

A blend of the old and the new

Depicting
contemporary
culture in an
ancient art form

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"Get close, then get closer," are the words that Montclair artist Anne Oshman uses to describe her inspiration and approach to the creation of the large-scale mosaics she has been making for the last few years. As an artist, she is fully absorbed in the details.

And those details can be seen "up close" in the latest exhibition of her work, "Body Language," on view through Sept. 10 in the Brodsky Gallery at the Chauncey Conference Center on the grounds of the Educational Testing Service in Princeton Center.

"People tend to look at the whole rather than the specific. But the details are generally overlooked," explained mosaic artist Oshman. "That's the area that I focus on in my artwork."

Oshman's most recent exhibition consists of pieces in which she continues to explore her ability to define the relationships of the figures to their interests and their environments. Her compositions consist primarily of cropped figures with a focus on the positions of the figures and their surroundings. These mosaics are portraits of a sort and though the figures are anonymous, they express a great deal about the relationships of the people within the mosaic as well as reveal the artist's unique point of view.

All of my work — with the exception of one piece — is contemporary," the artist pointed out. "The figures are anonymous and are involved in situations that people relate to every day. My focus is to pick up on the detail."

Oshman painstakingly chooses her subjects from the vast array of images that barrage people in contemporary life. Some come from her own photographs; others are assimilated from the daily sources such as newspaper or magazine advertisements.

"I go through hundreds of photos looking for something that strikes my interest," Oshman went on to explain. "Then I crop the photo and zoom it down to the part that tells a story — such as a figure reading a book or playing basketball. My work generally depicts the relationship of my subject to his environment."

Although mosaic is often used as a major decorative attribute of interior architecture, it also docu-



Courtesy of the artist

MOSAIC ART: "Hanging Out," pictured above, and "Voyeur," at left, are part of "Body Language," an exhibition of mosaic art by Montclair artist Anne Oshman, on view through Sept. 10, at the Brodsky Gallery in Princeton.

ments the culture that produced it. Oshman's mosaics explore 21st-century preoccupations such as bikini bottoms, mother-daughter relationships, and a man's fascination with his car, as well as people just "hanging out." Her use of an ancient medium does not constrain her view of contemporary life.

"Intricate patterns have always intrigued me," Oshman said. "I always loved doing jigsaw puzzles when I was a kid." But her interest in mosaic art began years later while watching workmen install fireplace tiles in her home. When the project was completed, Oshman was left with a large amount of leftover tile.

"I started playing with the tile, making simple designs, then gradually worked my way into creating art. The whole process evolved over a period of five years." During that time, Oshman asked questions of workmen and other people who had experience in handling tile.

"Although I was creating geometric patterns — I felt my pieces were flat, she admitted. "What I needed to learn was how to create depth." And so she did. Oshman had the good fortune to discover a studio in Manhattan run by European-trained mosaicists, where she took instructions for over a year and a half.

"They knew that I could handle

the materials and the tools, and went on to direct me in the fine art of making mosaics. They taught me to look at a subject and see the dimension and depth of detail in it."

Oshman usually works with micro mosaic tiles — approximately 3/8 of an inch square. Anything smaller is cut from that size.

"It's a step-by-step, slow and tedious process," the artist said, "but when I step back from the work and look at the result... it gives me a feeling of great satisfaction."

And that feeling of satisfaction is also shared by her audience. Oshman's work gives us a view of contemporary culture set in the framework of an ancient media — artistically blending the old and the new.

"Body Language," an exhibition of the mosaic art of Montclair artist Anne Oshman is on view through Sept. 10, in the Brodsky Gallery at the Chauncey Conference Center on the grounds of the Educational Testing Service, 660 Rosedale Road in Princeton. Gallery hours are Mondays through Fridays, from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. For more information, call the gallery at (609) 279-6450, or the artist at (973) 744-8774. A member of SAMA (the Society of American Mosaic Artists), the artist accepts commission work both for site-specific interior as well as portrait work. More information about Oshman's artwork can be found at www.anneoshman.com.