



16th century (Safavid Dynasty,
1501–1736)

Glazed pottery (detail)
3 feet, 6 inches x 10 feet, 6 inches
(106.7 x 320 cm)

PERSIA (IRAN), ISFAHAN

LOOKING QUESTIONS

What is this made of?

Describe the center and side sections. Which sides of the panel have a border?

What color is the background?
What does it remind you of?
What shape are the tiles?

How many points does the large star in the center have?
Look for more stars inside it.
How many points do they have?

Are the designs inside the star, vases, and border simple or complicated? Geometric or free-form? Which lines and shapes are like plants? Why?

This tile panel is over three feet high and ten feet wide.
What words describe how would it feel to be surrounded by these designs?

TILE MOSAIC WALL PANEL

This large panel and others like it decorated the prayer room walls of an Islamic monastery in Isfahan, the capital city of Persia (now Iran), more than four hundred years ago. The monastery was built for followers of Sufism, a branch of Islam that stresses a direct relationship with God through simple living, meditation, and “the path of love.” The thirteenth-century Sufi mystic Jalāl ad-Dīn ar-Rūmī, known by many as “Rumi,” is one of the most widely read poets throughout the world today. To create this striking panel, Persian tilemakers used a difficult **mosaic** technique. Instead of working with small pieces of stone or glass, they covered clay tiles with colored **glazes**, which were then carefully cut and fit together with a **template** and set into wet plaster.

The overall **composition** is simple and **symmetrical**. We see a large star with sixteen points in the center, a vase with flowers on each side, and a border across the top and down each side. These three elements are placed on a smooth, brilliant **turquoise** field of **hexagon**-shaped tiles. Inside each element, however, there are complex **geometric** webs of curving, vinelike lines and leaf and flower shapes. Within the large star, bright white lines form an intricate **radial** design that jumps out from the black background, **ochre** flowers, and graceful blue lines. The vases sprouting teardrop shapes contain similar layers of colorful **arabesque patterns**. These complicated, orderly **motifs** express infinite perfection and precision, while the turquoise recalls clear, blue water and lush green gardens, so desirable in the dry climate of Persia.