

Michelle Sider's Art

Exploring Themes of Identity, Place, Spirituality, and Light

by Shawn Newton

Often described as having an ethereal and dramatic quality, Michelle Sider's works are characterized by her use of bold, imaginative colors and a sense of movement and flow.

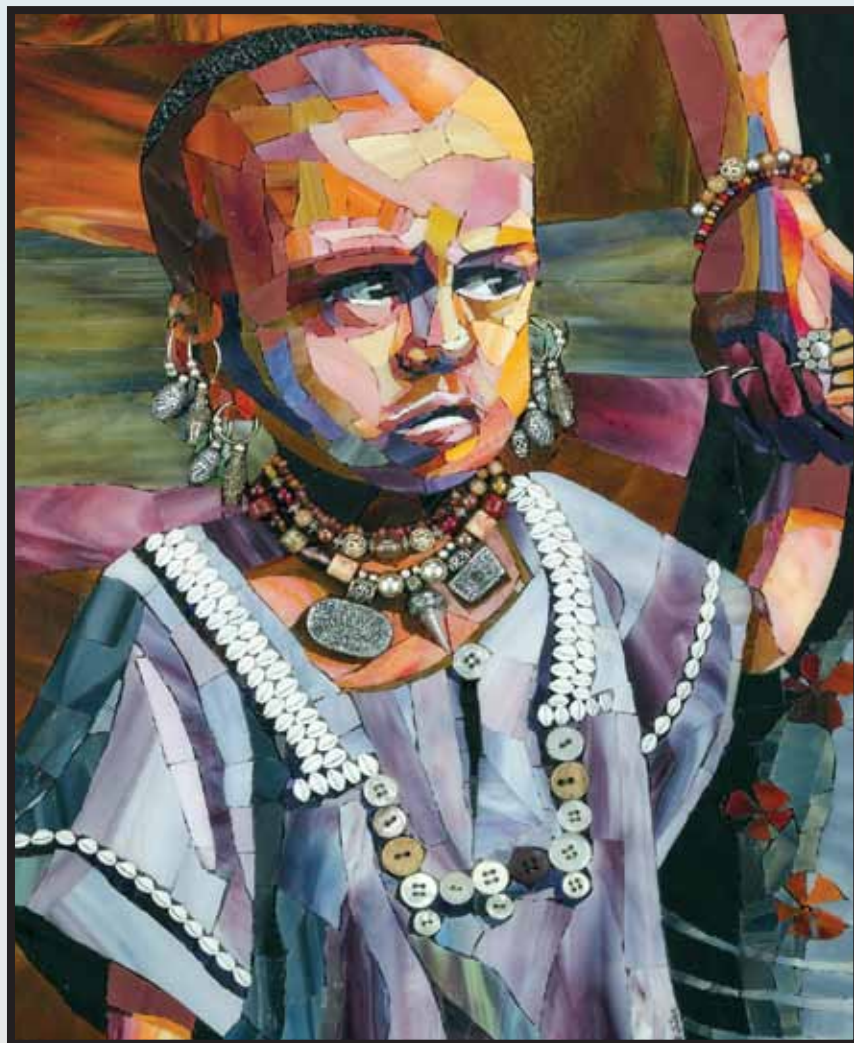
Power Through Art to Heal the Soul

A pivotal point in Michelle's life journey occurred when she volunteered as a young student in the waiting room of a children's hospital, where her assignment was to make the kids feel better. This, however, was a cancer ward, and she recalls the stillness of the room, which was filled with an awful tension.

