

# Groutline

eJournal

for the Society of American Mosaic Artists

Summer 2016

Vol.17 No. 2

## VisionShift

An Installation Experience



Reflections from Our Hearts: Atelier del Mosaico de Puerto Rico • VisionShift  
SAMA Mosaic Marathon 2016 • Mosaic Snapshots • A Mosaic Passover Story II

Broken Glass, Unexpected Beauty: Meagan Corrado

The Making of the New England Mosaic Society

The Art of the Whole: Textiles and Tesserae at IMA

Advice from the Past

**SAMA**  
Society of  
American Mosaic Artists







# VisionShift

**VisionShift** began with a phone call while I was in my mom's hospital room a few days before she passed away. A well-known art curator asked me if I'd be interested in creating a mosaic installation for a major new sculpture walk, currently under construction in the Dallas Arts District. She mentioned that other artists like James Surls, Jesus Morales, John Henry, and others would have work there. I said yes. It would be a project dedicated to my mom.

My initial visit to the construction site with Patricia Meadows, the art consultant for HALL Arts, happened on a day when Dallas had a rare snow and ice event. Schools were closed, nobody went to work, and offices were closed. It certainly made it easy to get a parking space downtown. Who says mosaic artists aren't intrepid?

Creating a large-scale, site-specific mosaic art project requires planning from beginning to end. It's important to anticipate all the things that might go



*This article was originally published in Groutline, the ejournal of SAMA (Society of American Mosaic Artists) and is published here with permission. [www.americanmosaics.org](http://www.americanmosaics.org)*

## The story of a large-scale mosaic installation

*By Sonia King*

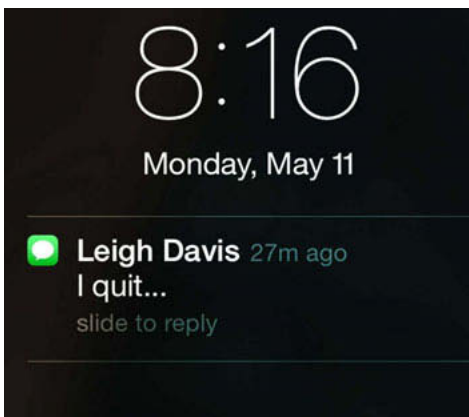
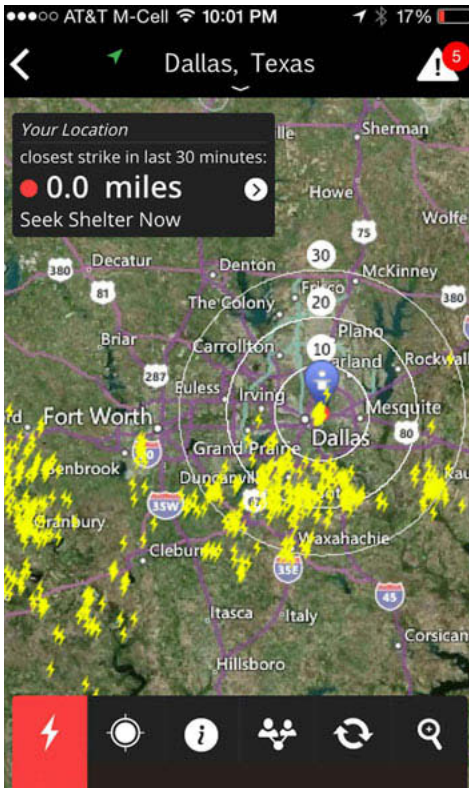


wrong. And having a talent for adapting to changing conditions is really helpful. Every installation has its own set of problems. Over the years I've learned when to adapt and when to hold steady. I start a big project knowing there will be

*Clockwise from upper left: Initial site visit on a rare snow day in Dallas. Assembling a small percentage of the materials in the studio. Beginning the creation of the first mosaic element, an 'energy burst'*

*(Continued on next page)*





challenges. But *VisionShift* brought more challenges than I ever could have anticipated.

The method of assembly was straightforward: direct on mesh over paper cartoon, the tesserae were applied with an exterior PVA that I brought in from England. There was lots of gold used. Actually, there was lots of everything used. Inventory management was critical, especially with over 200 different materials in the project.

