

ABOVE
Striped Wallpaper
by Sandra Bryant,
2007, glass and gold
leaf mosaic, 32 x 24.
Collection the artist.

OPPOSITE PAGE
**Autumn
Landscape**
by Sandra Bryant,
2006, glass mosaic,
24 x 32. Collection
the artist.

Mosaic Art: The Tile Creations of Carl and Sandra Bryant

Artists Carl and Sandra Bryant use tiny pieces of glass to create intricate mosaic works of art.

—
by **Stephanie Kaplan**

Art is often a labor of love, but it's especially so for husband-and-wife mosaic team Carl and Sandra Bryant. "Sandy had worked in oil painting for many years, and we wanted to try something that we could do together," explains Carl. The couple first explored making clay fine-art pieces and hand-pressed tiles for backsplashes before settling on creating mosaics together in 2001. "We both immediately fell in love with the medium," continues Carl. "Not believing in starting small, the first piece we attempted was a 45"-x-60" mural of an urban coffee stand. Despite the challenges, once we were done we knew we had found something that we both loved and could work on together."

Because the Bryants are self-taught, their creative process was honed through trial and error. Each mosaic begins with a thumbnail graphite sketch of the subject matter, followed by a more detailed pen-and-ink drawing on Kraft paper. Depending on the design, Sandra will sometimes also complete an acrylic painting on Kraft paper covered with gesso. "I'm just looking at shading, composition, and color when I do the painting," the artist explains. Once the composition and color are established for the mosaic, the painting or drawing is placed on a board and used as a pattern guide for the mosaic. The artists utilize the reverse-indirect mosaic method to create their designs, and say that it takes



about five days to piece together a standard five- or six-square-foot mosaic. Once the pattern is covered with clear contact paper sticky side up, the artists place the *tesserae*—the individual glass pieces in a mosaic—on the pattern and move them around to create the desired design. "It's like putting together a big puzzle," Sandra says. "It's important to have the tesserae flow in a line so that the sections of the mosaic match up exactly—if the line breaks, the composition doesn't flow." This technique provides maximum flexibility because the artists can change the position of the tiles multiple times until they reach a desired composition.

Once the mosaic is pieced together,

the face of the mosaic is covered with tile tape, which is much stickier than the contact paper. Another board is placed on top of the tile tape and the sandwiched mosaic is flipped onto its front. The artists then peel off the contact paper from the back of the mosaic, grout the tiles from the back, and adhere the mosaic to its final base with white Laticrete, a cement-based glass adhesive. "The process of grouting the tiles from the back of the mosaic gives the top of the mosaic a very smooth surface," Sandra explains. Adds Carl, "We use an archival base of either fully primed top-quality marine plywood, reinforced cement, or cement board, and we use reinforced mortar that is made to adhere to glass

mosaic. Mosaics have been around since ancient times and many are still in wonderful condition."

After a one-week drying period, the artists peel off the tile tape from the front of the mosaic and fill in any small spaces between the tiles with additional grout. "I like to use different colored grouts depending on the design because there isn't one color that looks right with everything," Sandra says. If I had to choose one grout color to use for all of my mosaics, I would go with a neutral beige color because it makes the tile colors pop."

To create their intricate mosaics, the artists use many types of glass, and two of their favorite manufactures



ABOVE LEFT
Carl clips glass to fill in the sides of an almost completed floral work. The preliminary pattern painting sits in the foreground.

BELOW LEFT
Sandra cleans the mosaic after it has been grouted and adhered to its permanent base. The mosaic is cleaned because the preliminary layer of grout on the back of the mosaic is never perfect. The final topcoat of grout is important for color corrections and for filling in tiny holes left over after the preliminary layer of grout.

are Aura and Sicis. Sandra also purchases stained glass and glass cabochons—a half-spherical bead created by melting pieces of glass together—to use in her mosaics. Although the couple estimates that they have 1,000 jars of glass in their studio, they put anything that inspires them in their mosaics, including such items as turquoise or coins. The artists follow the same philosophy when considering the palette for their pieces. “We tend to use a lot of red in our fine-art work, but we really enjoy more muted palettes as well. It really depends on the individual piece,” Sandra says. Regardless of their color choices, the artists generally work with more saturated colors because they produce more eye-catching mosaics.

