

Between 2014-2016 Opus Oracle published a series of tips and tricks from a wide range of mosaic practitioners.

Here is a selection of the most useful.

Tips and Tricks - April 2014

In this first of a series, artists Helen Bodycomb, Dominic Johns and Maria Kokkoris share their tips and tricks

Sticky Business

Hot weather: Re-use quality ziplock bags for precise glue application. Use a silicon spatula to clean out the dregs. (thanks Dom!)

Cold weather: keep all glues tightly sealed in lidded tubs to prevent cement pebbles forming from airborne moisture.

Brush pesky glue squeeze: sponge away unwanted glue squeeze then use a small paintbrush to recess further. Also use a brush to spread a shallow glue bed that squeezes up in a grid when installing a mosaic pre-laid on mesh.

Helen Bodycomb

Tweezer Substitute



This is one of my oldest and favourite tricks.

A pencil with a bit of Blu-tack is great for lifting or setting small tesserae. And you can use the other end for fine adjustments.

Saves searching for an elusive pair of tweezers and is a lot cheaper.

Dominic Johns

Versatile Vinegar

Anyone who has worked with cement and grout can relate to how your hands dry out from the harsh materials. Rubber gloves don't always protect your hands adequately. This is where the household vinegar comes in. After you clean your hands rinse your hands with white vinegar. It helps restore your PH balance and will help keep your hands from drying out badly.

Use white vinegar to clean off a freshly dried grouted mosaic. It is very mild and does a wonderful job of cleaning up. Just pour vinegar on a cloth and wipe clean. To clean more stubborn bits, dip a toothbrush in a small container of vinegar, work the area and wipe away with a clean cloth and then rinse well with clean water. It is inexpensive compared to some of the commercially available chemical cleaning products.

Maria Kokkoris

Lucy Cleary,
Kathgryn Portelli
and Wendy Tanner
share their tips and
tricks

Tips and Tricks - August 2014

Using Glass Stringers



Glass stringers (basically glass spaghetti, available at glass suppliers) can be used to form fine details in your mosaics, eg. for insect legs, birds feet & eye-lashes. Gently heat a stringer over a candle flame until you start to feel the glass becoming flexible. It can then be bent and curled to create the desired effect. To create an effect similar to a flower stamen, apply heat to the end of the stringer to create a ball. The pieces can then be attached to the top of tiles with a clear setting glue, or embedded in the grout lines.

Lucy

Use Your Camera

Used for best quality images for promotion and merchandising, and for lots of other reasons: WIP (Work in Progress) feedback, checking progress of projects, changing a coloured composition to greys to ascertain where the eye lands and if movement tracks are what I want. I also take final images both indoor and outdoors in various resolutions and formats.



Kathryn

No Go Substrates



Don't ever use particle board or craft wood as a substrate. If it gets damp or wet (my workshop in Bellingen town in NSW has been flooded about 4 times now), it swells and the tesserae pop off.

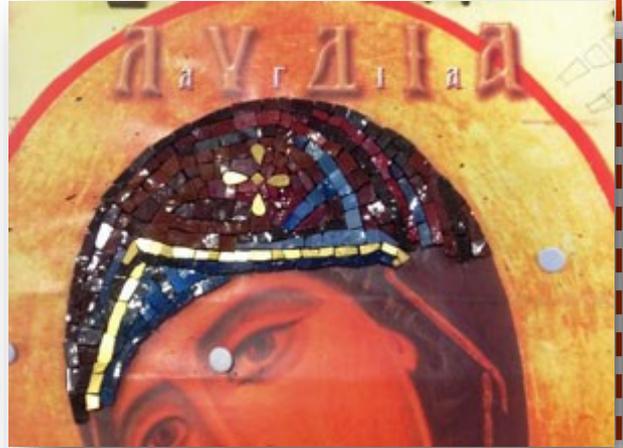
Wendy

Rachel Bremner and Christine de Brenni share their tips and tricks.

Tips and Tricks - October 2014

Working methodically

When working on your mosaic, especially if you are working with small tesserae (pieces), start at the top left of your main image/subject and work across and down following the andamento lines. It is also much easier to glue as you go rather than set it all up then come back and start gluing. Working this way you should avoid getting trapped and having to cut a small and/or very awkward shaped tessera.



Working row by row and not leaving awkward spaces to fill in later

This of course applies if you are right handed, since it means your hand will be moving away from completed work. If you are left handed, you should be able to work from top right, moving across to left and down.

That first glued row provides a base from which to work and once glued, pieces will not be accidentally bumped out of place. Even though pieces are glued it is still possible to go back and make changes if necessary, especially if the adhesive is a water based one which can be softened to loosen the offending piece.

Christine

Feeling Stuck?

