

Obituary for Aureleo Rosano

On August 7th, 2023, the world lost a great luminary. But the light this inspiring man leaves behind burns on in the countless sculptures, mosaics, and other pieces of art he created, and most importantly, in the countless lives he touched.

Aureleo Rosano left this planet a better, more lively, artistic, authentic, beautiful, and much more interesting place than he found it.

Aureleo Paul Rosano was born in New Britain, Connecticut on May 29th, 1939 to Vincenzo “James” and Anne Elizabeth Rosano, Italian immigrants whose strong work ethic, moral compass, and pride in their Sicilian heritage they passed on to their son.

As a child, Rosano made it his duty to both protect and torment his two sisters, Janice and Phyllis, and to keep the school principals and teachers on their toes. He preferred science and math to “the fuzzy stuff” but he liked the poetry of E.E. Cummings (“because he liked to break the rules too.”). From an early age, Rosano was a round peg unwilling to try to make himself ‘fit’ in a world full of squares. A true maverick, and a rebel.

Rosano was an iconoclast by nature, and a little too free-thinking, free-wheeling, rambunctious, and curious for most of his teachers to handle, both in high school and in college. His wide and varied interests were simply beyond what a formal education could provide.

In January 1960, Rosano gave up on universities, opened up a map of the United States, ripped off the northern half, and boldly and randomly chose a new home for himself (knowing that wherever he pointed on this “revised” map would be warmer than frigid New England). Then, without hesitation or money in his pocket, he packed up and moved to the place where his finger landed: Tucson, Arizona.

Rosano wore many hats in his lifetime, both literal and figurative. In his early days in Tucson, he worked as a dishwasher, banquet manager, and maître d’hotel at the historic El Conquistador Hotel, and later, as a copper miner, house painter, apartment owner, and manager. Rosano also worked as a test engineer for Hughes Aircraft (where he won the US Air Force Craftsmanship Award), and became an accomplished steamfitter, pneumatic control engineer, successful business owner, and teacher (“Outstanding Instructor”, Pima College).

Rosano (AKA “the Boss”) loved to wear hats, and was rarely seen in public without sporting a smart (preferably purple) chapeau. He was also known to wear a scooter helmet now and then, and in 1960, on a ‘59 Lambretta, he ventured out on a zig-zag impulsive journey across the US (which you can read about in his book “Scoot Across the USA” published in 2016.)

In 1968, he married Barbara Cressy from Darien, Connecticut, with whom he had his daughter, Teresa Carmela, and triplet sons, Dante Vincenzo, Marco Aureleo, and Antonio Michelangelo.

In 1973, Rosano added ‘builder’ to his resume. Having purchased a remote plot of desert next to the Tortolita Mountains, he built his home from the ground up, using adobe bricks he made by hand.

Rosano loved music and was an amateur musician himself. As a father, Rosano encouraged his children to be free thinkers and gave them building materials, tools, and musical instruments instead of toys. He was a huge supporter of his childrens’ musical careers and adventures (at one point, renting town cars and traveling to the East Coast as band manager for his sons’ band “The Crawdaddy-O Brass Band”), and was always proud of his daughter’s accomplishments in architecture and academia.

More than anything, Rosano was a mosaic artist and metal sculptor. On September 7, 2002, he married fellow artist Angela Rose Johnson, and art became an even larger part of his life.

Rosano first became enamored with mosaics in his early 20s, and after learning how to weld, he became a sculptor as well — often combining the two arts in his work. Although he did take on some commissioned work, mostly Rosano created for himself. Rosano was proud of the fact that he had no formal art training: “I’ve never had the desire for art instruction, and have studiously avoided reading too much of the history and various movements in the art world. The various definitions and expressions used in ‘artspeak’ do not interest me at all and I have carefully preserved my ignorance.” (The Rosano Sculptures, Published 1984).

Rosano’s last few years of creating mosaics were some of his most prolific. For the last decade of his life, Rosano was also an active art teacher ... teaching both his own students, and volunteering at Toscana Gallery where he could share his talents and enthusiasm with children. He had a large presence on social media and contributed to dozens of art pages, as well as sharing his poems, stories, and thoughts with anyone willing to engage with this incredibly charming man.

Rosano’s art studio looked like the set of “Sanford and Son”, but ask any of his students and they would tell you that it was their favorite place to be. He would greet all of them with that signature mischievous smile, a cup of black coffee, and an encouraging and supportive teaching style that drew the best out of them and out of their art. His teaching was spiced with his philosophies of life and art, and there was always a clear sense that he was teaching his students more than mosaics.

Everything Rosano did, he did artfully. Together, Angela and Rosano created one of the most artistic, beautiful, unique, and welcoming homes. They taught art classes, hung art galleries, produced outdoor art installations, and welcomed friends and other artists into their home with a warmth and generosity that was unmatched. And cookies. So many delicious and wonderful hand-made cookies. Rosano loved making and, more importantly, eating cookies. The only thing he seemed to enjoy more was sharing them with his friends and students.

“The Boss” was also a published author, poet, and a consummate storyteller. But his greatest story is the story of his life ... a life lived in the service of art, music, friendship, family, curiosity, teaching, and of being authentic and true to oneself. His legacy is a rich mosaic of all of the things he cherished ... at the top of that list, his loving and devoted wife Angela and his children and grandchildren.

Rosano’s life was like a great mosaic — as Rosano used to say, “all great mosaics share these traits: a little bit of planning, diverse materials, and lots of lively colors.”

His passing has left so many of us feeling broken. But mosaics are made of broken pieces, and it is only right that we make something beautiful from his wonderful, varied, and rich legacy. It is what he would want.

Anita Krizzan wrote, “We are mosaics. Pieces of light, love, history, stars... Glued together with magic and music and words.” Rosano was also glued together with magic, music, and words and the light, love, and history he shared with all of us, just by being who he was, remain.

Aurelio Rosano, you were a shining star of enthusiasm, curiosity, mischief, love, and light and your star continues to burn bright.

-Chris Stamos, mosaic student and friend.