

Mad Mosaics

Part 1

History of Mosaics

Mosaics have been a popular art form in several cultures around the world. The earliest known mosaics were found in a **Mesopotamian** temple dating back to the 3rd millennium BC. Made up of ivory, seashells, and stones, these decorative, abstract pieces laid the groundwork for mosaics made thousands of years later in Ancient Greece and the Roman Empire. Unlike the Mesopotamian mosaic-makers, however, **Classical** artists opted to create pictures, patterns, and motifs in their mosaics.

Mosaics are designs and images created using small pieces (*tessrae*) of stone or other materials which have been used to decorate floors, walls, ceilings, and precious objects since before written records began. Like [pottery](#), mosaics have rarely tempted looters and so they are often found in places where everything else has long since vanished. From ancient [Mesopotamia](#) to Mesoamerica, mosaics not only reveal the artistry of civilizations but also provide an invaluable insight into what ancient peoples wore, ate, and looked like. We can see gods, myths, ritual practices, sporting activities, agricultural techniques, [architecture](#), transport, weapons, and tools. We can even see how the world once was and glimpse now lost landscapes, flora and fauna.

Materials

Early Mesopotamian mosaics were made by combining terra-cotta fixtures. Similar to what we now know as [mosaic design](#), these early works of art were limited to red and white and aligned symmetrically – forming a pattern. In addition to decoration, these mosaics also served as protection from harsh weather.

Often depicting pagan gods, people and animals, the Ancient Greeks were the first to use what is known today as [tesserae](#) or the many small pieces of marble, glass, or tile that comprise a mosaic artwork.

Ancient Greek mosaics tesserae varied in size. Inlaid patterns' average tessera would measure approximately 1 centimeter. Further down the timeline, nearing the start of the Medieval times, more mediums became available, giving way to a wider assortment of raw materials. Additionally, the creation of floor mosaics was often a question of employing not only aesthetic elements but also quality materials with resistance to being worn out from being tread upon for centuries to come.

This became the main reason stone was used for early Ancient Greek mosaics. For much of history, the mosaic artist was therefore limited to whatever variations in color the natural stones at hand would provide

