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GalaGreenwood
MOSAICS STUDIO

Gala Greenwood
Contemporary Artist and Mosaic Craftswoman

"Mosaic is the art of long patience. It is built over time. A living image emerges, with its curves, its breaks, its colors, its strengths, its weights, its impulses, and its structure. Mosaic brings materials to life and animates what is fixed."

-Gala Greenwood-

The Tale of an Artist

Heir to a millennia-old tradition, as will be explained below, while still being used for everyday décor in architecture and interior or exterior decoration, mosaic is at the heart of the creative process of many contemporary artists. Today, as in the past, it is a vehicle for emotion and sensation, a motivation that underpins the work of Franco-British artist Gala Greenwood. Since 2012, she has dedicated her mind and hands to creating unique mosaic works.

Based in Brussels, Gala Greenwood approaches mosaic from a modern perspective, using materials such as glass, marble, ceramic, and porcelain tiles, applied in indirect setting. In a world of infinite technological possibilities, the artist-mosaicist uses traditional processes governed by patience, respect, flexibility, and creativity.

Freed from painting, contemporary mosaic takes many forms, sometimes blending with other mediums. It encompasses various practices, with many artists around the world using materials that are not traditionally applied to mosaic, combining paper, metals, and any material that can be glued or fragmented.

Gala Greenwood embodies both the spirit of an artist and the skills of a craftswoman. Whether signing her works under the name Gala Greenwood or creating interior architecture projects, her work consistently shares a singular and ever-renewed creative force. Through her objects and artworks, she creates unique atmospheres and experiences.

For Gala Greenwood, "mosaic is the art of long patience. It is built over time. A living image emerges, with its curves, its breaks, its colors, its strengths, its weights, its impulses, and its structure. Mosaic brings materials to life and animates what is fixed."

Close to stained glass and the metaphysical idea of light, mosaic is also, for her, a vehicle for shared emotion.

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A true artistic partner, Gala Greenwood loves to engage in conversation about her works to create the possibility of dialogue between interior architecture, art, and craftsmanship. Each of her creations tells a different story and evokes a particular emotion. Whether working on special commissions or creating a unique mosaic work, she always combines her personality and character with individual elements to create meaningful images.

Beyond creativity and innovation, sustainability and service are also essential values for Gala Greenwood, who is actively and without prejudice involved in every stage of production, offering unmatched flexibility from conception to final delivery.

Mosaic Through Time

Since the earliest antiquity, mosaic has used fragments of stone, colored or not, enamel, glass, or ceramic, assembled with plant-based mastic or natural plaster, to form patterns or figures. Regardless of the material used, these fragments are called tesserae.

Now part of the decorative arts, mosaic originated in Uruk, Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq) about six thousand years ago. Mosaics were initially made of painted clay cones that, when assembled, created geometric patterns.

The term "mosaic" comes from the Late Latin *musaicum*, itself derived from the Ancient Greek *mouseîon*, referring to that which is related to the Muses. In Ancient Greece, this technique was used in caves dedicated to the Muses, the nine goddesses who presided over the arts in mythology.

The oldest technique, known as *opus lapilli*, consisted of uncut black, white, orange, brown, and red pebbles, often placed in dichotomy (dark/light contrast), reminiscent of painted vases. Quickly, it began to depict scenes from daily life, hunting, and animals.

Initially, mosaic was utilitarian. In Greece, it was used as paving in rooms exposed to moisture. Developed by the 8th century BCE, it was made from uncut pebble tesserae. Soon, mosaics were no longer just for the floor but became wall decorations, a preferred decorative covering for homes.

Refined in Carthage, the marble mosaic technique, also partially made of glass paste or seashells, became widespread in the Roman world during the Punic Wars. By the 3rd century, tesserae began to be cut with a hammer, a method known as *opus tessellatum*, which spread throughout the Empire. Mosaics then covered floors and walls, as seen in Pompeii and Herculaneum. Meanwhile, another technique emerged, *opus sectile*, consisting of large marble slabs cut into geometric patterns.

Following in the footsteps of the Greeks and Romans, the Byzantines also made extensive use of mosaics. The two main centers of production were Ravenna and Constantinople, as evidenced by the Basilica of San Vitale (Ravenna) and the Hagia Sophia in modern Istanbul. Byzantine mosaics, made of glass paste and gold (a thin sheet of gold sandwiched between two layers of glass), were primarily wall mosaics, while the tesserae were cut with a hammer and chisel and not applied flat, creating multiple reflections and giving the compositions a special intensity.

Though mosaic remained in use throughout the Middle Ages, especially among the Byzantines, and through the Italian Renaissance, a continuation of Byzantine art, it increasingly faced competition from fresco painting. Artists sought to create mosaics that resembled painting as closely as possible: the joints between tesserae became minimal, and the chromatic ranges, with the introduction of Venetian enamels (*smalts*), were very broad, allowing for the creation of subtle gradients.

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After almost disappearing for several centuries, mosaic art reappeared in France in the second half of the 19th century, with its use by Italian mosaicist Giandomenico Facchina (1826-1903) during the construction of the Garnier Opera House in Paris. Trained in Trieste and Venice, Facchina also worked on the restoration of the mosaics in St. Mark's Basilica. He introduced the technique of indirect setting, already practiced by the Venetians, allowing for prefabrication of mosaics in the workshop and greatly facilitating the work of mosaicists under his direction, who used Venetian enamels and marble.

The Art Nouveau movement further amplified this widespread diffusion, with Gustav Klimt using it at the Stoclet Palace in Brussels, or Antonio Gaudí, who adorned the Park Güell in Barcelona, before it found its place in the Art Deco style. This was followed by renowned mosaicists of the 1930s, such as the Odorico brothers, Isidore and Vincent, who used marble, stone, ceramic, and glass paste "dyed in the mass" and applied in indirect setting.

In the aftermath of World War II, Ravenna, a major historical center of mosaic creation, brought the medium back into prominence through mosaic artists who created designs for major painters like Marc Chagall. Later, it was used by Op Art artists, such as Carlos Cruz-Diez and Victor Vasarely.

More recently, artists like French Invader have embraced mosaic, considering pixels as tesserae and flooding public spaces with mosaics inspired by the Space Invaders video game. Since then, new artists practicing pixel art have begun using mosaic in the streets, reviving and elevating the medium, which finally achieves the recognition it deserves as a respected applied art form.

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