

# Mosaic Art

## Exploring Color, Composition, and Rhythm

by Maria D. Rapicavoli, CMA Artist in Residence 2023-24

Drawing inspiration from artists such as Alma Thomas and Sam Gilliam, students will explore rhythm and composition through mosaic design.



## Materials

- Glass Tiles
- Mosaic Grout
- Glue
- Paper
- Cardboard
- Colored Pencils
- Paintbrush
- Sponges
- Disposable Gloves
- Mixing Bowl

## Looking at Mosaics: Examples

### Alma Thomas

Alma Thomas, a prominent figure in abstract art, is renowned for her vibrant and rhythmic compositions inspired by nature and her surroundings. Thomas's bold use of color and geometric shapes captivates viewers and ignites a sense of joy and vitality.

'The Eclipse' by Alma Thomas, 1970, acrylic on canvas

'White Roses Sing and Sing' by Alma Thomas, 1976, acrylic on canvas

### Sam Gilliam

Sam Gilliam, a pioneering figure in abstract expressionism, employs bold and vibrant colors in his artworks to evoke emotional responses and challenge traditional notions of space and form. Through his use of color, Gilliam creates dynamic compositions that invite viewers to explore the interplay between light, color, and movement

'From a Model to a Rainbow' by Sam Gilliam, 2011, installation [Video Link]

### Throughout Antiquity

The Cathedral of Monreale, ca. 1180, Palermo, Sicily [detail]

'The Great Hunt', Villa Romana di Piazza Armerina, 4th Century AD

Cave Canem' [Beware of the Dog], Naples National Archaeological Museum

**While looking at these artworks, consider the following questions:**

- How does Alma Thomas use color to create a sense of rhythm in her paintings? How does it differ from Sam Gilliam's work?
- Can you identify any patterns or repetitions in the way either artist applies colors to their canvases?
- How do you think each artist decided where to place each color on the canvas?
- Imagine you're listening to music while looking at each artist's paintings. What kind of music would it be, and why?

## **Step 1: Creating Your Design**

Start by drawing the desired geometric shape or pattern on a white paper. Try experimenting with different shapes and compositions, considering aspects such as symmetry, balance, and visual interest. This initial sketch forms the basis of the mosaic and will be your guide for laying the tiles.

## **Step 2: Selecting Tiles**

Now it's time to choose your tiles! Take your time to choose tiles that match the colors and design of your sketch. After selection, use a small amount of glue to attach the tiles to the white paper according to your sketch. Be sure to observe spacing and alignment to create a mosaic that looks cohesive and visually pleasing.

## **Step 3: Preparing the Mosaic**

Ensure that your mosaic artwork is securely attached to the white paper. Check for any loose or uneven tiles that may need to be adjusted. Gather all necessary materials, including cardboard, grout, a grout float or spreader, and a small bucket of water.

## **Step 4: Affixing the Mosaic to Cardboard**

Transfer the mosaic from the white paper to the cardboard surface. Apply a strong adhesive, such as mosaic or tile adhesive, to firmly attach the mosaic to the cardboard. Press down gently to ensure proper adhesion. Allow the adhesive to dry completely before proceeding.

## **Step 5: Grouting**

Mix and prepare the grout according to the manufacturer's instructions. Apply the grout over the surface of the mosaic, ensuring that all gaps and spaces between the tiles are filled.

Work in small sections, smoothing the grout evenly over the surface. Once applied, wipe away excess grout with a damp sponge. Allow the grout to dry completely before displaying your finished mosaic artwork.

Experiment with different grout colors and techniques to achieve your desired effect!

## **Maria's Notes**

**1.**

In art, rhythm refers to the flow and movement created by the repetition of elements such as lines, shapes, colors, and patterns within an artwork. An artwork with a strong sense of rhythm will guide the viewer's eye across the composition, creating a sense of harmony and balance.

**2.**

While students demonstrated keen enthusiasm for the mosaic medium, a few encountered challenges in translating their original sketches into the placement of small colored glass tiles. This difficulty resulted in moments of frustration and contemplation among some students, as they grappled with the intricacies of the project. Despite these initial hurdles, the grouting process proved to be a source of enjoyment for the class as a whole, with students relishing the opportunity to see their mosaic compositions come to life!



Examples From the Field:

# Fourth and Fifth Graders at Hudson Guild, NYC

## Process Shots



Examples From the Field:

## **Fourth and Fifth Graders at Hudson Guild, NYC**

### **Finished Works**





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