

studio

palette

composition

canvas

artist profile

inspiration

gallery

imagination

Piecing Together a Career from a Hobby

ELIZABETH SUNEBY **writer**

while studying economics at Skidmore College, Audrey Markoff developed a new passion: creating mosaics from hand-sculpted polymer clay pieces. “In hindsight, I wish I had pursued an art degree instead of taking just a few art classes during my four years of college,” explains the 2006 graduate who went on to earn an MBA from Babson College in 2012 and worked for 12 years in the software industry before pursuing her art full-time.

Polymer clay is a modeling clay—made from a synthetic compound, not mud from the ground. Best known by its brand names FIMO and Sculpey, the material is a favorite for arts and crafts projects as it comes in a multitude of colors, is simple to mold with your fingers, and bakes in a standard oven, not a kiln.

Beyond its popularity with kids, polymer clay creations have come into their own with collections at several art museums across the United States, including: the Racine Art Museum in Wisconsin; the Philadelphia Museum of Art in Pennsylvania; the Mingei International Museum in San Diego, California; the Newark Museum in New Jersey; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Fuller Craft Museum in Brockton, Massachusetts; and the Currier Museum of Art in Manchester, New Hampshire.

As Audrey devoted more of her time and energy to her hobby of mosaic making, she rented studio space with two other artists in Boston’s historic SoWa Art + Design District in the South End and became a member of the nonprofit association of professional studio artists, the SoWa



Dirty Waters, a mosaic inspired by the city of Boston



artist profile “tiles of all colors and shapes”

left: Americans and Israelis in the Boston-Haifa Connection working on a collaborative mosaic that now hangs in the CJP office in Boston; bottom: A family creating a mosaic in Audrey’s studio in the SoWa Artist Building in Boston’s South End.

visitor asked her if she taught classes, and she thought, “Why not?!” Today she hosts two-hour workshops during which participants choose a square board or a picture frame for a base and select from an abundant collection of Audrey’s handmade tiles of all colors and shapes to fashion their own creations that they bring

home at the end of the session.

Artists Guild. In 2019, she moved into her own SoWa studio to commit to mosaic making and teaching as her full-time career.

Audrey exhibits her colorful, dynamic, and abstract masterpieces at Art in Giving’s (AIG) online gallery and its corporate and retail installations. AIG is her family’s nonprofit that sells and leases artwork from an array of participating artists to raise money for childhood cancer research in memory of Audrey’s twin, Rachel Molly, who passed away from a brain tumor one week after their ninth birthday. “It is incredibly meaningful for me to sell my art in honor of my sister while supporting my growing family,” explains Audrey.

Audrey also exhibits her mosaics at her studio located on Harrison Avenue. The studio is open to the public during SoWa First Fridays, the monthly evening events hosted by artists and galleries. It was during a First Friday open house when Audrey got the idea to lead workshops. A

home at the end of the session.

Audrey’s hands-on workshops are such a hit that in March 2022, *USA Today* selected it as one of the “10 Best Art Experiences In and Around Boston,” stating, “Audrey lovingly guides participants through each step with just the right amount of encouragement.” In addition to offering workshops open to the public, Audrey hosts private parties in her studio for children and adults to celebrate birthdays and wedding showers, as well as to mark other special occasions.

Audrey is equally passionate about leading group mosaic projects with cohorts of students, campers, nonprofit organization members, and corporate colleagues. “I start by identifying the group’s goal, which more often than not includes both team building and producing a lasting piece of art to display,” notes Audrey.

Audrey recently worked with the Boston-Haifa Connection (BHC),

“Audrey’s hands-on workshops are such a hit that in March 2022, *USA Today* selected it as one of the ‘10 Best Art Experiences In and Around Boston.’”



artist profile “students created thousands of mosaic pieces”

a 30-year-old initiative of Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP) that brings together citizens of the sister cities to foster Jewish identity, connect youth, and empower at-risk families in Haifa, Israel. When a group from Haifa were visiting Boston, CJP leadership was interested in finding a creative and collaborative team-building project and learned about SoWa Mosaics through the Jewish Arts Collaborative. To prepare for the BHC mosaic-making session, Audrey sketched a Hamsa hand, the palm-shaped amulet that is an ancient symbol of happiness, luck, health, and good fortune traced back to artifacts from Mesopotamia and Phoenicia. She split the group into four teams to work together to tile their portion of the design and across teams to line up colors and patterns. The beautiful group effort hangs in the CJP office.

The Tenacre Country Day School in Wellesley also reached out to Audrey. After the school’s art teacher, Molly Rosenthal,



top and bottom: A sixth-grade student from the Tenacre Country Day School working on the graduating class gift mosaic pictured below.

spotted one of Audrey’s mosaics on loan from AIG hanging at Flour Bakery in Cambridge, Molly contacted Audrey to lead a visiting artist workshop with the Tenacre students. Upon learning more about Audrey’s offerings, Molly instead opted for a longer-term project: leading the sixth graders in crafting a graduating-class gift. Audrey sketched the central design of iconic school symbols, including the apple orchards and white school-house building. Between November 2019 and March 2020, the students created thousands of mosaic pieces. Each of the students also fashioned their own square tile mosaic for the border depicting their own favorite Tenacre memory. While Audrey intended to guide students as they tiled the central design, the pandemic made



Frankie Valli, Audrey's mosaic of the four seasons, was purchased by AmRamp through Art in Giving, Audrey's family's nonprofit that raises funds for childhood cancer research through the sale of art. The mosaic hangs in AmRamp's global headquarters.

the plan impossible. Instead, she and Molly took over and finished the mosaic in time for the students' October 2020 delayed graduation celebrations. Today, the mosaic hangs in a high-traffic hallway of the school.

The chief financial officer (CFO) of the Boston-based company Amramp contacted Audrey after admiring her mosaic on display in the lobby of the company's new facility. Cleverly titled "Frankie Valli,"

Audrey's work of art depicts lively images of the four seasons. The CFO hired Audrey to lead a team-building mosaic workshop with Amramp's franchise partners convening for a business meeting at the company's headquarters.

Audrey, who was raised in Wellesley, and her husband Gregory Dunn Jr. work and live in the South End. Greg is a software entrepreneur and founder of WalknTours, self-guided walking tour smartphone apps for several cities. Greg brands his journeys "solo tours for travel rebels." Not surprisingly, Audrey's SoWa Mosaics studio is a highlight of one of Greg's Boston tours. Perhaps soon, another popular stop on a WalknTour will be a grand Audrey Markoff mosaic gracing a public SoWa spot. [WW](#)

Visit sowamosaics.com to learn about Audrey's:

- Collaborative Group Mosaic Projects
- Corporate Team-Building Experience

Sign up for a Mosaic workshop or schedule a private event through Airbnb experiences: www.airbnb.com/experiences/1266706.

View Audrey's creations:

- Visit artingiving.com/audrey-markoff
- Stop by her studio at 450 Harrison Avenue, Studio #208 during a SoWa First Friday evening