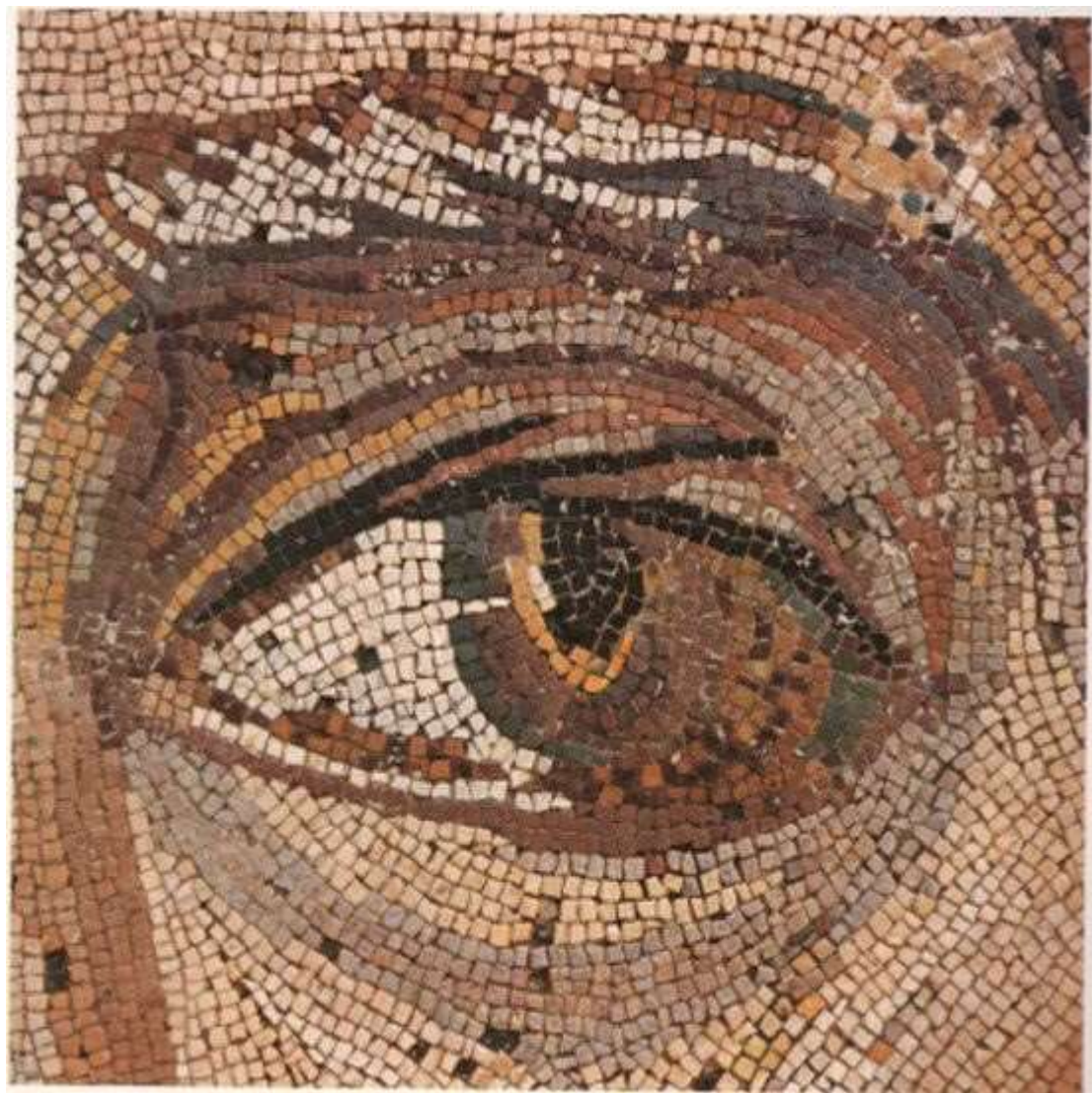
Ancient Greek Mosaics



Greek Mosaics, which can be found in parts of Greece and modern-day Macedonia are believed to be the earliest form of the art still in existence today.

<https://aeon.co/videos/how-does-a-precious-ancient-greek-mosaic-get-from-an-excavation-site-to-a-museum>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-iZ5wqRe-8>
(16 mins) Zeugma











Alexander Mosaic

The ***Alexander Mosaic*** is a [Roman](#) floor [mosaic](#) originally from the [House of the Faun](#) in [Pompeii](#) (an alleged imitation of a [Philoxenus of Eretria](#) or [Apelles' painting](#)) that dates from circa 100 BC.^[1] It is typically dated in the second half of the century between 120 and 100 B.C.^[2] It depicts a battle between the armies of [Alexander the Great](#) and [Darius III of Persia](#).

<https://www.ancient.eu/Mosaic/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-iZ5wqRe-8> (Khan Academy)





