

Mo, the Fridge Queen

BY CARLIN
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CCUSTOMED TO SHATTERED GLASS from broken car windows littering the streets of her Boston neighborhood, Mo—known only by her first name—knew that one day it would be her turn. The morning she arrived to find her car window smashed, she ran back to her apartment, lined a shoebox with felt, and gathered the shards of glass into the box as if they were pieces of jewelry. Her pile of glass heaped on the sidewalk, sparkling in the morning light, looked “quite brilliant and hopeful,” she remembers; the pieces were the beginning of her experimentation with mosaic technique

and processes.

Creating mosaic, she soon discovered, was an obsessive and repetitive process—very different from the whimsical nature of brushstrokes—yet she was drawn to the challenge of working with “such a random and unpredictable material.” After years of seeking to understand the nature of glass, Mo now unabashedly rolls the sharp shards in her hands like a horse whisperer who has tamed a wild mare.

“The glass and I have a mutual understanding,” she says. In preparation for piecing together her mosaics, she wraps a whole piece of tempered glass in a blanket, secures it with clothespins to protect her from flying pieces, and—despite the violent connotation of the word “smashing”—carefully hammers the corner with perfect tension until it explodes horizontally. For hours afterwards, the glass can be heard in a symphony of snaps, crackles and pops.

Although the arranging of pieces and the attention to color placement on a 1950s Frigidaire can be very methodic and takes up to three hours per square foot, Mo, who finds her art funny, rebels against the structure by using mosaic to transform the purpose of common household objects. If, as a kid, she could imagine building an upside-down house, then Mo’s most recent creations, displayed around her loft studio, are the realization of her “quixotic” imagination: postcards popping out of a glistening, glassed toaster; wine glasses placed tastefully in a soon-to-be-Astroturfed refrigerator; and the soft brown interior of a flowered fridge is a vision for a jewelry box—rings in the butter holder and diamonds stored safely in the freezer. “I’ve always changed what things are used for; my kitchen cabinets once held my clothes.”

Mo describes her mosaic creations as self-portraits. “Each fragment of glass is a memory. Combined as a whole, the patterns resemble patterns from my past.” *Scotch Plaid Cooler*, the 1950s washing machine with squared patches of red, blue and green mosaic, is reminiscent of her grandfather’s scotch cooler, which he brought on every camping trip. Similar to the washing machine, the cooler was tall, round and plaid. The fridges set the scene for her grandmother’s house, with flower patterns, such as morning glories, that remind Mo of a “long-ago garden.”

A resident of Florence, Massachusetts, Mo held her first solo show, *GLASS SMACK: Salvage in Mosaic*, in September, at the Taber Art Gallery at Holyoke Community College. She has also been artist-in-residence at the Art Complex Museum in Duxbury, Massachusetts. For her next endeavor, and perhaps the most ambitious to date, Mo is launching The Mostream Project, where she will mosaic the outside of an Airstream trailer—taking the idea of a traveling exhibit to a whole new level.

More about her work and The Mostream Project can be found at www.fridgequeen.com. ■



MICHAEL ZIDE

Facing Page: **SELF-PORTRAIT, FRIDGE** (Detail)

Tempered glass, refrigerator, glass stain.

25 in. × 54 in. × 23 in.

2004



SCOTCH PLAID COOLER

1950s washing machine, tempered glass,

glass stains, sanded grout, acid stains,

23-karat gold leaf. 24 in. × 50 in.

2005



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