television show “Morisanchu” commissioned a mosaic made from 10,080 slices of toast and white bread—some slices covered in chocolate—that was a reproduction of the Mona Lisa. Designed by the British artist Laura Hadland, the 30-by-36-foot mosaic was constructed on a piazza in Matera, Italy, in 2011. The same show sponsored a cherry blossom mosaic, also designed by Hadland, made from 10,000 colorfully iced cupcakes baked by Crumbs and Doilies, a London-based bakery.

In Nagato, 120,000 photos of smiling faces from around the world unite in a mosaic of the poet Misuzo Kaneko’s face. The work’s title, “Everyone Is Different, So Everyone Is Wonderful,” is a line from one of Kaneko’s poems. The 104-by-141-foot mosaic, which took 220 people six hours to construct, won the 2010 Guinness World Record for the most photos used in a mosaic.

The city of Seto, Aichi, hosted the 2005 World Exposition, or World’s Fair. Nagoya Mosaic Tile Co. Ltd. provided the specially designed floor tile for 169 mosaic panels that flowed through the Expo. Fifteen hundred people from 31 workshops created the panels. The Expo ran for six months and drew 22 million visitors.

Chigiri-e, a form of paper mosaic, was developed in Japan during the eleventh century. Artists tear small pieces of handmade paper and glue them together to form a picture collage. Since many modern artists use the Chigiri-e technique, paper mosaics were included in the MAAJ 2009 Biennial Conference.

Two of Japan’s best-known mosaic artists are Toyoharu Kii and Kudo Haruya. Each received a BFA and MFA from Tokyo University of the Arts, and each traveled to Italy for graduate work. Toyoharu Kii opened the Mosaic Atelier in 1982. He was an Orsoni Prize finalist in 2007 and an exhibitor in the Ravenna Mosaico 2011 festival. Kudo Haruya, a professor at the Tokyo University of the Arts, teaches mural art, mosaic art, and restoration. Both artists specialize primarily in large architectural and mural-style mosaics.

Deborah Verfaillie lives in Alpine, California, near San Diego, and has been creating mosaic art for about 10 years. Her work consists of wall hangings, outdoor patios, walls, benches, and bancos.

Photo: Toyoharu Kii

Wind Gate, by Toyoharu Kii, 2005. 71”H x 55”W x 30”D. Smalti and marble. Located at the Moriyama Care Center in Tokyo.
Susan Crocenzi admires the work of various artists, such as Laurel True and Niki de St. Phalle, and out-of-the-box creatives such as Salvador Dali and Friedensreich Hundertwasser. All these influences—as well as nature, color, music, and the rhythms of life—are evident in Susan's work.

The artist is also a writer whose imaginative prose echoes the depth of her mosaic creations. In her article, “Mosaic-Making: An Exercise in Telling Time (to Take a Hike),” she writes that in some moments of creating art she is “off in the vastness, small specks of stardust cast across the oceans, the trees, the furthestmost galaxies. ... Those little pieces in the hands of mosaic artists? They are us. The whole piece, made from a thousand pieces? That is us, too.”

A former middle-school English teacher, Susan began making mosaics about seven years ago after attending an art class at a community college. She soon joined an online social network where she viewed copious photos of mosaic art and combed through daily digests for nuggets of artistic wisdom. Before long, she was experimenting with various media and taking classes from established mosaic teachers whose techniques and knowledge she greatly admired.

Susan started with traditional outdoor pieces but quickly turned toward less traditional materials, such as tempered glass, plate glass, and polymer clay. In Susan’s signature style, “polymer clay shapes enhance the overall composition and are often a vehicle for personal expression,” says fellow artist Laurie Mika. “It’s the pure integration of polymer clay with traditional tesserae that I find most gratifying. It’s hard to tell where one medium ends and the next begins. I know from personal experience that this isn’t the easiest thing to do, yet in Susan's capable hands, the variety of tesserae complement one another and add interest to each piece she creates.”

Susan’s latest artwork heralds something new for her: a series. “Seven Secrets is the kick-off piece of my first conceptual collection that will hold together, both thematically and visually,” she says.