Naples/Pompeii



Photo © 2006 Brankov L. Antchev

















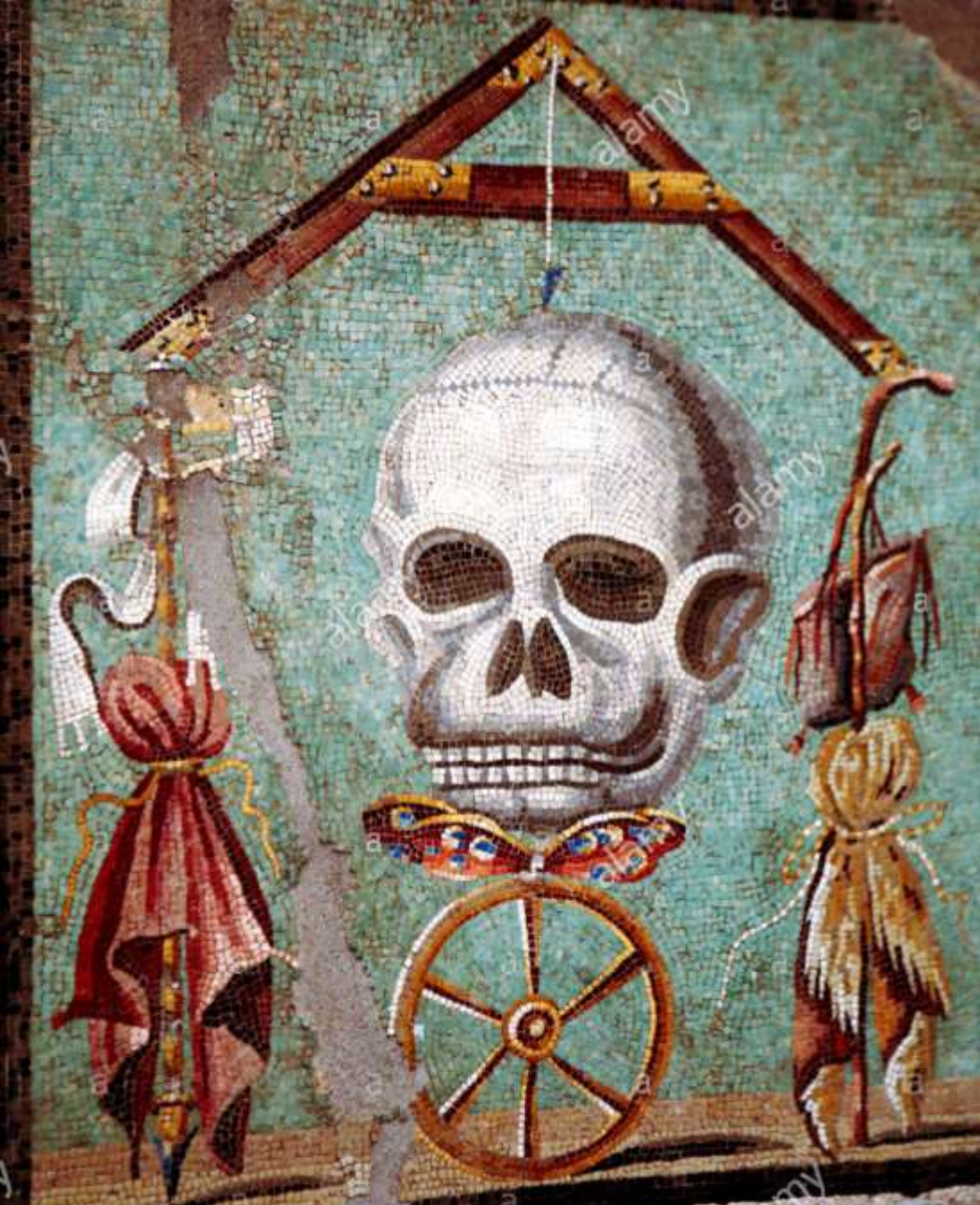
ΔΙΟΣΚΟΥΕΛΗΣ ΖΑΜΠΟΣ ΕΠΟΙΗΣΕ











Turkey

- <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/culture/turkey-massive-intact-mosaic-to-go-on-show-/1521176>
- https://www.boredpanda.com/ancient-greek-mosaic-excavation-zeugma/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=organic
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZWPLsybhP58> (Roman)

Byzantine Mosaics

Sculpture in the round, the preferred medium for images of pagan deities, disappeared in Byzantium and was replaced by its aesthetic opposite: mosaic. With figures depicted against a glimmering gold background, mosaics suggest an ethereal, heavenly realm. In antiquity, most mosaics adorned floors and so were usually made of colored stones that could withstand people walking on them. Because the Byzantines put mosaics on the walls, they could also use fragile materials: mother of pearl, gold and silver leaf, and glass of different colors. Small glass cubes, or tesserae, were placed at angles to catch and reflect the light, creating a sparkling, otherworldly atmosphere.



Ravenna

<https://www.itinari.com/ravenna-and-its-mosaic-masterpieces-hvqu>

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/early-europe-and-colonial-americas/medieval-europe-islamic-world/v/justinian-and-his-attendants-6th-century-ravenna> (San Vitale)



