

GROUT

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MODERN MOSAIC EXCELLENCE

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On a visit to Exeter from my home in the south east in 2001, my eye was caught by a poster for a mosaic exhibition in the Royal Albert Memorial Museum. Remembering my childhood visits to Verulamium, I decided to pop in and have a look.

The BAMB *Exposure* exhibition, which included works by Cleo Mussi, Dugald MacInnes, Vanessa Benson, Elaine M Goodwin, Jane Muir, Catherine Parkinson, Trudi Lloyd Williams and Robert Field, was a revelation to me. I went back excitedly for a second visit, and was totally hooked – particularly by Bob Field's super-flat matt ceramic abstracts which somehow seemed so three-dimensional. Within a year, having moved to Devon, I was making mosaics, joining BAMB and helping Allan Punton with *Grout*.

So to be able to interview Bob Field, the mosaic artist who inspired me to get involved, for this issue's Cover Story, was a real privilege, and I hope that you find his story as inspirational as I did.

In fact, *Grout* 40 is all about inspiration.

Last October saw a truly inspiring British Mosaic Forum (see page 10) and fortunately for those unable to attend, there are videos of the lectures (see page 3) as well as a fascinating account of the making of the BAMB Mosaic of the Year on page 12.

Who could fail to be inspired by the genius of Nek Chand? Did you know about the opportunities that exist to volunteer on the site of his stupendous Rock Garden? You can find out about the man and his life-long project on page 16.

Also in this issue, we feature the work of award winners – including some of our regional members (on pages 4 and 5) and our own chairman, Gary Drostle (on page 7) - as well as the achievements of school children (with some help from Jan O'Highway) on page 14.

Get inspired!

Manya McMahon
Editor

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The aims of BAMB

- to promote, encourage and support excellence in contemporary mosaic art
- to raise public awareness of modern mosaic art through exhibitions, publications, events and related educational activities.

BAMB membership is open to all who are interested in modern mosaic art including those who live and work overseas.

BAMB membership rates

Standard £25 UK (£23 if paid by standing order)
Standard Overseas £30
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If you wish to join, please contact the Membership Secretary

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An obsession with pattern

BAMB founder member Bob Field only wanted to learn how to make mosaics so that he could make reconstructions of Roman designs. A course with Elaine M Goodwin soon changed his mind, and he's spent almost 20 years exploring the medium's possibilities for self-expression. See page 8.

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FEATURES

The Rock Garden of Chandigarh and the genius of Nek Chand



Nek Chand Saini. Some call him a saint or prophet, and certainly his spirituality is a powerful aspect of his presence, as anyone who has met him would testify. Others simply refer to him as a self-taught genius whose use of spatial relationships on such a massive scale could compete with the greatest of architects, whose giant waterfall sculptures are outstanding achievements of innovative engineering, and whose thousands of sculptures of human figures, creatures, even trees, capture the sublime serenity of perfect form.

Nek Chand Saini was born in the India of the British Raj where he had an idyllic childhood and became the first person

in his village to graduate from a high school. However, his home was in what became Pakistan, and in 1947 he was forced to flee to the Indian side during the Partition, along with the rest of his Hindu relatives and neighbours. He and his family had to leave their home, their farm and their village, an experience that had a deep bearing on his later burst into creativity. He eventually found employment at the giant construction site of the new city of Chandigarh being built in what was left of Indian Punjab by Le Corbusier. In 1958, while working as a roads inspector, he started collecting river stones of different shapes and sizes, and industrial waste materials. Chand was fascinated by the mystical significance of rocks and their innate character. For years he worked in secret in a hidden forest clearing on the outskirts of the newly constructed city.

He began by building a series of alleyways and courtyards, a reconstruction of the home village he had so cruelly lost. Gradually he added pools and streams and then set many hundreds of the large stones he had collected into formal

groupings and arrangements. Still in almost total secrecy he began to form his first figurines and statues, using a combination of cement left over from construction projects and a host of found materials. For armatures he used old bicycle parts, with handlebars becoming the basis for animal horns and mudguards the supports for swaying female figures. A final coating of smoothly burnished pure cement combined with waste materials such as broken glass bangles, crockery mosaic, or iron-foundry slag were then placed

Nek Chand Foundation



Rock Garden Chandigarh India

The Rock Garden, Chandigarh, India, is a 25-acre fantasy world of sculptures, waterfalls and huge swings created by artist, architect and engineer, Nek Chand. The *Nek Chand Foundation* is a registered charity that protects the Rock Garden and supports Nek Chand to complete his work. The *Nek Chand Foundation* raises international awareness of this environmental and artistic masterpiece, and organizes volunteer trips.

website
www.nekchand.com



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Volunteers stay at the Rock Garden for one month in November or Feb/March each year and take part in activities from creating the world's largest mosaic with recycled tiles, to picking up trash, or documenting the Garden. The Rock Garden is a beautiful place surrounded by bird-filled forest, and a month's stay is a rewarding multi-cultural experience.





on the figures, with many of his earlier pieces having shells for eyes.

By the time that his creation was discovered by a government working party clearing the forest in 1972, he had built over several acres and created almost 2000 individual sculptures. The discovery caused a sensation and although he had been illegally using government land in a strictly controlled area, support for him in Chandigarh

outweighed officials who demanded its immediate destruction. Further pressure on the authorities led to Nek Chand being relieved of his duties as a roads inspector and being able to devote himself full time to expanding his creation along with the help of a salary and 50 labourers paid for by the government.

Within a few years he was able to set his sculpture into a whole series of walkways and themed mosaic

courtyards and what would become the Rock Garden was officially inaugurated in 1976. The final phase of the Garden is fairly near completion, with an even larger waterfall, an amphitheatre, a snaking arcade with giant swings, and large walkways with full-size mosaic animals. It is this final stage, Phase Three, that has developed into a giant international mosaic project.

There has always been a difficult relationship with the Chandigarh City Authority. The Rock Garden was built on government land and is therefore publicly owned. Although there have been agreements in the past that entrance money should be spent on the maintenance and development of the Rock Garden this is rarely the case. Even though the Rock Garden earns over £300,000 per year, very little is ever put back into its upkeep, a situation made worse by apathy and corruption.

This neglect has threatened to badly affect the Rock Garden and as a result Nek Chand's international friends and admirers established the Nek Chand Foundation, a UK charity, to organise volunteers to spend a month at the Rock Garden to work on mosaic projects and help maintain the Garden. Parties of six to eight volunteers spend one month living and working at the Rock Garden, mending, cleaning, making sculptures and working on mosaics. Full details about the volunteer programme can be found at www.nekchand.com and the Foundation's John Francis Cross, is happy to answer email queries personally on johnfranciscross@hotmail.co.uk.

The Rock Garden and its creator Nek Chand are a gift to humanity, incomparable to any other artistic creation the world has seen. In spite of the neglect it suffers at the hands of an uncaring city authority, the Nek Chand Foundation does all it can to support this great man and his extraordinary achievement.

John Maizels

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