Despite the couple’s love for the same creative process, their work is quite different. Carl’s mosaics tend to be more abstract, such as *Gelato* and *Birth of a Planet*, while Sandra focuses on landscapes and still lifes. In *Gelato*,



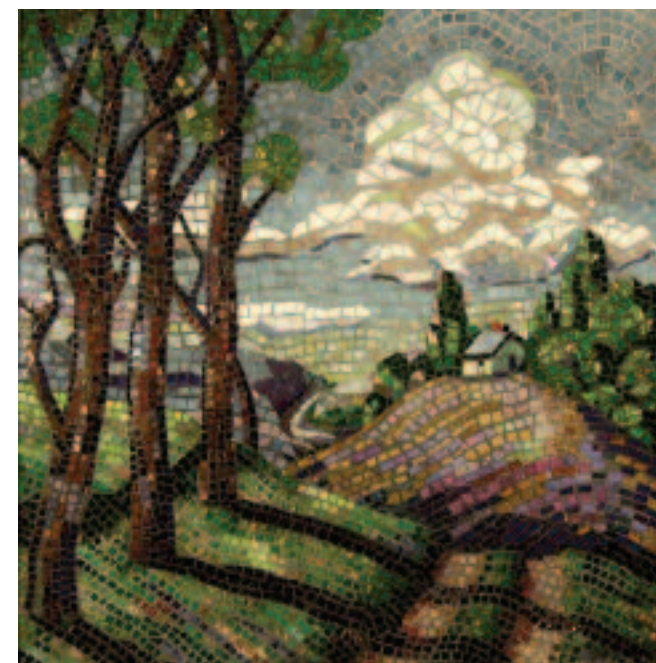
LEFT
Flowers on the Table
by Sandra Bryant, 2005, glass mosaic, 30 x 24. Private collection.

BELOW LEFT
Mosaic Landscape
by Sandra Bryant, 2005, glass mosaic, 24 x 24. Collection the artist.

BELOW RIGHT
Birth of a Planet
by Carl Bryant, 2006, glass mosaic with beads, 24 x 22. Private collection.



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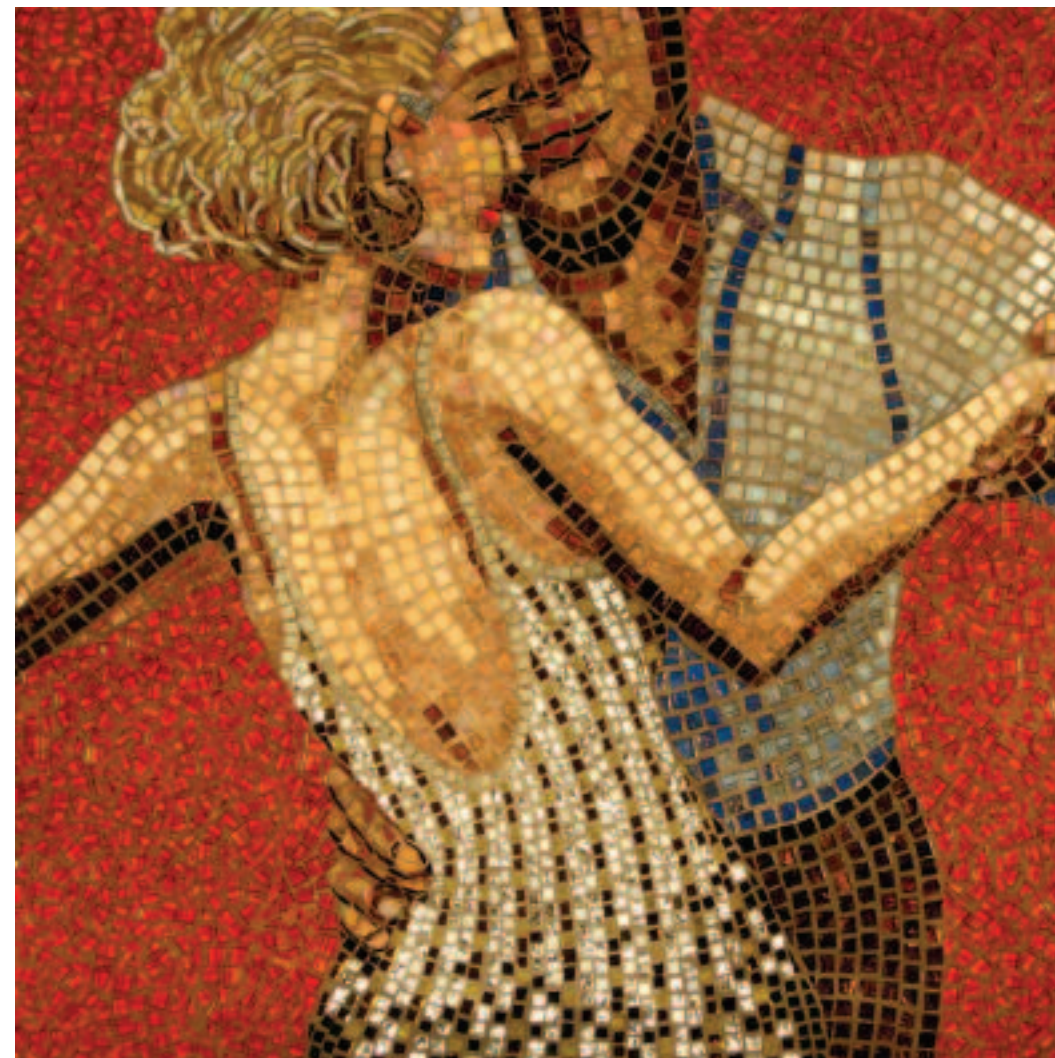
Carl's use of different shades of red tile makes the more intricate yellow-and-green design stand out. The details that make this mosaic so effective can also be seen in Sandra's *Flowers on the Table*. "Most of our fine-art projects have an average of 1,600 individually shaped pieces of glass per square foot," the artists explain on their website. A close look at the flower stamens in *Striped Wallpaper*