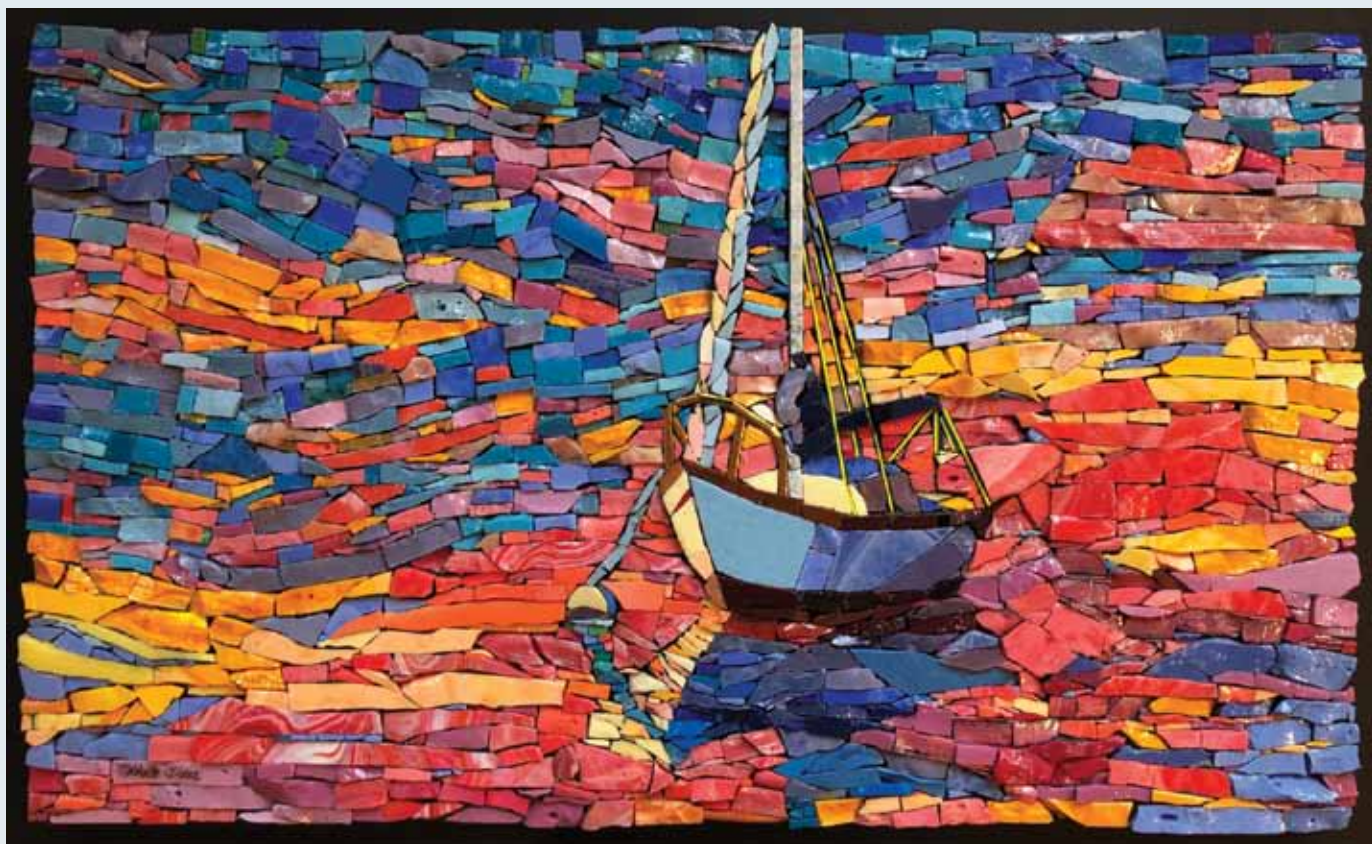
After arranging plenty of extra art supplies to encourage participation, Michelle just began to draw. Slowly and quietly, the children began to approach and choose their materials, interpreting their conditions and feelings on paper. It was then that Michelle decided to add a minor in psychology to her fine arts degree, eventually obtaining a doctorate in clinical psychology. The field of art therapy had not quite gained the momentum and success it now enjoys, but she knew it to be a vehicle for success.

Michelle worked within the psychology community for approximately eight years, raised her children, and became the high school art teacher called "Doc" by her students. She successfully used life themes to drive the lessons, including sessions on technique to facilitate artistic progress, and they loved it.

