

MOSAICO

an art form on the move

The elegance and versatility of an ancient building technique rediscovered through the sculptures of Paola Scibilia.



The art of mosaic has historically fulfilled both an important cultural and functional role, evolving in harmony with the technological advancements which have revolutionised the construction industry through the ages. Almost as old as civilisation itself, appropriately, the medium was born principally to beautify and embolden rather than strictly to cover and protect urban roads and pavements and the walls and floors of sacred buildings. Soon, it became recognised as a means of immortalizing the culture and knowledge of an epoch, thanks above all to the durability of the materials used. Moreover, although archaeological evidence indicates that mosaic was most frequently applied as a decorative covering on flat surfaces, in respect of advances in architectural science artists began to experiment; the potential of mosaic as a sculptural medium was even explored, though never truly fulfilled. It's by taking this as her inspiration that the contemporary talent of Paola Scibilia has been able to emerge, having discovered a new, previously unexploited plasticity which leaves scope for exciting and original work with mosaic. As Peter Fischer highlights in his monograph "Mosaics Cicladici", on the hieratic style of the Treviso "artiste", what distinguishes mosaic art is above all the material, formed exclusively from small pieces more or less uniform in shape, which are aligned to form pictures and shapes. The natural shades of the materials or chromatic additives are the only other design apparatus. The word design should nevertheless be used with some caution. In reality the subject is stylised through its coloured background and the joints themselves, between one piece and another, which by creating "directional lines" add a certain dynamic energy to the work. In Scibilia's work, mosaic takes on a new dimension, deriving "body" and movement as it becomes like a second skin protecting the figures represented in the sculpture: they are female bodies, austere divinities, and models up to two metres tall. The structures are held in place by an iron body wrapped in a plaster layer, on which the chips are affixed. And it's the sticking of the pieces and the grouting of the joints which is the most delicate aspect of the mosaic technique, where the artist reveals the full extent of his or her craftsmanship and the choice of adhesives becomes critical, both for safety and manoeuvrability as the artist manipulates the pieces into position.

Mapei suggested that a plaster substrate be prepared with PRIMER G, a primer which creates a sufficiently adhesive surface for all types of finishing.

As regards the sticking of the pieces itself, by using KERABOND, mixed with ISOLASTIC, a strong-sticking elastic mixture is obtained which, by virtue of its quick drying-time and its consistency, enables the artist to arrange patterns with considerable precision. For works commissioned from abroad, the elasticity of the adhesive must go hand in hand with good superficial impermeability properties, particularly when the surfaces are vulnerable to humidity, as is the case at the base of the hand mixed plaster. In this instance KERALASTIC represents an ideal solution, as it can absorb the stress exerted on delicate materials, such as glass, as they are stuck. For some works the final grouting of the pieces can be performed with KERACOLOR, a mortar which, coloured or neutral, is suited to both internal and external applications.

