



SAMA's Mosaic Legacy in *San Diego*

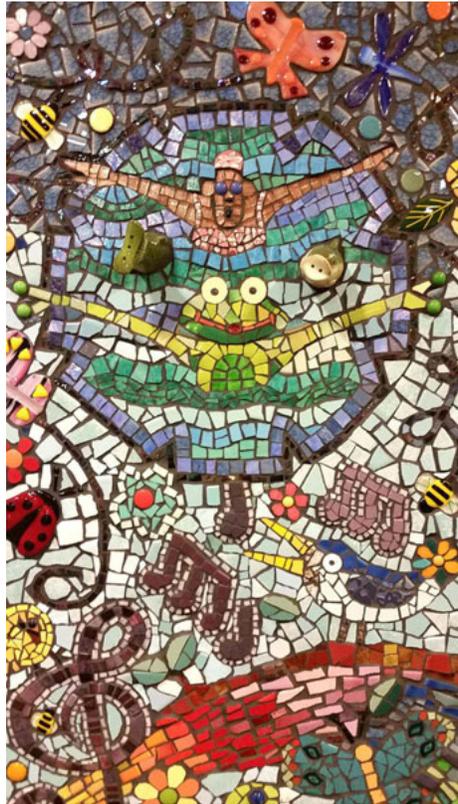
By Co-Leaders, Dawn Mendelson and Jolino Beserra

Dawn Mendelson, Co-Leader

My favorite aspect of creating art is building community. I love working with both new and experienced artists, pulling together to create something beautiful. In fact, I work on a daily basis with a team of incredible instructors and participant artists at the nonprofit arts program, Piece by Piece. There, we create art, and we also learn about teamwork and collaboration. I thrive on projects that involve a crowd.

I was very excited to partner with Jolino Beserra on this year's SAMA Mosaic Marathon. I feel we are kindred souls in our enthusiasm for recycled china. But, we also share a love for community and have worked together a number of times with a group of amazing Los Angeles-based artists affectionately called the "Mosaic Mafia." This circle of brilliant souls often give their time to make art happen, wherever needed. They were first to volunteer to support us in this project, and—along with the help of the dynamic duo, Kim Emerson and Dennis Reiter—truly helped make it the wonderful success it was.

Our initial trip to meet the supportive staff and talented artists of this year's recipient, St. Madeleine Sophie's Center (SMSC) in El Cajon, was such a delight. SMSC's work program offers a variety of opportunities to adults with developmental disabilities—everything from a swimming program to cooking to gardening to a wonderful art program. It was quickly agreed upon that their artists



Top: Sign Panel for the three-part entryway mosaic. Middle: Detail of Swim Panel, installed on right side of doorway. Bottom: Grouting of panel by SAMA members during conference in San Diego.

would not only participate in our Mosaic Marathon, but would also collaborate on fabricating pieces for the proposed mural.

Our design focused on SMSC programs in a colorful and inspiring mural that surrounded the building entrance. This is the door everyone enters, and we wanted to help make that portal to their center joyful. Because both Jolino and I specialize in pique-assiette mosaic, we decided to use a variety of materials including broken plates, 3D figurines, ceramic tile, and the Mexican smalti generously donated by Wit's End Mosaic. For me, the excitement is often in choosing the materials and envisioning how to interpret their textures and colors into a design.

With community art, both the design and those creating it undergo changes

"With community art, both the design and those creating it, undergo changes that enhance the experience."

-Dawn Mendelson

that enhance the experience. Often, the initial vision is organically developed through the process. We had some great ideas contributed by SAMA artists. Some

of my favorites were when a certain patterned plate made a great swimsuit, and how Jolino added the windows to the yellow tile we turned into school buses. Ideas were

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exchanged as people new to mosaic sat next to experienced artists and had a conversation about what is the best nipper or how to cut a plate. Seeing the wonderful SMSC art instructor, Erin Perschbacher, working with the artists from the Center at the tables alongside SAMA artists, was inspiring. Their fused glass pieces and mosaic flowers were beautiful. This collection of materials and the imagination of the many SAMA artists who contributed, resulted in a vibrant and lovely piece.



Paint Panel from right side of doorway. Materials: Mexican smalti, repurposed china, and fused glass elements created by SMSC artists. Scene: Icons depicting SMSC programs, including art, cooking, vineyard, and gardening.

