



The 2018 Boston Mosaic Marathon

by Cynthia Fisher, Mosaic Marathon Co-Coordinator

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Founded in 1999, the Society of American Mosaic Artists (SAMA) is a vibrant and ever-expanding group of more than 900 members, including mosaic artists at all levels, mosaic aficionados, collectors, materials suppliers, and art educators. SAMA has put renewed emphasis on strengthening ties with other mosaic organizations around the globe to pursue common goals and develop new programs that are relevant to its diverse membership.

In addition to workshops, presentations, and mosaic art tours during the annual SAMA conferences, the Mosaic Marathon brings members together for a unique opportunity to create a mosaic in a cooperative networking experience. A large mosaic panel, *WATER*, was recently created during the 2018 Mosaic Marathon in Boston, Massachusetts, and now hangs on the wall at the Harbor Islands Pavilion located at 191 West Atlantic Avenue on the Rose Kennedy Greenway in Boston.



Members laying tesserae on the Great Blue Heron panel

Finding Leaders and Sponsors

It had been so exciting to hear the announcement that the 2018 American Mosaic Summit was to take place in Boston, something that many of us New Englanders had been hoping would happen for years. When Deb Aldo, co-chair and good friend, asked if I would be willing to spearhead the marathon, I jumped at the opportunity with one stipulation—that we create it using the indirect method, which was a golden opportunity to spread the word on my beloved approach to mosaic.

Next up was to find a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization willing to work with us and identify a location for the mosaic to reside. Our theme was water resources, an important issue for our city, which is situated on a natural harbor and estuary of Massachusetts Bay. I created a design for three panels, each 3 feet wide by 5 feet high, hung vertically.

Planning the Design

A watercolor sketch of the design was created to accompany the initial inquiries sent to various water-focused organizations. My original drawing is quite similar to the final mosaic. It included a map and a list of recreational uses of water resources on the left, a mandala with fish swimming around it in the center, and a great blue heron taking flight in the right panel. I chose the quotation, “If there is magic on this planet, it is contained in water” by Loren Eiseley, an American anthropologist, philosopher, and natural science writer, since it broadens the water theme from being science-driven to include a lyrical approach.

Boston Harbor Now, whose mission is “working to reestablish Boston as one of the world’s truly great coastal cities,” was enthusiastic in its acceptance of our offer. We had meetings and lots of e-mail back and forth to iron out the details. I was both relieved and thrilled when this important part of the process was accomplished.

Deb Aldo took the lead in the mandala, since that is her area of expertise. A team of local SAMA volunteers committed to the marathon, and I am grateful for all their efforts. Thank you to Christine Kenneally, Carol Cataldo, Jess Regelson, Cecilia Kremer, Suzanne Owayda, Beth Klingher, Pam Stratton, Nikki Sullivan, Gwen Basilica, and others.



The completed mural

We broke from SAMA marathon tradition by adding new materials to the beautiful Mexican smalti. These included one-inch pâte de verre tile, vitreous glass, and stained glass. Deb also incorporated a myriad of pebbles, shells, dalle de verre, Litovi, and Mexican smalti for the mandala section. Another task was making the sketches full size. Finally, as the marathon approached, we started the laying process in my studio to give a sense of what materials were to be used where.

Installing the Mosaic

Once on site at the Westin Boston Waterfront Hotel, the conference received the unexpected zinger of a blizzard on day one, which gave eager member volunteers an early start. The mosaic was assembled by laying materials facedown on sticky mesh, as per the indirect method. Volunteers could choose which type of material they wanted to work with, and it was a great learning experience for newbies. When finished, the mosaics on the sticky mesh were flipped over, right side up, and attached to the panels with thinset mortar, then grouted with three shades of gray and black. The procedure was explained for those unfamiliar with using a notched trowel to spread the mortar, and as one member commented, "Being present was like attending a workshop!"

Much planning went into the installation, since the National Park Service did not want any hanging hardware to go into the beautiful, recently refinished mahogany woodwork. I designed a cleat system with a one-inch aluminum lip to hold the mosaics onto the wall. The installation went smoothly thanks to the assistance of my builder husband Marcus Fisher and Deb Aldo.

We also want to offer a huge thank-you to those who provided the materials needed to complete the project. The 2018 SAMA Mosaic Marathon was co-sponsored by Kim Wozniak of Wit's End Mosaic and Smalti.com (Mexican smalti, aluminum frames); LATICRETE International (thinset mortar, grout); an anonymous donor (stained glass, pâte de verre, vitreous glass); and Eno's Design Center (WEDI backer board).

GLA

Visit www.americanmosaics.org for more information on the Society of American Mosaic Artists, a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating, inspiring, and promoting excellence in the mosaic arts.



Members working to ensure that andamento, the direction created by placement of the tesserae, flowed between the panels

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