



In Members' Own Words

by Gwyn Kaitis

In response to a blog spot on the Society of American Mosaic Artists (SAMA) website, members began discussing why they became SAMA members and what they value in the organization.

"I feel like now I can stand a little taller as an artist," said new member **Brandi Fletcher** of Ojai, California. She notes that the networking and building of relationships with other mosaic artists is instrumental in helping her to grow as a relatively new artist.

Carole Choucair Oueijan thought she was the only artist who worked with mosaic as a fine art medium until she found SAMA. Trained at the Institut National des Beaux Arts in Lebanon, Carole moved to California 23 years ago. A member since 2003, Carole says that she has met many artists who inspire her and other artists who are seeking to prove that mosaic is indeed a fine medium in visual art that needs to be recognized. She is very encouraged to see that many amazing mosaic artists' work is being included in more museums and galleries than ever before. Carole says, "I encourage every artist to attend SAMA's events and to volunteer as much as you can. It will nourish your mind and give you a boost all year, inspiring you with fun and pushing you to create wonderful art!"

Cody Abbott of Chicago, Illinois, worked as a gallery manager when a friend who is the operations manager for SAMA persuaded him to assist with a SAMA conference being held in Chicago in 2007. Cody remembers walking into the Mosaic Arts International Exhibition. "Inside the gallery, I was amazed at what mosaics could be and what they meant to people. As the interloper that night, I mixed with the crowd, admired the work, and listened to the passionate discussions happening about the art in the exhibit." Cody soon officially joined SAMA as a member and has been an avid volunteer for the organization since attending that first conference.

"Through the workshops, presentation, and organized critiques that SAMA offers," says **Joan Schwartz** of Huntington Woods, Michigan, "I've been able to view other artists' work and hear how they found their 'voice.' This exposure to a wide range of mosaic styles and techniques has aided me greatly in my own work. SAMA

has been an important resource I can draw on to help me create a style unique to me and to develop a cohesive body of work that is recognizable to others." She mentions that members' willingness to share techniques and tips makes SAMA one of the most valuable tools in her mosaic workshop, while every conference adds another layer to an evolving process that is integral to her artistic growth.

Photography by Tim Stassines



Artist Yulia Hanansen teaching glass layering techniques at the 2013 conference.



Jaqueline Iskander, Carole Choucair Oueijan, and Jaqueline Sowers catch up at the Mosaic Arts International Artists' Reception.

Canadian member, **Margo Anton**, reported that mosaic art is not a particularly well-known medium in her country. Opportunities for classes were not available at the advanced level she required. As Margo states, "SAMA opens many doors of opportunity for the passionate and interested artist." She has found that the SAMA conference refuels her creative spirit every year.

Another member, **Jaqueline Sowers** of Midlothian, Virginia, shared: "Believe it or not, when I say I am a mosaicist there are still people who have no idea what a mosaic is and ask what they are. SAMA wants to make sure that such questions become a thing of the past. Promoting the art of mosaic, be it classical or modern, and those who create these works, that's what SAMA does." Jaqueline doesn't believe she has ever been part of any group as dedicated or as generous as SAMA. "We support each other, encourage each other, and share our passion for the art of mosaic. SAMA members are a family."

Jenny Perry of Frederick, Oklahoma, loves the annual conferences so much that she says it is like "coming home," while **Nikki Sullivan** of Moosup, Connecticut, said she returns home from each conference with so much inspiration and material that she can't wait to get into her studio. One of Nikki's favorite aspects of the conference is Mosaic Arts International, a juried show sponsored each year by SAMA in various parts of the country. The next Mosaic Arts International will take place at the Williams Tower Gallery in Houston, Texas, April 24–May 30, 2014. Also in Houston, more than 500 international artists and arts enthusiasts are expected to attend the American Mosaic Summit, April 30–May 4, 2014. **GA**

The Society of American Mosaic Artists, a nonprofit organization of over 1,200 members, is dedicated to educating, inspiring, and promoting excellence in mosaic arts. SAMA, the largest mosaic arts organization in the world, seeks to foster and sustain a mosaic community where members are encouraged to explore the full potential of the art form. More information about the group can be found at www.americanmosaics.org.

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