



*Chieko Shimizu Fujioka*



## CHIEKO SHIMIZU FUJIOKA

is a glass mosaic artist living in Santa Clara, California. Through her medium, Chieko provides the narrative of self-care, self-love and the profound journey of self-acceptance. As broken pieces of glass are gathered and reassembled, they symbolize the inherent resilience within us all, gently pushing us forward on the path of personal growth and empowerment.

Growing up in Japan, I learned the beauty of its customs alongside the harsh realities of its culture. The magnificent nature and respectful treatment of the environment were countered by the pressure of strict rules and a group-oriented society. A somewhat opaque societal pressure to fit into a certain format created confusion during my adolescence as I searched for my core identity. In a world constantly dictating right and wrong, my self-esteem plummeted, making it difficult to find my path.

After working for several Tokyo corporations, I moved to California to join my husband when I turned 30. Leaving my home country lifted a veil of social pressure. Reality struck, forcing me to ask: *What do I want to do with my life?*

Art was the answer, but the specific type remained unclear. I enrolled in workshops, meet-ups and classes, where I met my mosaic art mentor Kathy Richardson. A professional artist, Kathy held weekly public meetups to teach mosaic art. Like a magician, she revealed the vast possibilities through this medium.

Even after years of practice, I struggled to call myself a professional artist. Some say adulthood is about overcoming childhood challenges and I believe that's true. Despite my dedication, self-doubt lingered: *Who will take me seriously? I'm just a self-taught artist.*





A shift occurred around 2017 when I started noticing a trend on Instagram. Many young, independent artists were promoting themselves on social media. Witnessing their hard work, both in creating and marketing their art, blew me away. These individuals were vocal, proud of their creations, and taking ownership — something I never experienced before. Inspired and empowered by their online presence, I thought, *If they can do it, I can do it too.* This marked the beginning of my fight to break free from past ideologies.

My first studio space was a corner of our apartment. Even after four years as a professional artist, this core space remains, along with the addition of a community studio. It's where all my artistic journeys begin, not just creation, but also the things I dream of: *What if my work could be displayed publicly? What if I could have a gallery show? What if I could contribute to public installations?*

It's important to acknowledge that this home studio fostered my emotional strength early on. From waking up to going to sleep, I was alone. Every discussion, strategy session and decision came from within. It was a demanding period, but a necessary one that strengthened my core as a business owner.

“The solitude that I find in my studio is one of plenitude. I am enough for myself. I live fully there.”

— Joan Mitchell



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his period also made my move to a community studio all the more special. When my apartment studio became too small to handle the increasing number of orders, I felt a desperate need for more space. On a whim, I visited a fellow artist friend, Lynne Strom-Berg, during her open studio event with other artists. Witnessing the beautiful space, I casually inquired about vacancies. Unfortunately, there were none. Discouraged, I went home without much hope. Then, much to my surprise, Lynne called later that day, offering to share her studio space. Talk about a dream come true!

The community studio offers a vibrant environment that fosters organization and collaboration. Designated storage keeps my supplies readily available, streamlining my workflow. Surrounded by fellow artists, I'm constantly inspired by the exchange of ideas and the opportunity to push my artistic boundaries further. The expansive workspace allows me to tackle large-scale projects without limitations, freeing my creative flow. Additionally, the dedicated private office provides a quiet haven within the studio for focused concentration, while also offering a professional setting for client meetings and presentations where I can showcase my work in a polished environment.

In contrast, my home studio provides a sanctuary for introspection and personal expression. Here, I can truly unwind and become immersed in the creative process. The natural light is perfect for capturing captivating videos to share on social media, a crucial tool for connecting with potential collectors. This intimate space allows me to delve into smaller, more personal pieces that explore themes and ideas close to my heart. These intimate creations often form the basis for the behind-the-scenes glimpses I share in my videos, resulting in a deeper connection with viewers on a personal level. Last, but not least, it is also where my supportive husband and our furry family member, Wonton the French bulldog, belong.





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y artistic process is a unique blend of abstract painting and mosaic artistry. I begin by laying a foundation of acrylic paint, expressing fleeting emotions and everyday experiences in a dreamy, abstract form. The heart of my work lies in the meditative act of attaching crushed glass to the painted surface. This slow, deliberate process is incredibly calming, almost therapeutic. It feels like I'm piecing together broken fragments of my own experiences, healing them and making them whole.

Once the surface is fully covered, I seal it with grout. This final step, a meticulous application of a clear binding agent, provides a sense of completion and satisfaction. The result is a captivating artwork that transforms light into a mesmerizing display. The underlying colors are filtered through a dreamy lens, while the reflection of light creates a scintillating dance across the surface. Whether viewed in daylight, evening or night, my glass mosaics offer a unique and immersive experience.





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my initial focus was personal exploration, my artistic path gradually shifted towards serving others. The broken pieces of glass resonate deeply with the challenges we all face. Yet, within each of us lies the remarkable ability to rise above the brokenness. The mosaic technique embodies this very essence — once shattered broken pieces turn into something not just whole again, but stronger and more beautiful than before. Witnessing how viewers found solace and a sense of rejuvenation in my pieces sparked a profound realization of the impact my art could have. This experience, combined with the inherent symbolism of the glass mosaic medium itself, became a central mission of my life as an artist.

I feel incredibly blessed by the generous people in my life and the ways in which I can tell my personal story through art. I live a life beyond my dreams, with nothing more to ask for. My wish is to continue creating in the hope of spreading self-love until my final days.

### Chieko

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