

# Easy Reader

VOLUME XXXVII, NUMBER 7  
OCTOBER 12, 2006

HERMOSA BEACH • MANHATTAN BEACH • REDONDO BEACH HOMETOWN NEWS



Photomosaic artist Jen Hellman will be at the Shade Hotel in Manhattan Beach, Sunday, to discuss her art.

## Hellman explains photomosaic work on exhibit at Shade hotel

by Heather Ross

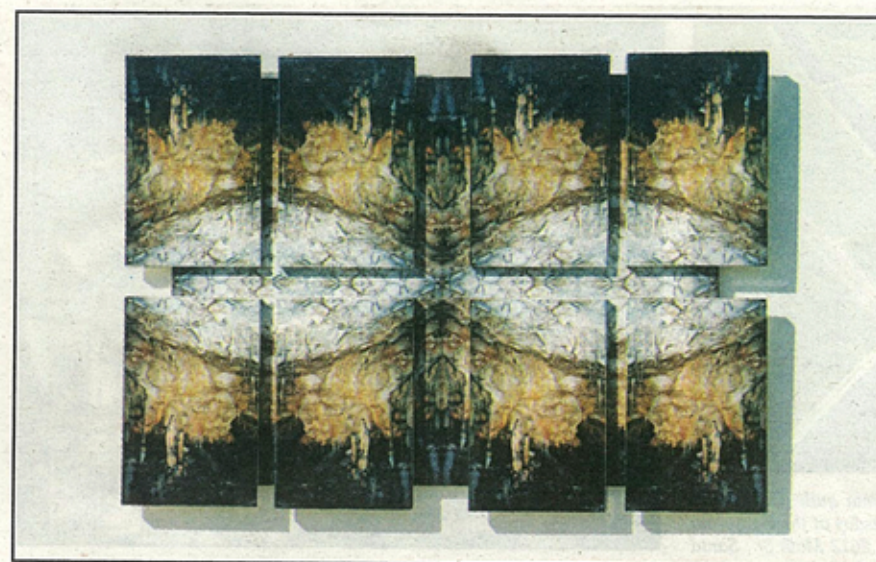
**Q.** Tell us about your photomosaics. Is your artwork considered photography?

**A.** My work is photographically based, but I involve so many different materials in the design - tile, fabric, metal, sand, acrylic paint - that it really becomes multimedia. I always begin with a single photograph - seaweed on the beach, the fender of an old car - and extend from it until the emerging collage develops a life of its own. At first glance my work appears abstract and is often mistaken for a painting, a tapestry, or a computer-generated

print. But as the image unfolds the viewer discovers a meticulously built photographic mosaic. My Photomosaics are based on repetition and layering of image, which for me becomes very meditative.

I shoot 35 millimeter film and don't use Photoshop, except when transferring my completed images to fabric or tile. So much of the art world is computerized now but I prefer to build my pieces from scratch so they never lose the human touch.

**Q.** Where do you think your artistic talent originated?



Photomosaic by Jen Hellman at Shade Hotel, Sunday, October 15.

**A.** My mother was a dancer and a poet, and my father a writer. He published over 30 books on science and technology, including this year's "Great Feuds in Mathematics". I think my artwork reflects each of my parents - it appears abstract and at the same time is actually very logical and organized.

My father had a darkroom in our basement and I was intrigued by the whole process of photography early on. I remember building a pinhole camera out of a Quaker Oats box and soon after that I started shooting photographs of trees with a camera my father gave me. I was always drawn to nature and architecture.

In addition to art, I studied ballet and music at the North Carolina School of the Arts, and then at Bennington College in Vermont where I got my liberal arts degree.

**Q.** How did you end up in the Beach Cities?

**A.** After graduating college, I worked as an editorial assistant at Premiere Magazine in New York City, but was unhappy in the corporate atmosphere and craved warmer weather. I got a phone call from a friend in Hermosa Beach who needed a roommate and I arrived two weeks later with one suitcase in hand. I've lived in Hermosa Beach ever since. I miss my family, but even as a child I had dreamed of living at the beach.

**Q.** How did you come up with the idea for Photomosaics?

**A.** When I first moved to California, I became sidetracked from my artistic pursuits. Having recovered as a teenager from two herniated discs, I had become interested in sports medicine, and eventually enrolled in that graduate program at Cal State, Long Beach.

It wasn't until 1997 that I dug up a photograph of a rock wall taken years before on a drive through the Rocky Mountains. I kept looking at it and one night the idea for Photomosaics came to me - literally in a dream. The next day I made multiple and reversed copies of the rock image, turned them in different directions and began building mosaics - arranging them with post-its. I worked in sports medicine during the day, went to graduate school in the afternoons and crafted my Photomosaics at night.

What made you decide to take the leap and commit to your artwork fulltime?

Soon after I finished my Master's Degree my mother was diagnosed with cancer. I went to visit her in New Jersey and stayed there until she died six months later. I will never forget our talk about staying "connected" through my artwork.

This gave me a renewed sense of purpose to fulfill my dream - just like my parents had done when they were young.

I stayed with my family back east another year, and while I was there the owner of a framing store offered me a solo show at a gallery she owned. I had several more shows - at Studio 4 West, The International Contemporary Furniture Show and The Dean Street Gallery. When I returned to California I began showing my work locally at Gensler Architecture, Klade Gallery and The Manhattan Country Club.

**Q.** What is the most challenging thing about your artwork?

**A.** I'm doing something unique, so there's nobody to go to for answers. There is a lot of trial and error so my work requires a lot of time in the incubation stage, but there's nothing like the feeling of coming up with an unusual idea - and making it happen. I always want to be pushing the envelope so my theme doesn't get stale. That's why I started experimenting with transferring my images to ceramic tile using the dye sublimation process. It reminds me of centuries-old Portuguese tile work.

I am least inspired to photograph things that are already beautiful. I like to find something ordinary and make it beautiful. One of my favorite pieces is created from a photo I took of a torn cardboard box in the street.

**Q.** What advice would you give to young artists?

**A.** I would tell them that their true talent is their birthright. You can put it on a shelf and pursue other things, but it will always haunt you. So embrace it early on and don't let anyone talk you out of it. Find what makes your vision unique, work hard at it, be determined and develop good business sense around it. There's always a way to make a living fulfilling your passion.

I am involved with the nonprofit foundation Walk With Sally. It offers mentoring to children of parents with cancer. I am currently mentoring a girl named Gabriella who is interested in art and looks forward to our trips to art galleries.

**Q.** What's next?

**A.** Lately I've begun creating Photomosaic furniture, such as coffee and bistro tables. I'm also transferring my images to fabric for clothing. I am working right now on a very large tile piece to be displayed in a high-rise office building lobby next year.

An exhibit of Hellman's photomosaics opens at the Shade Hotel in Manhattan Beach on Sunday, October, beginning at 1 p.m... ER