THE LOS ANGELES CONSERVANCY AND THE J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM
PRESENT

MOSAIC L.A.

GETTY

LOS ANGELES CONSERVANCY
**WHAT IS MOSAIC?**

By Ann Steinsapir, Ph.D., Education Specialist, J. Paul Getty Museum

**MOSAIC** is an art medium in which small pieces of colored glass, stone, or ceramic tile (called tesserae) are embedded in a background material such as plaster or mortar. The medium itself is so flexible that it is used in a variety of techniques to create different effects—smooth or uneven surfaces, muted or vibrant colors, ordered or random patterns, realistic or abstract subjects, and virtually everything in between. Mosaic design choices are infinite, from simple geometric patterns to the most sophisticated pictorial scenes.

The materials used to create mosaic make it perfect for building decoration, which is why most mosaics are found as part of architecture. Opinions vary as to where the earliest mosaics were created, but the fourth millennium BC Sumeria is one possibility. Archaeological evidence confirms the early pebble mosaic floors dating from the Neolithic period in Crete, roughly five thousand years ago. Mosaic was one of the most popular methods of floor decoration by late Republican Rome and flourished throughout the Roman Empire.

The basic method of making mosaics involves a number of steps, a process that has changed little since ancient times. First is assembling materials; choices of colors and stones have varied through history and until recent times, depended on which materials were locally available. The second step is planning the layout of the design, making sure it fits within the specific space allotted. One of the most important steps is making sure the foundation material of the floor, wall, or ceiling is prepared and ready to take the tesserae. This step is especially important for floors where a strong support has to be in place so that the mosaic patterns will not break down due to heavy traffic.

Mosaic has remained a popular art form for thousands of years. On walls, the mosaic tesserae catch the light, bringing vivid imagery to life. On floors, the designs allow us to enter briefly into impressions of walking into mazes, on water, and on the backs of giants. Two local events—the Getty Villa special exhibition, *Stories in Stone, Conserving Mosaics of Roman Africa*, and the program, *Mosaic L.A.*, co-presented by the Los Angeles Conservancy—are testaments to our continued fascination with mosaic techniques and the labor and concentration it takes to create such beautiful works of art.
BIRTH OF LIBERTY
FOREST LAWN MEMORIAL-PARK
Robert Homer Cumming, Bruno Bearzi, 1964
6300 Forest Lawn Dr., Hollywood Hills 90068

The original Forest Lawn Memorial-Park was founded in 1906 in Tropico, now known as Glendale. Dr. Hubert Eaton, the founder of the park, believed that cemeteries were not places to mourn the dead, but rather to celebrate life and culture. As a result of this approach, he amassed one of the largest collections of sculptural, stained glass, and mosaic artistry in the United States. One of the most impressive, the Birth of Liberty mosaic at Forest Lawn–Hollywood Hills is the largest historical mosaic in the country. It measures 162 feet long and 28 feet high, includes more than 10 million pieces, and portrays 25 scenes of important moments in American history, from the first legislative assembly in Jamestown in 1619 to the Constitutional Congress of 1787.
HOME SAVINGS OF AMERICA  
(WASHINGTON MUTUAL)
Millard Sheets, 1968
1500 Vine St., Hollywood 90028

Built in 1968, the Washington Mutual at Sunset and Vine is one of over 40 branches originally designed by architect and artist Millard Sheets for Home Savings of America. Sheets’ now iconic designs were instantly recognizable and extremely successful, drawing record numbers of patrons because, as the artist said, “people wanted to be associated with something beautiful.” This branch features three mosaic murals, one of which covers nearly the entire two-story primary façade. The murals depict legendary movie stars, a nod to the site’s history as the location of the filming of Hollywood’s first full-length motion picture, “The Squaw Man.”
Renowned American mosaicist Joseph Young's first commission in Los Angeles was to create the mural for the lobby of the new Welton Becket designed Los Angeles Police Facilities Building. Thirty-six feet long by six feet tall, when it debuted, it was the world's largest glass mosaic mural executed by an American artist. Created using over 250,000 Venetian glass tesserae, the mural hangs in space, floating over the floor, cantilevered from two building support columns. It took Young over two years to complete, and was the first of his several public art pieces in downtown, including the mosaic "Topographical Map" on the Neutra Hall of Records Building on Temple Street and the Triforium, a kinetic sculpture across from City Hall.
From the 110 Fwy., exit at Adams Blvd.
The church is located just to the west of the
freeway, between S. Flower St. and S. Figueroa St.
A small parking lot with an entrance on S. Flower
St. is available, or please take advantage of the
adjacent street parking.
(Thomas Guide 634, C-7)

ST. JOHN’S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Mosaics by various artists, 1937–1968
514 W. Adams Blvd., University Park 90007

Completed in 1925 and designed by architects (and brothers) Pierpont and
Walter Davis, St. John’s Episcopal Church is filled with beautiful mosaic
artwork. This Romanesque-style church is modeled on the 11th century
Italian church of San Pietro. Built of simple cast concrete, it was envisioned that the
concrete surface would eventually be covered in decorative materials, such as
mosaics, as time and funds permitted. Many mosaics have been added to the church
over the years, most recently in 1968 with the addition of the Lady Chapel, a
glittering, golden floor-to-ceiling Byzantine-style mosaic inspired by the mosaics of
Ravenna, Italy.

THIS SITE IS ONLY OPEN FROM 1 TO 4 PM
THE TOWERS OF SIMON RODIA
(WATTS TOWERS)
Simon Rodia, 1921–1954
1765 E. 107th St., Watts 90002

The artist called them Nuestra Pueblo or “Our Town,” although generations of Angelinos know them as Watts Towers. These beautiful spires that defy description were the passion and obsession of Simon Rodia, an Italian immigrant construction worker who devoted 34 years of his life to creating them. He worked completely alone, with no written plans and guided only by his artistic vision. The structures and sculptures (17 in all, on a 4,000-square-foot lot) are made of structural steel covered with cement. Their mosaic decoration comprises an extraordinary variety of materials, including broken tableware, figurines, glazed tiles, glass bottles, mirrors, seashells, rocks, telephone insulators, and even shoes.
Special thanks to the sites who so graciously shared their mosaics for this tour: The Forest Lawn Museum, Forest Lawn-Hollywood Hills, especially Alison Bruesehoff, Cynthia Tello, and Matt Aaronson; Washington Mutual, especially Michael Zuniga and Vice President Maria Montenotte; Los Angeles Police Department, especially Capt. Andy Smith and Sgt. Richard Stabile; St. John’s Episcopal Church and The Rev. Canon Mark Kowalewski, Ph.D. Rector; The Towers of Simon Rodia and the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department, especially Leslie Thomas, Ginny Kazor, Rosie Lee Hooks, and Sara Cannon.

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