

# The Californian.com

## Salinas mosaic project breaks down barriers

By Scott MacDonald • smacdonald@thecalifornian.com • April 23, 2010

In an art gallery in Salinas' Chinatown, thousands of tiny pieces of broken plates are being turned into a vision of sunflowers and rolling hills.

The mosaics will beautify a new housing project. But the process of making the art is serving larger purposes. It's helping some folks find the help they need: through art, through community and through social services.

"With all these little pieces, you piece back the pieces of your life, back together again," said Michael Ball, a principal volunteer with Breakthrough H'Art, a collaboration of artists supported by Interim Inc., a mental health services provider.

Ball, an artist, helped conceive and design the scene being created across three large boards that will be installed at Sunflower Gardens, Interim's new housing project. He praised the mosaic medium.

"It has a vibration in it, it has a pattern and a rhythm. It's in everybody," he said. "It's powerful."

The pieces have been made at the @risk Art Gallery on Soledad Street in Chinatown by a group of about 20 people during the past few months, said Mia Ferriera, programs director for the Franciscan Workers. The pieces, along with 10 others made during the past year, will be on display Saturday during the third annual Salinas Asian Festival.

Ferriera said the collaboration between the Franciscan Workers, which runs @risk, and Interim Inc. is not just about art. It also helps outreach workers connect with people on the street and guests of Dorothy's Place, the soup kitchen and day room run by the Franciscan Workers to serve the homeless.

Although people on the street may need the services of a mental health provider like Interim, Ferriera said, there's a stigma associated with mental illness.

Michael McDonald, assistant program director with MCHOME and Interim, said efforts like the mosaic project help break down that stigma.

"A lot of the problem we have with connecting people to services is that no one wants to be mentally ill," he said. "This sets it in a different tone — it's like fun."

But it's more than that, McDonald said. He's seen the project help change the views of the people of Interim.

"In a way, we're affecting the agency we work for," he said. "In a way, we're doing outreach to social workers."

"The biggest thing for me is breaking down those distinctions. Like, look down this table," he said, pointing to about eight people building a mosaic. "Who's mentally ill?"

At the end of the table, the eight people McDonald pointed out worked side by side, chatting, spreading glue onto tiny colorful pieces of broken plates, sticking them to a waterproof board, creating patterns that form sunflowers, fields, hills. They formed a small community of artists, working together as equals.

Advertisement

**Kodak**

IF YOU'RE NOT PRINTING ON A KODAK ESP ALL-IN-ONE PRINTER, CHANCES ARE  
**YOU'RE PAYING TOO MUCH FOR INK.**

FIND OUT HOW MUCH YOU'RE OVERPAYING FOR INK AT [PRINTANDPROSPER.COM](http://PRINTANDPROSPER.COM)

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

# The Californian.com



Purchase this Photo

From left, Mia Ferreira, Suzanne Hilton, Camille Graves and Emma Ohlund work on a mosaic April 7 at the @risK Art Gallery in Salinas' Chinatown. (Scott MacDonald)



Purchase this Photo

Lisa Schuljak, center, works on a mosaic April 7 at the @risK Art Gallery in Salinas' Chinatown. (Scott MacDonald)



Purchase this Photo

People work on a mosaic April 7 at the @risK Art Gallery in Salinas' Chinatown. (Scott MacDonald)

## Advertisement



**Mom Dilemma #36:**  
Your daughter insists on wearing her princess costume to the grocery store. Allow it or not?

YES, at least she's dressed!

NO, I have some rules!

**momlike**me.com  
where Local moms meet

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

# The Californian.com



Purchase this Photo

Broken colored plates are some of the building blocks for mosaics being assembled at the @risK Art Gallery. (Scott MacDonald)

## TO ATTEND

Information about the Saturday's Salinas Asian Festival is online at <http://salinasasianfestival.com>. @risK will be open 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.; events happen around Chinatown from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Advertisement

**Mom Dilemma #36:**  
Your daughter insists on wearing her princess costume to the grocery store. Allow it or not?

YES, at least she's dressed!

NO, I have some rules!

momslike.me.com  
where Local moms meet

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™