



The Prouty
Pique assiette mosaic, 8 inches by 8 inches
By Susan Whelihan

Ever since Susan Whelihan's father gave her a Strathmore drawing pad and "a fancy set of scented markers" when she was in third grade, art has been, she says, "a significant part of my life and identity." She majored in graphic design in college and has always enjoyed doing fine art—drawing, painting, sculpture, and mosaics. The appeal of creating a *pique assiette* (or "broken-plate," as the medium is also known) mosaic is the challenge of "taking broken pottery that would otherwise be useless trash, and making it into something appealing." The colored fragments are "used like dabs of paint," Whelihan says, while an occasional piece with a picture on it, like the cyclists above, is "used like a collage element." There's an engaging story behind this particular work. Whelihan is a program manager for Dartmouth's Friends of the Norris Cotton Cancer Center—whose major fund-raiser is an annual biking, walking, and rowing event called the Prouty (see www.theprouty.org). But when she conceived of this mosaic, she had no tie at all to Dartmouth. Here's how she tells the tale: "Feng shui is a hobby of mine. I was living on Nantucket before coming to the Upper Valley, feeling stuck because I couldn't find enough year-round work to make ends meet." Eventually, she "started exploring jobs in Vermont and New Hampshire." She was doing a lot of mosaics at the time, so containers filled with shards of pottery were all over her tiny apartment. "One tile fragment I was excited to build a larger piece around was a little tandem bicycle. . . . With Vermont always on the brain, I envisioned the little cyclists riding on a couple of big, green mountains, with a big, blue sky and yellow sun." During her job search, "this piece was in a dish near my front door, [which], in feng shui, is your career area. I had never heard of the Prouty, [but] the best job I found . . . was working for the Friends, which is about 90% working on the Prouty." A similar kind of karma graced this year's Prouty, which fell on a perfect, sunny midsummer day and raised almost \$2.5 million for cancer care and research. ■

For a **WEB EXTRA** with a gallery of photographs from this year's Prouty, plus more about Whelihan's artwork, see dartmed.dartmouth.edu/f11/we02.