The mosaic elements were created in my small studio with the help of my trusty assistant, Leigh Davis. There were eleven elements in three styles: energy bursts, solar flares and asteroid craters. After completion, each element was cut into multiple sections with lots of masking tape register marks. Then, all the sections were loaded into plastic crates for transport to the job site.

One of the challenges was the window of opportunity for installation. The construction project had pushed installation back by months already. But time had run out as I was leaving to teach a workshop in Greece at the beginning of June. May weather in Dallas can be unpredictable with storms, hail and tornados, but there was no choice. We all hoped to be lucky with the weather.

The construction delays meant the landscaping wasn't in yet and there wasn't a place to stand or



*Left side, top to bottom: Watching the severe weather the night before installation began. Text received from trusty assistant the first morning. Car loaded with crates of mosaic sections, cement-based adhesive, grout, tools, etc.*

*Right side, top to bottom: Road blocked by a downed tree on the way to begin the install. Gusting winds as the first cartoons are positioned on the wall. And the rain goes on and on and on.*

*(Continued on next page)*





place a ladder next to the walls. The incredibly supportive construction manager had the 'Princess Platform' built for me. And he allowed us to take off hard hats and safety vests as long as we stayed on the platform.

That turned out to be the least of my worries. As per my contract, there was supposed to be a tent over the whole installation area and storage for all the gear and materials required for a large installation. The possibility of severe weather and high winds didn't allow a tent. The decision was made to tarp the structure, lifting them during the day and lowering at night. This meant all the materials were brought up a three-story ramp from the parking garage each morning and taken down at day's

**"The morning that the install began, my trusty assistant sent me a text that said, 'I quit.' I got the same text several times a week during the install. Hah!"**

-Sonia King

end. This included a lot of heavy stuff like bags of cement-based adhesive, grout, tools, folding tables, step stools, mosaic sections, etc. A lot of time and energy was spent every day getting ready to start or closing down for the evening.

Needless to say, I was checking the weather ALL the time. I had four different weather apps on my phone, checking radar, wind speeds, the locations of lightening strikes, and predictions. The morning that the install began my trusty assistant sent me a text that said, "I quit." I got the same text several times a week during the install. Hah!

The dramatic weather meant stopping and taking shelter in the parking garage during tornado warnings and lightning storms. It meant trying to place templates and tape the walls while trying to keep the wind from

*Clockwise from upper left: High winds made placing the cartoons a little tricky. Lots of taping to keep the edges crisp. Mounting the first section on the wall. Tape goes on and comes off the wall several times during the process.*





**"It helps to be an optimist. You need to have nerves of steel for these large installs. Or at least be willing to panic in private."**

-Sonia King

tearing the paper cartoons. Working on the ladders in high wind meant the tarps were beating me around the head while trying to install mosaic sections. And it meant that a seven- to ten-day install took four weeks.

But we got it done with two days to spare before I left for Greece. I was able to take good detail shots but the overall site images would have to wait for the landscaping to be installed. I thought I was done. I knew what landscaping was planned and had gotten confirmation in writing that the plantings would be ground cover with a maximum growth of six inches.

But this project still had a surprise for me. The landscape architect needed to add a tree to fulfill the 'green' requirement of the city. And he decided to stick a large tree less than a yard from the mosaic. And that began the saga known as "Tree versus Art." It went on for several nerve-racking weeks and required going to the project owner. Art won.

VisionShift is in an important location in the Arts District of my hometown. The response to the artwork has been really gratifying. People even send me selfies as 'VisionShift Angels,' using the mosaic elements as halos. I'm proud of the project and I know my mom would have loved it.

*Sonia King's award-winning mosaic art is exhibited internationally and represented in private, public, and museum collections. Her mosaic, Depthfinder, is the first by an American to enter the permanent collection of contemporary mosaic art at the Museo d'Arte della Città di Ravenna, Italy. Sonia is a founding member and President Emeritus of the Society of American Mosaic Artists.*