What are the seven secrets? Not surprisingly, she’s tight-lipped, but does offer this in accompanying text: “Some [secrets] are monumental, mysterious, and misty. You know they’re out there, frolicking in the cosmic desert with Salvador Dali. Thundering herds of Technicolor rhinos dressed in astronaut gear who spontaneously disappear right in front of your eyes, as if they just passed through an enormous trompe l’oeil wrinkle-in-time movie set.”

As she peers through her current favorite material—repurposed architectural glass—she ponders our vulnerability-loving culture. “Secrets are not always related to repression. Sometimes secrets are about caring for your stories, your inwardness, your deep pool of privacy in such a way as to preserve the potency of it, and the delicacy.” And, yes, she also admits that some secrets come from less desirable sources: “Sometimes you’ve got a fuzzy-headed storm of jumbled-up fear in your back pocket,” she writes.

As Laurie Mika points out, “There is no mistaking Susan’s work as each piece reflects her signature style. She has effortlessly achieved what I try to inspire students in my workshops to do—to find their own voice.”

See more of Susan’s work at scmosaics.com.
Step-by-step, here we go:

1. Gather all your supplies. Refer to package directions for a full supply list and additional details. Allow about 90 minutes without interruptions. Mask off your substrate with painter’s tape to protect it from the grout.

2. To use partial amounts of the two-part epoxy, pour each of the liquids into a jar equipped with a tight-fitting lid. You can then take out as much as you need for each project. I use a large syringe (from the vet’s office) to measure precise amounts. You can use other measuring containers, but be sure the ratio is precisely equal. Mix Part A and Part B thoroughly in your container.

3. Wearing your mask, add four parts of Part C. I used 1/2 oz. of each liquid and 2 oz. of powder for this 10-inch mirror. Mix thoroughly.

4. Quickly spread the grout over your mosaic and into all the joints. It’ll be somewhat thinner than sanded grout. I used my gloved hands, but you can spread it with a grout float or spatula.

5. Fill two buckets of water with the wash packets or a couple ounces of vinegar. Dip your sponge into the treated water and wring it out thoroughly. I keep rags nearby to mop off my gloves and the sponge. Use the sponge to clean excess grout off the mosaic; this step removes most of the grout from the tesserae. Clean the sponge frequently; the epoxy makes it gummy. Let the grout cure for about 20 minutes. Then, working quickly, use the final wash (or clean water with vinegar) to thoroughly clean all the epoxy off the tesserae. The epoxy dries in about 90 minutes.

6. Now add Dazzle, if you choose. (Without Dazzle, you’ll have a super-strong, durable grout that never needs sealing.) My process differs from LATICRETE’s directions, but uses less Dazzle with less waste. Put your mask on again and sprinkle a generous amount of Dazzle Color Powder onto your mosaic. Rub as much as possible into the grout joints. You’ll notice a good bit of Dazzle on the tesserae. Using your sponge and final wash water, remove the excess Dazzle. When your mosaic is mostly clean, switch to a dry rag to buff and polish it.

That’s it—you’re done! Enjoy showing off your mosaic!

Dianne Sonnenberg is a professional mosaic artist and instructor in Austin, Texas. Her sculptural mosaic Ocean(egg)raphy, grouted with SpectraLOCK, won the Best Architectural Mosaic award at Mosaic Arts International 2011. DianneSonnenberg.com
To Frame, or Not To Frame? …THAT Is the Question

BY KAREN AMI

After all those hours spent planning, composing, and creating a work of art, the final presentation is often not given the importance it deserves. Professional presentation shows that the work is ready for display. Framing “houses” your work and protects the vulnerable edges where tesserae can be “dinged” and, as a result, pop off. A proper frame on a two-dimensional mosaic offers a buffer to damage and exposure.

Frames present endless choices—everything from basic do-it-yourself aluminum to seventeenth-century ornate gold baroque. I advocate simple rather than decorative. A frame shouldn’t visually compete with your work; you don’t want the viewer to look at your mosaic and exclaim, “What a nice frame!” As artists, we must make those aesthetic decisions for our work. Generally, collectors respect artists’ framing choices.