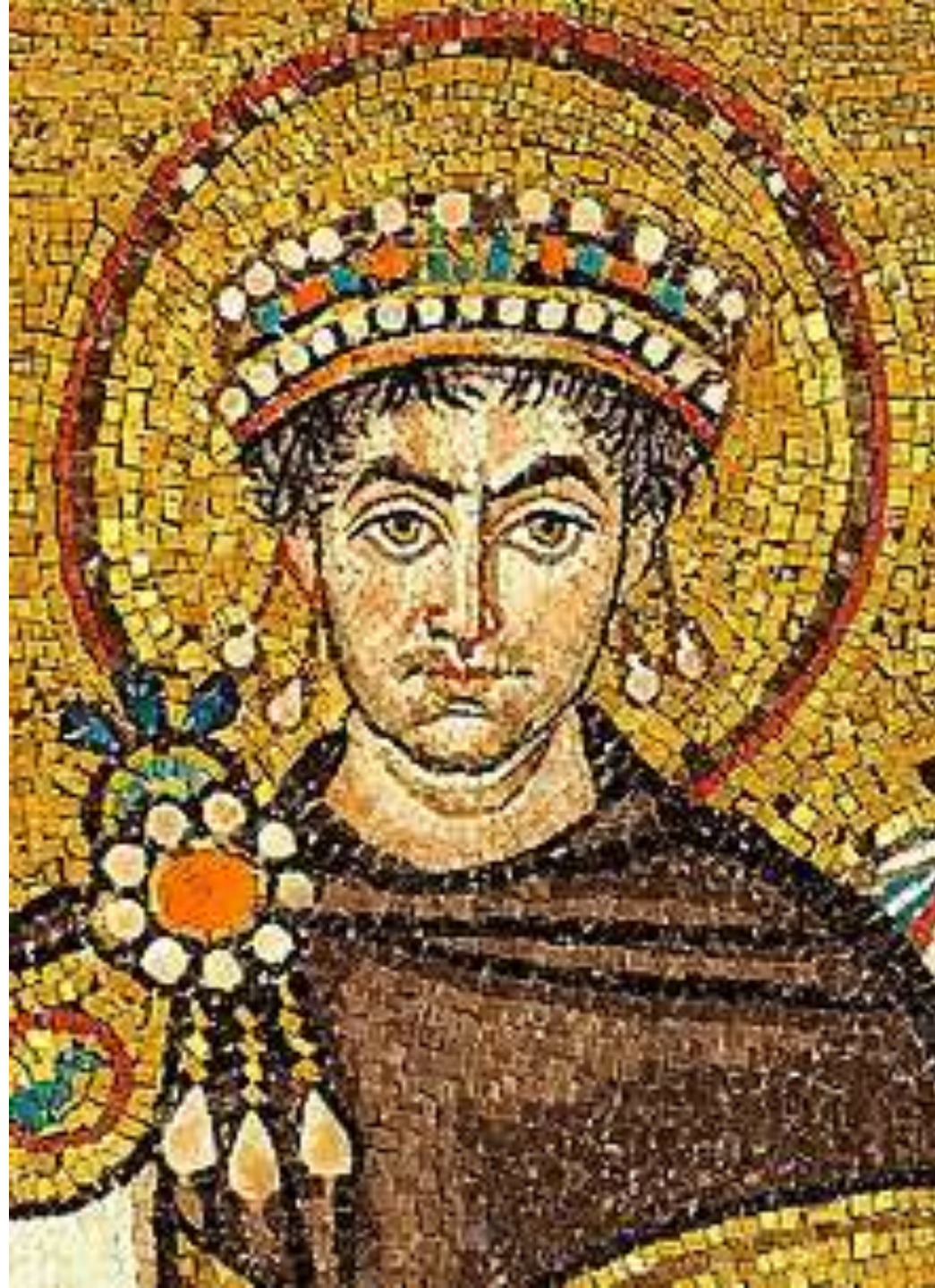














As We Saw It



Antoni Gaudí (1852-1926)

Park Güell

Park Güell is a public park system composed of gardens and architectural elements located on [Carmel Hill](#), in [Barcelona](#), [Catalonia](#), [Spain](#). Park Güell is located in [La Salut](#), a neighborhood in the [Gràcia district](#) of Barcelona. With urbanization in mind, [Eusebi Güell](#) assigned the design of the park to [Antoni Gaudí](#), a renowned architect and the face of [Catalan modernism](#). The park was built from 1900 to 1914 and was officially opened as a public park in 1926. In 1984, [UNESCO](#) declared the park a [World Heritage Site](#) under "[Works of Antoni Gaudí](#)."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Deq8vfb71kE>

















Niki de St. Phalle (1930-2002)

Tarot Garden

Niki de Saint Phalle (born **Catherine-Marie-Agnès Fal de Saint Phalle**) was a French-American [sculptor](#), [painter](#), and [filmmaker](#). Widely noted as one of the few female [monumental sculptors](#), Saint Phalle was also known for her social commitment and work.

The **Tarot Garden** (Italian: *Il Giardino dei Tarocchi*, French: *Le Jardin des Tarots*) is a [sculpture garden](#) based on the esoteric [tarot](#) in [Pescia Fiorentina](#), Tuscany, [Italy](#). The park was opened to the public in 1998.

