

What are Mosaics or Tessellations

The word 'tessera' in latin means a small stone cube. They were used to make up 'tessellata' - the mosaic pictures forming floors and tilings in Roman buildings

Here, the term has become more specialised and is used to refer to pictures or tiles, mostly in the form of animals and other life forms, which cover the surface of a plane in a symmetrical way without overlapping or leaving gaps.



The Beginnings

The tilings in the Alhambra in Spain were laid out by the Moors in the 14th century. They are made of coloured tiles forming patterns, many truly symmetrical. By our definition, they are not tessellations but they did inspire the young M.C Escher, who copied them into his notebooks and later converted some into true tessellations.

Escher noted that the tilings never included animals or plants. His tessellations hardly ever left them out!

When lecturing later in life, Escher used to ask the audience if they knew of any tessellations done by other artists in the past. He was sent details of a tapestry design by Koloman Moser entitled "Forellenreigen", or trout farm, depicting a fish tessellation completed in 1899 - a year after Escher was born.



M.C. Escher 1

Escher can be regarded as the 'Father' of modern tessellations so I've allocated several galleries to his art. He is famous for his impossible depictions like the one on the right, but he was a master of lino and wood cuts and produced many superbly crafted landscapes as well.

During his life, he became obsessed with filling the plane with pictures that did not overlap or leave spaces. Aged 68, he stated, "Filling the plane has become a real mania to which I have become addicted and from which I sometimes find it hard to tear myself away." Here is a very shortened version how this came about...

Project:

Prepare small squares of colored paper – the children draw a large simple diagram or pattern on a paper and then use the small squares to “color” in the drawing – using different shades of paper to nuance the picture. The smaller the squares, the better. You can draw a correlation to pixels which are what a digital screen or picture uses.