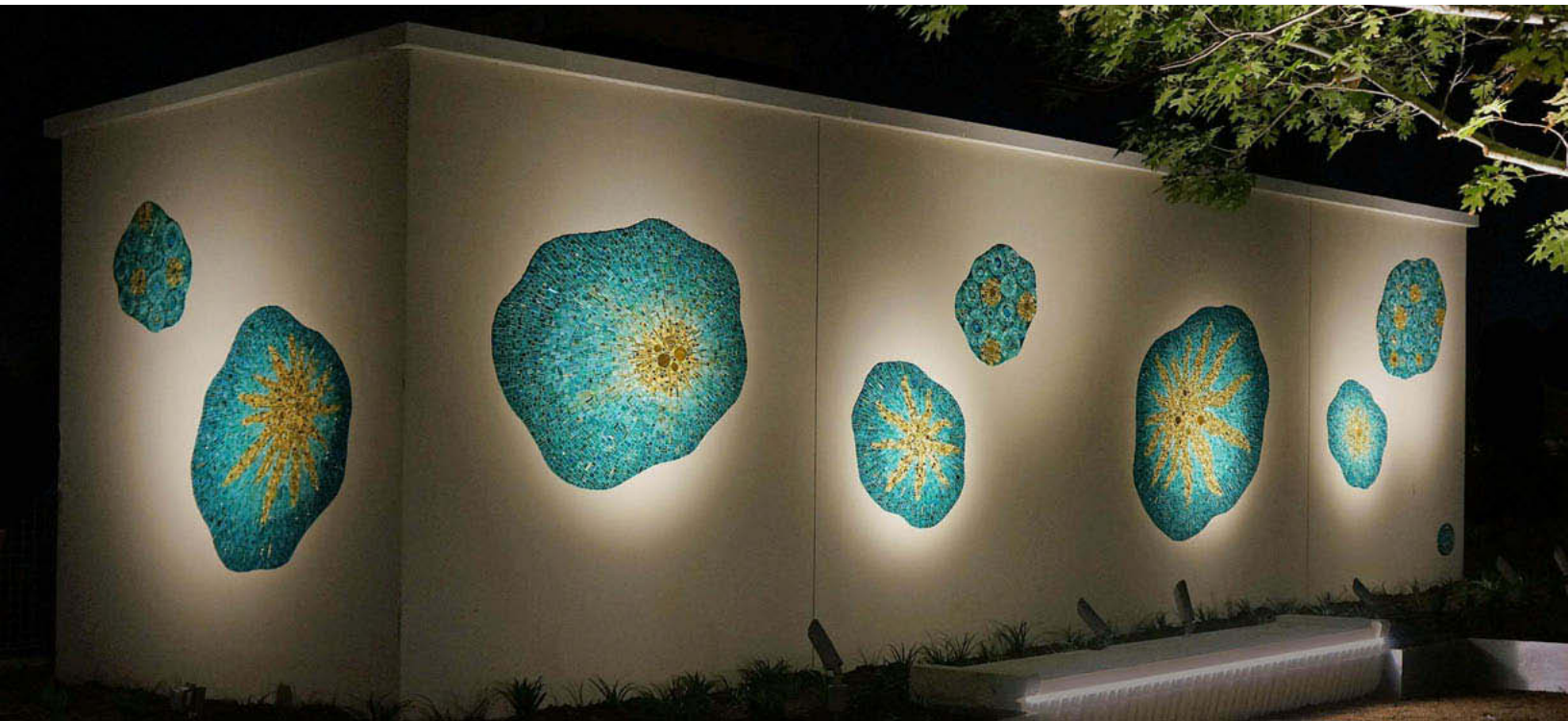
<http://mosaicworks.com/>



Top to bottom: The installation took place during the wettest May in 117 years. The landscapers added a tree 30 inches from the mosaic. After a lengthy war, Art vs. Tree... Art won!

(Continued on next page)





"*VisionShift* is the only contemporary mosaic project in the Dallas Arts District—the largest contiguous urban arts district in the nation. Eleven mosaic elements float across three sides of a structure on KPMG Plaza in the new HALL Arts complex.

The Arts District has changed the collective image of downtown Dallas and *VisionShift* expresses the possibilities and opportunities that surround us when

one is open to seeing them. The explosive energy of the dynamic forms expresses the sense of vitality and spirit that created the Arts District and our city. Dallas is a place that bubbles with potential and citizens willing to take risks to achieve great things, both on a personal, micro level as well as a big picture, macro level. The Dallas Arts District has transformed downtown, offering new life and energy and I hope *VisionShift* contributes to that vitality."

-Sonia King



Above: The finished project at night.  
On left, clockwise from top left:  
Detail shot of an 'energy burst'  
element. Sonia in front of a 'solar  
flare.' Detail of an 'asteroid craters'  
mosaic element.