Matting a work before it’s framed gives it a visual “breathing space” that enhances a complex, detailed mosaic. With their multitude of elements and materials, colors and textures, fine-art mosaics can be busy. A calm space between the mosaic and the frame gives the work perspective and a clear view of the elements.

Create your work on appropriate materials, such as birch or oak plywood, or lightweight, sustainable materials, such as Wedi or hexalite. Substrates should be thick enough to support the mosaic’s weight without danger of warping. If you use Wedi or hexalite, plan your frame before you create your piece. Remember, too, that Wedi and hexalite generally require that hangers or boltholes be inserted before you begin your work.

With framing considerations come hanging systems. Mosaics are heavier than most other media; what works for a painting may not work well for a mosaic. D-rings, wires, and French cleats are options for weighty pieces. Consulting a professional framer who shows you different framing choices could be a worthwhile investment.

Karen Ami is the founder and executive director of The Chicago Mosaic School, now in its eighth year. She’s also president emeritus of SAMA, an artist and sculptor, a teacher, and mother of three outstanding sons. Karen has been invited to exhibit her sculptural mosaics and give a presentation on American mosaic education at this year’s Prix Picassiette Symposium in Chartres, France. chicagomosaicschool.com, artamiba.com

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Pebble mosaics are one of the oldest known forms of mosaic. The art form originated in Greece more than 4,000 years ago for the purpose of stabilizing floors and making them durable and weather resistant. The first versions used only black and white pebbles. Over time, the mosaics evolved in complexity; the artisans started to use figurative and geometric patterns as well as more colors. During the fourth century, these mosaics reached a pinnacle, as depicted in Lion Hunt, 4th Century B.C. When cubes of stone, or tessellation, became prevalent for mosaic, pebble mosaics went into decline.

Pebble mosaic regained popularity during the Renaissance when it was used to enhance gardens and exterior spaces. It was also used indoors to decorate entire rooms, as seen in the Villa at Isola Bella.

Today, pebble mosaics retain their popularity in Europe and the United States. Maggy Howarth is one of the world's foremost experts on the subject, and her work is remarkable. I had the good fortune to study with Maggy, and I often use her pre-cast slab construction technique to build the work that I create for my clients. Maggy's book, The Complete Pebble Mosaic Handbook, explains the process in detail. Workshops present a great opportunity to practice the basic techniques involved.

**Techniques and Planning**

There are three primary techniques. The first, indirect pre-cast, is best for works that must be flat. The second is the wet-setting method: The chosen area is filled with wet mortar, and then pebbles are embedded. Jeffrey Bale often uses this method to create his works (see next page for an example). The third method is used in climates free of harsh freezes and thaws. The site is filled with dry concrete; pebbles are set into dry mortar, then gently sprayed with water to set the concrete.

To begin planning your pebble mosaic, choose a location. Ideally, there should be no long-term standing water; create a slight decline for runoff. Sketch a design and source your pebbles. Removing stone from public land is frowned upon, so purchase pebbles online or from landscape supply companies. Hire a landscape contractor to assist with ground prep—unless you’re seriously motivated to shovel for days (think muscle and character building). Focus on making the pre-cast slabs (think chill-axing in your studio).

Creating a terrace or patio requires heavy equipment, power equipment, measuring, grading, carpentry skills, and significant
expense. Installations are not solo endeavors, but are certainly do-able with practice and patience. Working on a smaller scale, however, is less physical, less expensive, and, some say, more fun.

Several options work for desktop pebble mosaics. To make pre-cast slabs, use a flat-bottomed container that is 3-4 inches deep, such as a plastic shoebox. Fill it with sand/topping mix (available at hardware stores), and make a few practice runs to get the hang of setting the stones. Increase the size of your mold after you feel comfortable with the process. You can fit multiple molds together for a larger mosaic, or place individual molds at strategic spots in your garden.

Another small-scale option is to incorporate pebbles into panel or framed art pieces; this type of project requires less extensive planning and fewer materials by far. My latest obsession is mixing pebbles with cut stone and Blenko glass. I take a piece of insulation foam and carve the shape I want with a sharp knife. I sand the surface, wrap it in fiberglass mesh, cover the surface with thinset or cement slurry, and let it dry for 24 hours. I then start to play by adhering pieces to my substrate with thinset.

