

Now Showing in Montclair:

# Public Art!



**PUBLIC** The Montclair Arts Council advocates that public art be included with new construction projects whenever possible. Unveiled in January, the mosaics at the Crescent Deck, above, by Montclair artist Anne Oshman, represent the first major achievement of the arts council. Right, Oshman at work in her studio.



## The Montclair Arts Council unveils its first project, the Crescent Deck mosaic

BY MICHAEL LASER  
Photos by Ted Axelrod

In a town where your neighbor is as likely to be a working artist as a lawyer or an accountant, it's not surprising that even a parking deck serves as a canvas for public art.

Since January, Montclairites have been enjoying "A Classic Ensemble," 310-square-feet of mosaic art at the recently opened Crescent Deck – the first project organized by the new Montclair Arts Council.

The mosaic's 14-foot-wide central panel features vintage cars from the 1920s, 40s, 50s and 60s. Artist Anne Oshman explains how she arrived at her concept: "Montclair is such an old-time, homey town. It seemed perfect, thematically, to put old cars on the front of the parking deck."

To create the mosaic, Oshman, a resident of Montclair, blew up each panel's design to its actual size and laid it on a table in her studio. After taping the pieces in place, she glued them into a stainless steel pan, one pan per panel. Once the glue dried, she grouted them – "like bathroom tile," as she puts it – and sealed them.

For the panels directing drivers to South Park Street and South Fullerton Avenue, and for the smaller, vertical panels flanking the main three, Oshman used stained glass, which she cut from sheets into half-inch square pieces or smaller. "When the light hits it, it's gorgeous," she says. "The tile is more subtle, but the glass really jumps out. It's vibrant."

The Montclair Parking Authority asked the arts council to solicit and select a design, and paid the \$50,000 cost of the mosaic with parking meter income.

But what, exactly, is the Montclair Arts Council and where did it come from?

In 2001, after surveying local artists and others, a committee of volunteers worked with the township to produce an ambitious, exhaustive Arts Plan for Montclair. The 89-page plan laid out detailed goals and strategies; out of this grew the new Montclair Arts Council, or MAC. With startup funding supplied by the township (independent fundraising will start soon), the MAC promises to "promote and support Montclair as a ▶





vibrant center for the arts and culture."

"Montclair has been an arts community for 150 years, since George Inness lived here," says MAC Chair, Phoebe Pollinger, who also serves as president of Studio Montclair, a non-profit organization that brings the work of visual artists to the community's attention. "The population is involved in so many aspects of the arts: visual artists, performers, dancers, writers, behind the cameras, in front of the camera. There's an amazing diversity of talent here. And

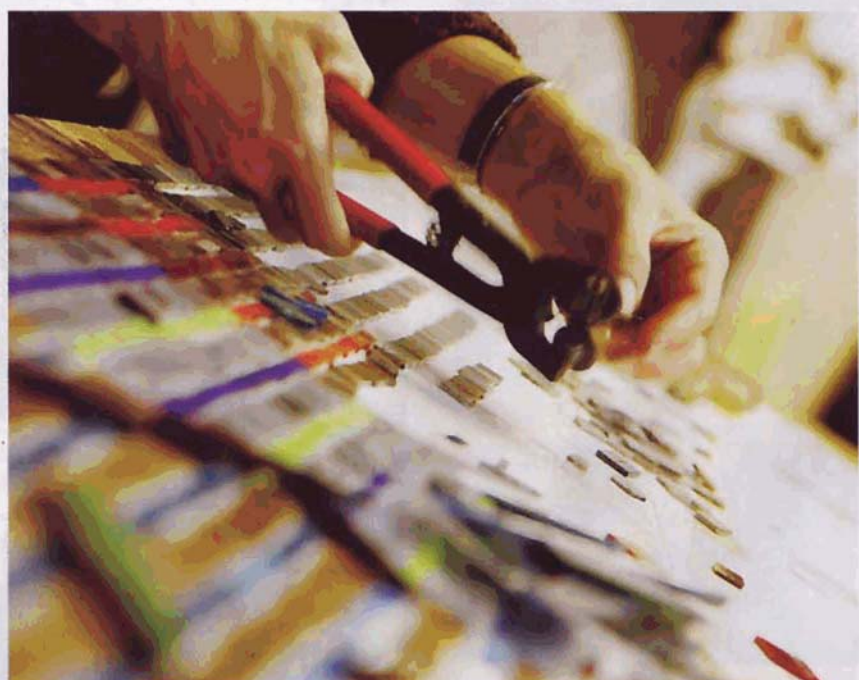
this pool of talent needs to have an organization dedicated to helping us be all we can be."

One of the art council's major goals is to establish Montclair as an "arts destination," for the benefit of the township as a whole. "The arts are an incredible economic driver," says Pollinger. "People who come to Montclair to savor the arts leave behind money that sustains our community. In New Jersey, for every dollar that is invested in the arts, 1.4 dollars is returned in revenue."

Over the coming years, the MAC

may undertake projects as ambitious as creating an arts center, comparable to the ones in Summit and Rahway. According to Pollinger, "We have to be enormously creative, and we have to be as compelling or more compelling than developers in making our proposals to the town. It is part of the 2001 Arts Plan, and we feel it would be enormously beneficial to the community."

The MAC's precise agenda will be determined by Executive Director Jim Peskin, who was hired in January, in consultation with the Board, which



**THE MAKING OF A MURAL** Members of the Montclair Arts Council solicited and selected Anne Oshman's concept for a tiled mosaic to adorn the recently opened parking deck in The Crescent lot. Above, Oshman painstakingly assembles one of the panels.



**GIVING DIRECTION** Public art can be pretty as well as practical as evidenced at top by a panel that orients motorists. The MAC's first Executive Director, Jim Peskin, above, was formerly the Managing Director of the Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey in Madison and was a Board Member of ArtsMaplewood.

includes representatives from theater, music, drama, the visual arts, dance and writing, as well as retailers and others with an interest in promoting the arts in Montclair.

Local artists appreciate the MAC's efforts to create more opportunities for public art, and to secure more generous commissions than in the past.

For Anne Oshman, the Crescent Deck project has made a difference

both in her career and in the art she makes. "It opens up a whole new world of possibilities. You can think larger. And it was a great step to be able to have this," she says. "People want to see what you've done before they'll give you more public art commissions."

What else will the Montclair Arts Council accomplish over the next few years? For local artists – and the rest of us – it's exciting to dream. ■

## THE PLAN AHEAD

The 2001 Arts Plan included a multitude of ideas for doing more with Montclair's artistic resources – everything from creating a "percent-for-arts" on all new construction to establishing a townwide arts festival. The MAC's Board has drawn from these ideas in planning its agenda. Long-term goals are still under discussion, but a few projects are already under way:

- The new Siena complex, at the corner of Church and South Park streets, will feature a pair of 40-square-foot murals over its main entrance. (The MAC issued the Request for Proposals and selected the artist, Cadence Giersbach.) According to MAC Vice Chair Rhoda Kriesel, "The public art program will be a strong, ongoing one, with any new construction projects in Montclair," including the recently built Orange Road Deck and in the Bay Street area.

- By April, the MAC plans to distribute a Montclair Arts Calendar.

- A registry, still in the planning stage, will list local artists of all kinds. Kriesel expects that the registry will show samples of each artist's work and provide links to their Web sites.

*To view the Arts Plan in its entirety, go to the township's Web site, [www.townmontclair.nj.us](http://www.townmontclair.nj.us), and click on "Arts & Cultural Development."*