

A correspondence glass

Story & PHOTOS BY GRETCHEN AMMERMAN

For the TODAY

I'm super good at art. And by that, I mean I have a particular talent for surrounding myself with amazing artists, which almost makes up for the fact that I can't even draw a smiley face that doesn't look like it's taken an airplane ride through a tornado.

One of those friends, mosaic artist Joanne Daschel, believes that everyone has talent hidden somewhere, and that the primary thing that separates successful artists from the rest of us is the work they put in to perfect their chosen medium.

With that belief, Joanne offers tools to help others create pieces of their own. She started by giving workshops at the Lincoln City Cultural Center, where she has a studio. When stay-at-home orders were issued in March, she turned to the internet and the postal service to offer nightlight and sun catcher kits people can complete at home.

"We're all artists," she said. "It's just that many of us weren't encouraged to think of themselves that way, so never give it a real try."

Challenge accepted.

Of the many choices available in her nightlight kits, including a turtle, flowers and a starfish, I chose to make a wave. The box Joanne creates has pretty much everything a person needs to create a (potentially) beautiful piece of useable art, including more than enough pieces of glass in various colors to allow for a healthy number of mistakes (precut kits are available but I wanted the full experience).

"It's a good idea to practice with some glass you don't care about," Joanne said. "But I definitely include enough so that you won't be nervous about running out while you are working."

Though the kits include written instruction, a series of short-but-thorough videos Joanne created also help walk you through the series of potentially intimidating tasks, like trying to cut shards of glass into actual usable shapes.

"We don't worry about being too exact in mosaic," she says during one of the segments, a hugely comforting tip. "Having pieces that are not quite perfect

I think is kind of charming and it gives a handmade, folksy look to each piece."

After a few panic attacks, I finally settled into a rhythm, really noticing how the glass shards can create a shape without being exactly what you thought you needed them to be. This is one of the things that drew Joanne to the medium to begin with.

"Mosaic is fascinating to me in the way that it engages the brain," she said. "If you look at a mosaic up close, it's just a bunch of broken pieces that don't make sense. Step back, and your brain will try very hard to re-assemble those pieces into a pattern that can be understood — a leaf, a wave or a portrait. I first noticed this magic when I became interested in pointillist paintings as a teenager. I realized my brain was 'mixing' the colors in those dots together, but the fact that they are distinct makes the image somehow more alive. Mosaic works like that too."

In the workshops she has offered for the past few years, participants have two hours to finish a nightlight. Let's just say that it took me longer than that, and Joanne comforted me that not only was I not alone, but that this is part of the appeal for people who have been purchasing her at-home project kits.

"I find that the time allotted is perfect for some people but can be a bit stressful for others," she said. "This way, people can work on them in their own time. I also have had plenty of people that wanted to attend one of my workshops but either couldn't come on the scheduled date or live too far away, so this is nice for them, too. I started this as a way for people to have a creative project during the quarantine, but it's turned into something I will keep offering."

At first, I was trying to reproduce exactly the color scheme Joanne used for her wave design, but the fun really began when I started to envision and create a design of my own. Shard by shard, I was making something that actually looked like a wave.

My completed creation is sitting next to me on my desk, and is honestly something I'm quite proud of. I certainly won't be slapping a beret on my head and calling myself a visual artist, but it was quite a thrill getting out of my comfort zone and trying something new and

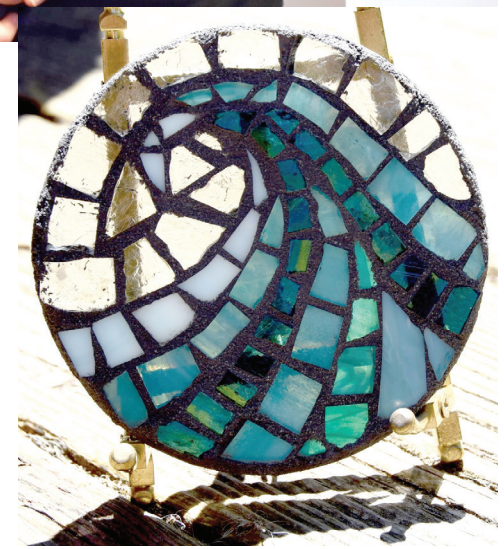


Joanne Daschel

something that I thought was out of reach to me.

"Taking a creative class is an act of courage," Joanne said. "It's not usually recognized as such, like a bold, athletic goal like running a marathon might be. But so many of us are living with a lifelong message that we are not artists. So, when we take a step into creative learning where other people might see us, it feels scary. I think at-home kits can be a way for people to be brave, try something new and get past that barrier."

For more information or to order mosaic night light and sun catcher kits, go to www.joannedaschel.com.



The author's finished mosaic