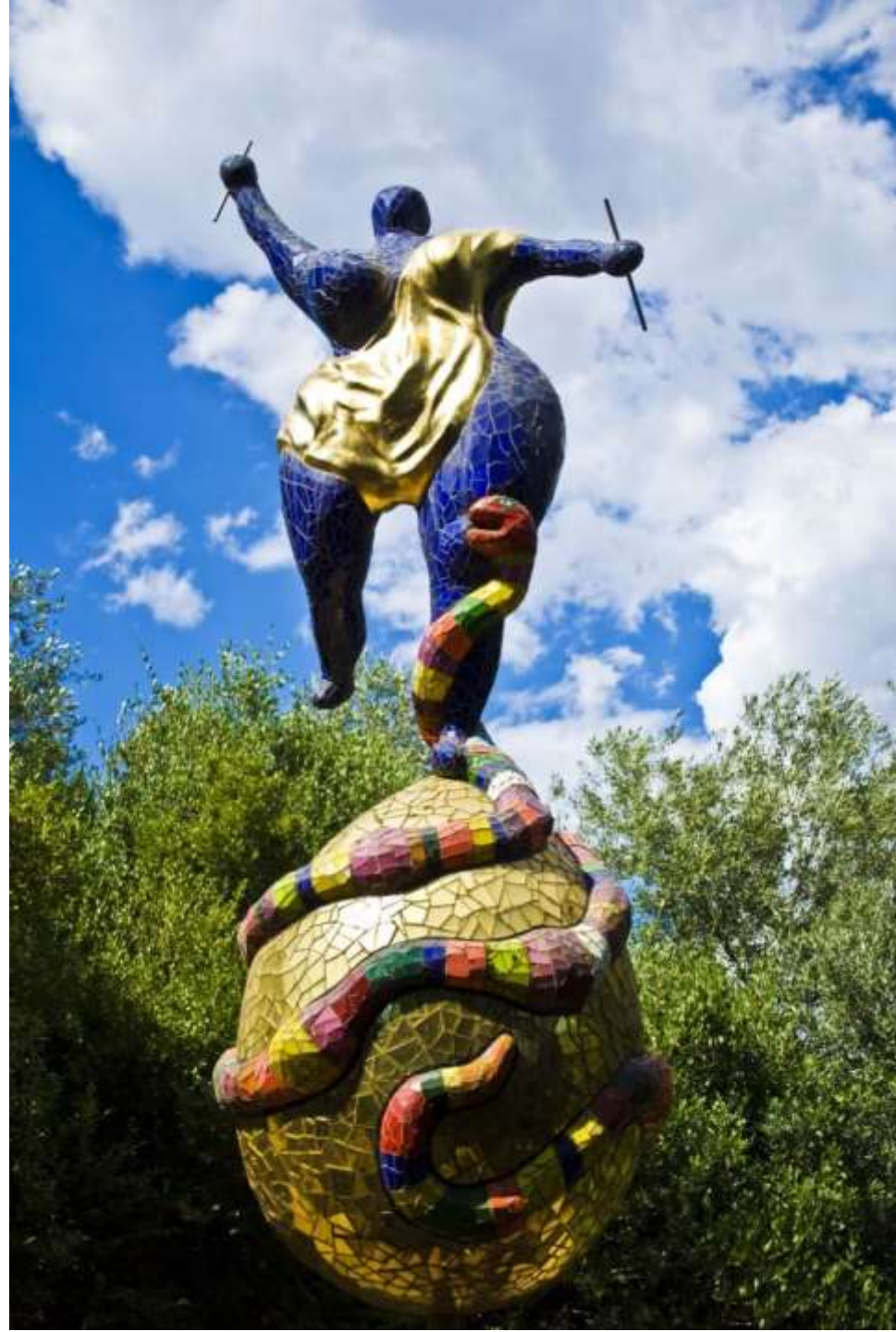
Niki de Saint Phalle, inspired by [Antoni Gaudí's Parc Güell](#) in Barcelona, and [Parco dei Mostri](#) in Bomarzo, as well as [Palais Idéal](#) by [Ferdinand Cheval](#), and [Watts Towers](#) by [Simon Rodia](#), decided to make something similar in design for her monumental sculpture park based on the [Tarot](#). In 1979, she acquired some land on top of an [Etruscan ruin](#) in Garavicchio, Tuscany, about 100 kilometres (62 mi) north-west of Rome along the coast. There she built the *Giardino dei Tarocchi*, containing twenty-two monumental figures representing her idea of the greater Mysteries of the Tarot, constructed of reinforced concrete and covered with mirrors and ceramic mosaic. Some of the larger sculptural figures can be walked through; the artist herself lived inside the [sphinx](#)-like *Empress* for several years during the construction of the garden.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FgzVZwFm9nM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0niI7Jospuo>

























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25 YEARS

Atlantide Phototravel

Assignment Suggestions

- Use paint chips or cut up magazines to create tesserae and use them in an artwork
- Create visual texture by “gridding out” a painting
- Create stepping stones using quickcrete and broken pottery
- Use rocks, pebbles and found objects in a mosaic
- Create an artwork inspired by mosaics
- Play with gradations of color
- Find examples of mosaic art in your neighborhood or other areas of LA and photograph them
- Create a mosaic using photographs