Three years ago, Michelle began a series of mosaic artistic journeys, *Transparencies and Reflections*, that illustrate her love of light and how it dances on the surfaces of the various objects she portrays. *Sense of Self* answered the ubiquitous questions, "Where do I come from and what are barriers that I have broken through to become myself?" This introspection birthed a modern *Queen Esther*, the biblical Jewish queen who was able to thwart the genocide of the Hebrew nation by using her intelligence, status, and beauty to devise a plan to persuade the Persian king to spare her people. Michelle portrayed her with a knowing stare, sumptuous figure, a globe in her hand, and hiking boots to facilitate a quick escape! It seemed a natural progression that would lead to her next series.



Michelle Sider, I Am Yemenite #3, stained glass, conch shells, handmade silver jewelry, buttons, copper, metal, and beads, 18" x 14", 2020. Fear, starvation, poor health, sadness, and weariness were constant companions for Jewish Yemenite children, close to 60 percent of whom did not survive. Seeking protection from God and mystical forces, they developed traditions and customs, including styles of clothing and jewelry thought to have magical powers to protect themselves and their families. To ward off evil, this little girl wears charms, beads, and an amulet, and is laden with jewelry inscribed with prayers. The jangling noises they create are designed to invoke God's blessings and keep evil at bay. Michelle personally crafted the jewelry after much research. Photo by Eric Law.



Michelle Sider, Sunset Sailboat, Italian smalti, marble, and iridized glass, 16" x 24", 2019. Photo by the artist.

I Am Yemenite

Between June 1949 and September 1950, an amazing refugee evacuation took place. Operation Magic Carpet, also known as On the Wings of Eagles, was a covert operation sponsored by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the Jewish Agency, and the Israeli government. Close to 50,000 nomadic Yemenite Jews, isolated for generations, gathered at the capital of Yemen, after traveling on foot over treacherous mountains and deserts, where they faced robbery, starvation, disease, and wild animals. There, they boarded planes provided by Alaskan Airlines and Near East Air to be flown to Israel.

Since 2019, Michelle has spent time researching written material and interviewing historians, professors, and residents who may still be alive, with the hope of telling their personal histories and honoring their unique culture through a series of mosaic portraits—eventually a dozen or more—presenting them in a museum exhibit accompanied by a written study.



*Michelle Sider, Steam, Italian smalti, gold smalti, and stained glass, 14" x 18", 2020.
Photo by Eric Law.*

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Michelle Sider, After Hours, stained glass and crystal, 13" x 13", 2019. The selection of material for the ice cubes in this piece was becoming an increasingly annoying task. After pondering her dilemma for days, a worker pounding a wall in her home settled the matter. While opening a kitchen cabinet door, a lovely, hand cut wine glass lost its precarious balance and crashed to the floor. Michelle didn't miss a beat. She had found her ice cubes. Photo by the artist.

Combining Materials and Technique

Michelle begins every mosaic by gathering information while speaking to her clients about their expectations and hopes for the project, then taking photos or sketching the scene on-site. A black-and-white illustration develops into a colored-pencil sketch, which serves as a guide for a full-scale acrylic or oil painting, upon which she places carefully selected glass and metals. Each of her mosaics, which themselves take 100-plus hours to complete, hides a complete painting underneath. "People have asked me if I am sad to cover over the paintings and if I want to preserve them with prints," Michelle admitted. "The answer is no. I am able to let go of the painting, because I am excited to see the piece turn into a dazzling, light-filled, reflective, and luminescent glass mosaic."

Her enthusiasm for this art form can be detected in her descriptions of her past and current work as well as her anticipation of future personal explorations. "Surrounding yourself with beauty, a sense of place and, in particular, reminders of places that you hold dear in your heart can help you to have a positive and grateful view. I think that is very healthy for the mind, body, and soul." **GA**

Michelle Sider works out of her Huntington Woods, Michigan, studio and is a member of SAMA and the Mosaic Artists of Michigan, among other professional groups. Visit www.michellesstudio.com to discover more about the artist and her work.

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.

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