

Murray Avenue School-Art Appreciation 2012

Middle Eastern Tile Painting: Presentation Notes for Parents

The focus of this presentation will be on tiles made for architectural decoration in the country of Turkey. The tiles were predominantly produced in **Iznik**, a small but ancient city on the Marmara Sea outside of **Istanbul**, which is the country's capital.

A little Turkish history: The city now known as **Istanbul** was formerly the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, called **Constantinople**. This gated city was founded by Constantine, Roman Emperor in the 4th Century CE, when the enormity of the Roman Empire found itself split into East and West to allow maximum political control in the regions. The Eastern Roman Empire eventually developed its own culture and identity through its rulers, referred to as **Byzantine**. The Byzantines ruled the city, an important stop on the famous "Silk Road," until the 15th century when conquered at last in 1453 by **Mehmet II**, an Ottoman warrior prince controlling the Eastern part of the country.

In the process of conquering the Byzantines, most of the city was destroyed by cannon fire. Thus began the rebuilding process of the city which would now be known as Istanbul. This vigorous building regime was based on pre-existing structures, like the Church of Hagia Sophia, which was taken over and rebranded as the Blue Mosque.

Mehmet also took over the existing palace complex at the crest of a hill overlooking the Bosphorus river, calling it the **Topkapi Palace**. This is the location we will be looking at as the finest example of painted tile as use for architectural decoration in the 15th-18th centuries in the slow but expansive development of the complex.

The Tiles

Tiles are made by firing a composite of clay, glass and quartz (we will refer to this as *clay*). The composite is kneaded thoroughly to get out all the air bubbles, then shaped into vessels or flat tiles for wall decoration, and fired in a 1000 degree C kiln. After being cooled, the tiles are ready to be painted with designs.

Designs are usually made up of different **motifs** (design element). Iznik designs are famous for **stylized flowers** including tulips, carnations and peonies, as well as a stylized leaf design with pointy edges called "**saz**" **leaves**. Another popular motif found on tiles and other media is the "**cintamani**" design, which features a triangular formation of three circles surrounded by wavy lines. Individual tiles act as a piece of an overall design and often the motifs are cut off at the edges of a square tile.

The designs are **transferred** onto the tiles from paper using charcoal, and then outlined in paint and filled in with color. The **colors** are predominantly dark blue, turquoise, light green, and tomato red, with occasional yellow or orange.

After being painted, the tiles are covered in **clear glaze** and fired again, heightening the color and creating a shiny surface. Wall tiles are attached using mortar and usually connect on all four edges creating a continuous design.

Presentation Guideline for Students

- Where is Turkey? What continent are we looking at?
Turkey is located in the Middle East on the continent of Asia
- What other countries are next to Turkey in the Middle East?
Border Middle Eastern Countries Iran, Iraq and Syria; near Israel, Saudi Arabia, Egypt; Border Eastern European countries Bulgaria, Greece on the Mediterranean Sea.
- Country Capital
The capital city is called Istanbul, on the Western side of the country. Istanbul is known as the "Bridge between Europe and Asia" because it is the city you pass through to get from one continent to the other. Located on the Bosphorus River.
- Founder of the modern city of Istanbul
*Mehmet II in 1453, first ruler of the Ottoman Empire.
The Turkish King is called a Sultan.*
- Where did he live?
In a palace of course! His palace is called the Topkapi Palace, on a high hill with a large entrance gate, called the Gate of Peace.
- What kinds of decorations did he use in his palace?
Tiles, textiles; 18th c. painting shows the tiles are covering the whole wall behind the sultan; Summer pavilion also shows tiled walls with different designs arranged in sections
- What kind of designs do we see painted on the tiles?
Flowers and leaves, and some writing in another language (Arabic, Persian or Turkish)
- What do these tiles look like up close?
Tiles are painted by hand with different designs. Each element in a design is called a "motif". Motifs include stylized flowers and leaves with pointy edges called "Saz" leaves. Also popular is the "Cintamani" design which has three circles and wavy lines. When you look at one tile it usually has a motif cut off at the edges because these all fit together like puzzle pieces to make one large continuous design.
- What are tiles made of? *Clay mixed with other materials*
- How did they make the tiles?

Step 1: Kneading the clay to get air bubbles out

Step 2: Firing the clay to make it hard and dry so they can be painted

Step 3: Decorating: Designs are transferred with chalk on the fired clay

Step 4: Chalk lines are outlined with paint

Step 5: The outlines are filled in with color paint

Step 6: Glazing: Painted tiles are covered in clear glaze

Step 7: Firing: Glazed tiles are put back in the kiln to come out shiny and bright

NOTE: color difference in tiles before and after glazing/firing

Project Materials

- Bisque tiles (try to handle as little as possible on the surface)
- Paints-5 colors
- Plastic cups for paints 20-25 (5 cups per table group)
- Brushes (one brush per cup) *Students should use the brush only in that color to paint, to avoid having to rinse brushes in water, etc.*
- 4.25" x 4.25" designs ~24 (one per student)
- Chalk, one piece per student (can break in half if needed)
- Pouncers (sponges with handles), 2-3 per table group
- Laminated images of Iznik designs
- Baby wipes for cleaning hands

Project sequence

1. Each student gets one 4.25" x 4.25" design; same design per table group suggested!
2. Student should trace the design with chalk, pressing firmly
3. Collect chalk and clean hands with baby wipes
4. Pass out tiles, and laminated pictures if desired for reference
5. Transfer chalk outlines by flipping design, rubbing with wooden end of pouncer starting at one corner and working all the way across the tile. Check to see if design is transferred by lifting one corner
6. Begin painting design by filling in with chalk. Older students can outline design first. It's fine to paint on top of paint if they want to change the color or add designs, just wait a minute to dry.
7. When dry (this is quick) collect tiles and put names and teacher on back of tile with special marking pencil only!! (regular pencil will burn off in kiln)
8. It's best to have a shoebox or other small box to keep the tiles all together. Layer or stack with paper toweling in between. Put teacher's name and grade on box top and leave in the AA closet.

All tiles will be glazed and fired at the same time at the end of the project, so the kids will receive their finished tiles around Spring Break. It's a great finisher to back the final tile with cork, and use as a coaster.

Have fun!!

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