As you can see, there’s a big difference between working large and working small. If you have just a little time or you’re new to mosaics, keep the project small. But if you’re a professional or long-term planner, a pebble pathway might be just what you’re after.

Debora Aldo has been making mosaics since 1997, creating commissions for clients from coast to coast. A Connecticut certified teaching artist, she travels internationally, teaching mosaic enthusiasts. pietreduredesign.com

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t was my first trip to Italy, just a few weeks after the SAMA conference in Kentucky. I was on my way to Luciana Notturni’s Studio Arte del Mosaico in Ravenna, where I was enrolled in a workshop titled “The Traditional Techniques of Mosaic.” I was so excited about studying the ancient methods that I hardly slept the night before.

First, Luciana’s assistant Anna introduced me to my new addiction—Italian coffee served in a shot glass. Then down to business: We learned how smalti is made, handled the tools used in ancient times, looked at samples of naturally colored marble, and ogled the gold-leaf smalti.

I had brought my wheeled nippers into class, but Luciana told me that the hammer and hardie would be my new best friends. I half-heartedly put my nippers away, but resolved to develop my skills in the ancient techniques and then practice enough to pass them on to my students.

We would be creating two mosaics. Luciana had us painstakingly trace each tessera from a photograph of an ancient mosaic, a valuable lesson for me. Then, to my surprise, we flipped our work over and repeated the tracing. As we did so, our pattern was transferred onto a bed of lime, which reminded me of white icing.

I worked with marble for the first time; cutting little cubes for hours became very rhythmic and soothing. As Luciana chatted with us, she seemed to become one with her marble and tools; not looking down once, she cut with meticulous strokes. As the week progressed, I found the hammer and hardie to be respectable friends. I even permitted myself several private inner smiles over my intermittent successes with the ancient method of cutting marble. I almost forgot about my wheeled nippers.

I’ve come to love Ravenna. I felt the little city’s rhythm and discovered a connection between the people who make the art now and those who made it hundreds of years ago. I didn’t expect this week to be a reminder that art is my therapy and that making art improves my emotional outlook.

Shortly after I arrived home, I was invited to show my work in Udine, Italy, along with other international mosaic artists who are members of Contemporary Mosaic Art (CMA), an online mosaic forum created by Pam Givens. The exhibition is running at the Claudiano Art Exhibition Gallery near Venice, through October 21, 2012.

To say that I’m grateful to be a recipient of the Robin Brett Mosaic Scholarship is an understatement. This award afforded me the opportunity to learn, to grow, and to be a better teacher.
VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Crystal Thomas

Think you don’t have any way to contribute to SAMA throughout the year? You might want to rethink that notion. When she answered a call for help in an issue of *Andamento*, Crystal Thomas combined her love of mosaics and technical editing into one neat package.

Crystal, a lead technical editor for a small networking training company, began working as an editor and writer in the Seattle area in 1996. She started making mosaics in 1998, but didn’t become serious about mosaic art until 2006. When Crystal began teaching mosaics in 2009, she used her writing skills to develop tutorials that describe her particular mosaic style.

In December 2009, Crystal answered then-*Groutline* editor Rhonda Heisler’s call for help with editing and general writing duties. After submitting samples of her work, Crystal started editing SAMA’s conference publications (such as exhibit catalogs and programs), but the majority of her new duties involved working with *Groutline* copy.

“Crystal has been an invaluable set of eyes to help with the SAMA side of *Groutline* editing,” says SAMA Board President Shug Jones. “I can always count on her to catch things I might miss and make thoughtfully suggested edits to text. Not to mention that she is always a delight to work with.” Crystal is quick to credit the team at 2B Custom Publishing for their great work, which makes her contribution easy.

Thanks, Crystal, for all that you’ve done and continue to do to assist SAMA with behind-the-scenes duties that help keep the wheels turning. Our volunteers are invaluable to the organization and we could not get along without you!

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