



Contributed photo

The title of this work by Cheryl Cohen is "Flow."



ASHLAND — Entering mosaic artist Cheryl Cohen's studio in her Ashland home on a sunny afternoon, the first thing one notices is the light coming in from the windows.

It reflects off cracked plates, mugs, bowls, water mirror glass, spectrum glass, turquoise iridescent glass, shells, sea glass and bathroom tiles.

"Creativity central," Cohen said, adding it's "happy chaos."

Cohen spends many hours in her studio, working on her mosaics and listening to books on tape. At night, her husband Eric reminds her of the late hour.

"(He) will come up and say, 'Do you know it's 11:30?'" she said.

A lifelong passion

Art has been a passion and a refuge for Cohen since childhood.

"Art was always my favorite thing in school... a major part of my self-esteem," she said. "I did have learning problems in school. Art was my haven."

It seemed risky to choose art as a career. Interested in working with special needs children, Cohen received a bachelor's degree in occupational therapy (O.T.) in 1979 from Sargent College. She moved to Atlanta, where she worked as an O.T. and married her first husband.

Art remained a theme in Cohen's life. After her first child, Julie, was born, a friend introduced Cohen to paper and fabric jewelry. She moved to Sudbury, and started her first business, Julianne Designs. Taking time off from O.T., she bought equipment tents and sold her jewelry at shows in the Northeast. She also had her second child, Ali.

Cohen's children grew up with a full pallet of art and crafts supplies at their fingertips. And her enthusiasm was contagious.

"My girls were into it big time," she said. "All their friends knew when they came over they'd leave with a new pair of earrings. We were always making something."

Cohen said she loved immersing herself in making jewelry and going to shows.

"At my peak I did 24 shows a year and was in eight stores," she said. "I loved every minute of it."

Then her husband lost his job, and Cohen returned to the O.T. field, working part-time in Maynard.

But this did not stop her from embarking on new artistic adventures.

Connecting the dots

When beaded jewelry became popular, Cohen started working with, and making, beads.

"I'm so wildly fascinated by the process involved in making an item," she said.

She took classes in stringing and knotting, lamp work (melting glass to make glass beads) and metalwork, and gave classes at her house.

Later, taking classes in stained glass, she fell in love with "how beautiful glass was, and I marveled at the variability of glass."

Cohen said she believed she would eventually find a way to combine all her artistic skills in a unique form of expression.

"My dream all along was to connect the dots of all the pieces, and use all the supplies I have, in some way that could be unique and special," she said.

She saw picture frames made from plates and pottery at a crafts show, and thought, "How hard can that be?" She discovered the joy of smashing plates, and a new door opened.

Challenges along the way

There were some dark times for Cohen. Her first marriage ended in 2003, and in 2005 she was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent treatment. She was recently diagnosed with Lyme disease, after many years of symptoms.

Now cancer free for six years, she resumed a treatment for Lyme disease that is working well.

The creative process has helped Cohen adapt to her health issues. At a recent retreat on Cape Cod called "Possibilities Weekend," art projects and other exercises helped her acknowledge and accept ongoing health challenges.

The retreat opened up a path for "incorporating the reality of your life into who you are and moving forward with it," she said.

Fitting the pieces together

When Cohen took a mosaics class in Watertown, she realized she had found her niche.

"I got very excited about it," she said. "All of a sudden I realized I could use all the beads and supplies in one type of art. I started playing with beads, then plates mixed with glass, then I started using everything I could find," she said.

Encouraged by Eric Bloom, whom she married in 2010, she decided to make mosaics her official business.

Bloom "stops for yard sales without being asked," said Cohen. He even designed her website, www.cherylcohenmosaics.com.

Her first large piece is mounted on the wall in their living room in Ashland.

"It took nine weeks to make a triptych, a three-panel piece that's 6-feet-by-32-inches, using mirrors, china, pottery, beads, glass tiles, dichroic glass, vintage jewelry, rocks and semi-precious stones," said Cohen.

Endless possibilities

Cohen is excited about the endless possibilities in mosaics. She loves reusing vintage artifacts.

"Someone gave me a chipped plate and jewelry, I incorporated them into a picture frame," she said in an email. "There are so many family or personal 'treasures' that can be incorporated into an art piece and can be enjoyed daily."

Her mosaics were in two juried art shows, and are available for sale through her website.

You can see her mosaics at Bakery on the Common in Natick, and the Holliston Mill Open Studios on Nov. 3 and Nov. 4. Cohen's mosaics will be at The Center for the Arts in Natick in March, and Indalo Gallery and Studio in Newton in May.