



## Maple Knoll Village

Ken Wright

# *I Can Hear You Now*

Materials: used hearing aid batteries, spray paint, wood, glue, electrical wire

(13in high by 11in wide)

Both my wife and I have hearing aids, and without much thought of it, have been putting our used, dead hearing aid batteries into a pill container. Last year when the jar became full (approximately 250 batteries) I began to feel the need to do something creative with them.

Laying them out on a counter it was easy to arrange them into a close packed hexagonal pattern, and from there to imagine the analogy of this array of circles to the array of microdots on a TV screen that produce images our eye could interpret. Thus was born the idea of a mosaic made from batteries. But a mosaic of what? It struck me that the most natural thing would be an image of where these batteries had lived their useful life: the ear.

Reducing this idea to practice brought its challenges. It wasn't hard to digitize a photo of an ear by dividing it up into small circles, but it quickly became apparent that I was going to need a lot more than 250 batteries to make an image that people could readily see as an ear. Playing with the size of the circles representing batteries convinced me I'd need around 1000, or about 32 by 32 (This isn't the exact number I ended up with; I leave it as a challenge to the viewer to determine that.)

My many friends and neighbors at Maple Knoll came to the rescue here. I put out a call for used batteries and within a few months had what I needed. (Special thanks to one person who had a stash of over 300, and another of 200!) So in this sense it's a real piece of community art: your batteries are in there somewhere!

My original plan was to use the two different sides of the batteries to form the contrasting regions of the image. But on laying out trial patterns it became clear that that approach didn't give enough contrast to distinguish the image. So I began painting some of the batteries with black spray paint to get two distinct "colors": silver and black. But those images were too stark, so I added a third "color", gray, to provide intermediate tones. The ear piece and battery pack behind the ear were a late addition to add realism. If the viewer still finds it difficult to resolve the image, try squinting and viewing it that way. Or look at it at an oblique angle to help your eye "see" it.