illustrates that even the smallest part of a flower is composed of many tiny pieces of glass that add a realistic quality to the mosaic.

Although the couple has only taken on one public mosaic mural, public art is something they are very interested in and would like to do more of. Installing the mosaic at the Lucille Umbarger Elementary School, in Burlington, Washington, was a chal-

lenge, but Sandra is anxious to take on similar projects because she enjoyed working with a community. Regardless of the type of mosaics the couple creates, Sandra reiterates that they continue to work with this medium for one simple reason—"because it's really fun."

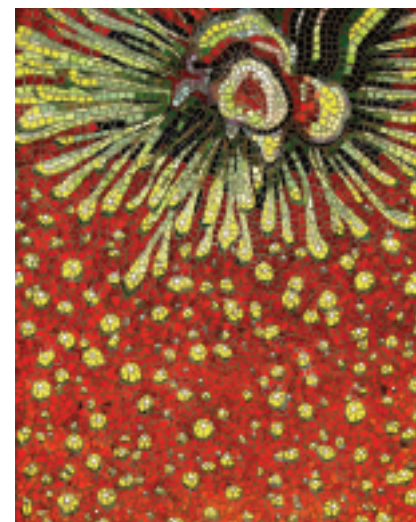
Stephanie Kaplan is the online editor of American Artist.



LEFT
The Dancers
by Sandra Bryant, 2005,
glass and 18k gold mosaic,
24 x 24. Private collection.

BELOW LEFT
Gelato
by Carl Bryant, 2006, glass
mosaic, 30 x 24. Collection
the artist.

OPPOSITE PAGE
The Black Vase
by Sandra Bryant, 2007,
glass and gold leaf mosaic,
24 x 24. Collection the artist.



About the Artists

Carl and Sandra Bryant are active members of the Society of American Mosaic Artists and have participated in many international exhibitions, juried competitions, and fine-art shows. Highlights include "Mosaic Arts International" exhibition, in Miami; "Beneath the Surface," in Chicago; "A More Perfect Union," at The Ellipse Arts Center, in Arlington, Virginia; and "Opus Veritas—Fragments of Truth" at the Museo ItaloAmericano, in San Francisco. Their mosaic artwork has been featured on textbook covers and in public and private collections. The Bryants are represented by Rebecca V Gallery, in Tacoma, Washington. They live in Lynden, Washington, with their two children, Dustin and Alyson, and their studio cat, Lucy. For more information on the Bryants, visit their website at www.showcase-mosaics.com, or e-mail them at info@showcasemosaics.com.