The most valuable experience in both leading and participating in the Mosaic Marathon at SAMA is the creating of community, the exchange of ideas and techniques, the feeling of support and camaraderie. There is collaboration and teamwork, there are new friendships forged, and old ones rekindled. There is laughter and chatter, deep discussions, and moments of intense concentration and quiet. And there is giving back. As artists, two of our most valuable assets are our creativity and our passion. Sharing this with others, who may not have that experience or who could use the support, is incredibly important. I love that the mission of the SAMA Mosaic Marathon is to not only leave a legacy of our art form in the city to which we've come, but also to contribute to that local community in a way that lifts people's spirits and reminds them of the power of art.

Jolino Beserra

Co-Leader

For me, the stars were aligned when Dawn Mendelson and I were asked to design and direct the creation of this year's Mosaic Marathon. Dawn

and I love and respect each other's talent and spirit so, except for the math part, it was fun and easy, from doodling ideas to coloring final sketches in her dining room.

Ironically, I was introduced to Dawn, my beloved Mosaic Mafia, and a renewed involvement in community-based projects because of a headline. It was a fortunate day, indeed, when the *LA Times* ran an article called *Piece By Piece*, describing the mosaics in my own home. Confusion led to a call, laughs, and a tour. I was introduced to *Piece By Piece*, the art nonprofit, and never looked back.

I thought bringing all the talent SAMA has to offer into one small space for three days could be a dream project or a nightmare, so how could I not say yes? Dawn and I both love pique-assiette mosaics so it was fun to have this opportunity to collaborate on a design that blended tile, objects, marbles, and china with the beautiful colors found in Mexican Smalti, a new



Top: Installing the sign. Left to right: Jolino Beserra, maintenance assistant from SMSC, and Dennis Reiter. Above: Fused glass tiles prepared by SMSC artists were embedded in the **Paint Panel**.



Erin Perschbacher (left), Jolino Beserra, and Dawn Mendelson with artists from the SMSC art program.

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material for me. Dawn and I took a road trip to San Diego to get a tour of the grounds of this year's recipient, St. Madeleine's Sophie Center, offering services and classes for adults with developmental disabilities. I was very impressed by the variety of programs they offered, and after observing the glass fusing class, we thought it would be terrific if the students worked with us. They eventually created glass hearts to represent their 50th anniversary, as well as glass bugs and accent mosaic flowers. The recipients aren't usually involved in the creation of the marathon mosaic, so it was a unique opportunity for everyone. Four students even dropped in during the conference with instructor Erin Perschbacher, to be part of the mosaic production.

After we decided the mosaic would best be located at the entry, we worked on designs representing some of their programs for the sides of the entry topped by a signage mosaic above the door. Everyone had different talents, experiences, and styles, so we all learned from each other. Letting a mosaic develop organically is part of the magic of a community project and its success.

Practicing my art in a family of artists for over 16 years, has allowed my personal evolution and sense of self as a mosaic artist to grow in leaps and bounds, and I feel that it all culminated in these moments at conference. A big, crazy, hilarious, exhausting, rewarding, enriching, and slightly drunk (after-hours only, of course) whirlwind of a ride called the Mosaic Marathon—with everything that implies. The big cherry on the sundae: Best In Situ Award for my three and a half years of mostly isolated work on the Benito Juarez Park Alebrijes sculptures. Dawn Mendelson winning Best Community Mosaic Project for *Broadway's Blooming!* I swear, no super pac influenced the judges!

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-Jolino Beserra

I'm grateful and thrilled to have been part of this year's SAMA conference and also to have been a part of the Mosaic Marathon mural's contribution to a great organization. This was definitely a dream fulfilled.

The 2016 SAMA Mosaic Marathon is co-sponsored by Laticrete and Smalti.com & Wits End Mosaic.

All Photos by Dawn Mendelson except where noted.



Top: Co-Leaders Dawn Mendelson (left) and Jolino Beserra (right) flank SMSC art instructor, Erin Perschbacher, in front of completed installation. Photo: Dennis Reiter. Above: SAMA members busily assemble mosaic pieces during conference in San Diego.

California native, **Jolino Beserra**, graduated with a B.A. in illustration in 1982 from The Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, and entered the advertising world focusing on the entertainment industry and forming Byrd/Beserra Studios in 1985 with his partner, celebrated poster designer and illustrator, David Edward Byrd. <http://jolinoarchitecturalmosaics.com/>

Southern California artist, **Dawn Mendelson**, began her journey into mosaics after receiving her masters degree in 1998. She has led many large and small community projects, from fine art to murals, and is the Program Director of Piece by Piece, a nonprofit organization that brings mosaic art to under-served neighborhoods in Skid Row and South Central Los Angeles.

<http://dawnmendelson.com/>