A few thoughts about working when you feel creatively stuck. For me it is important to remind myself that it is about play and learning. An exercise can go into the bin when finished if you don't like it. Make it small, use material already cut, left over from previous work. From small ideas bigger ideas grow! No artist only ever makes masterpieces, they practise, so find out how to make practice fun.

- Try using only one material or one colour
- Pick one piece of stone, shell, some object that you are drawn to and try to make a mosaic that works around that piece
- Make a piece where the interstices (gaps) are your main design focus.
- Force yourself to stick down one piece without knowing what is coming next.
- Just start, no expectations. If you don't like it, think hard about why not and learn from it.

Rachel

Kim Grant, Caitlin Hughes and Bev Plowman share their tips and tricks.

Tips and Tricks - June 2015

Easel Ergonomics



One of my favorite mosaicing tips is to work with an easel. This allows you to get your work up in front of you and gives a much better perspective on what you are doing. This only really works with cement-based adhesives or similar as they hold the tesserae in place and things don't slide off. Regularly turn your easel around to get a look at your work from a distance.

Caitlin

Keeping Glue Going

Sometimes I like to use adhesives which need a caulking gun. Those things are so annoying and I found that no matter what I did and what little gimmicky gadget I bought, the adhesive would dry really fast. This isn't foolproof, but the best thing I found to keep the adhesive fresh for as long as possible is to allow a small "nub" of adhesive to extend past the tip and allow to dry. The next time I sit down to work I gently pull the dried bit of adhesive out – usually a longish dried section comes out and I am able to continue working with the fresh glue behind it with no problems and without chunks of dried adhesive getting mixed in. The trick is in making sure not to pull on the dried bit too hard or too quick.

Kim

Staying Put

When placing materials, cutting tile and using beads etc, I always work with a felted jewellery mat next to me. When I cut pieces they do not roll off. Beads etc also stay put. It is always easy to pack up and just place in a plastic container then pull out where I left off! They are very cheap and come in packs of three from craft shops.



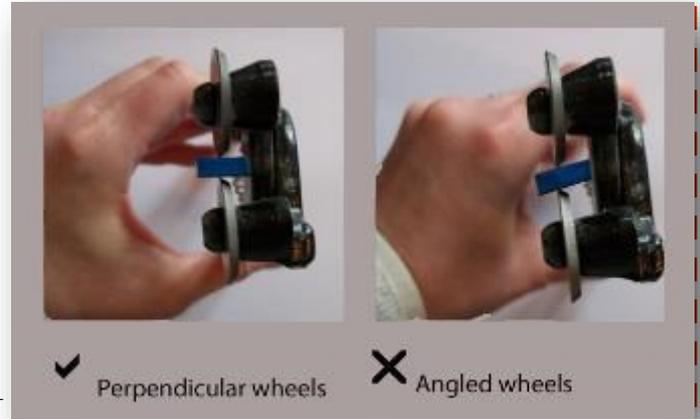
Bev

In this issue Margo Anton, Susanna Mills from Susie's Studio and Marian Shapiro share their useful tips

Tips and Tricks - October 2015

Going Straight

I often have students complain that their cuts aren't straight when cutting with wheeled nippers. The fix is quite simple. Most people inadvertently place the tessera (mosaic material) between the wheels at an angle. By simply double checking to make sure that the tessera you want to cut is absolutely perpendicular to the wheels, you should automatically get better cuts. In addition, supporting the piece by holding it so it doesn't move should also help, and keep you from getting wonky cuts and the dreaded curved cuts.

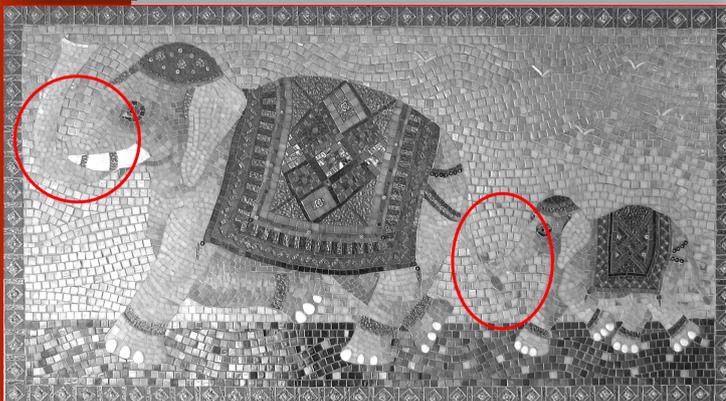


Margo

Getting the Values Right



Sometimes a mosaic can be difficult to read and this is often because a mistake has been made with the values (how light or dark the materials are relative to each other). Modern technology gives us an easy way to check. Most smart phones and tablets have a built in feature to turn photos into black and white or you can do it in any photo editing software.



Marian

Turning the photo into black and white clearly shows the areas that need more contrast