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Tiles Through Time: design your own and practice mindfulness

Background:

Tiles have been a key building element for over 25,000 years! In this activity, you will learn more about the history of these ceramic pieces while taking a moment to practice mindfulness. Relax and focus on colouring the 'tiles'. You can also get active — have a little stroll and get some pattern inspiration from your surroundings!

Tile, from the Latin word *tegula*, is a ceramic building material. It can be found in different shapes, colours, textures, and parts of a building. The big tile family includes bricks, terracotta, faience, and mosaic.



Moulded Fritware Tile
c. 1250-1350

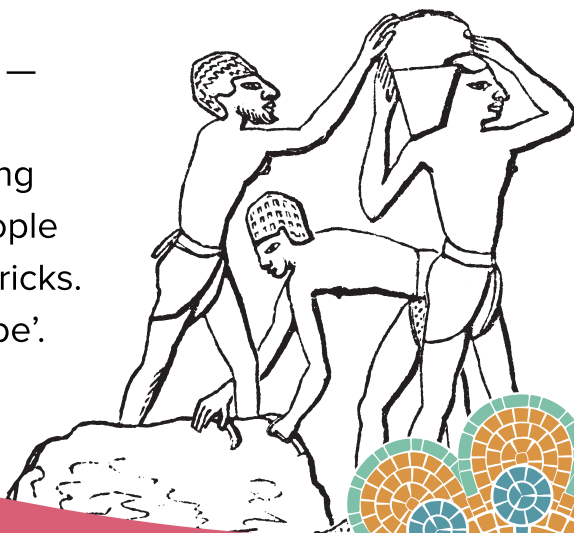
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The making of tiles started when Nomadic people settled along rivers in the Middle East, Egypt and Mesopotamia. Seeking to settle down, they sought a more long-lasting building material. By mixing the surrounding resources — water, sand, clay and mashed reed, and letting them dry, Nomadic people developed sun-dried bricks. They were called 'Adobe'.

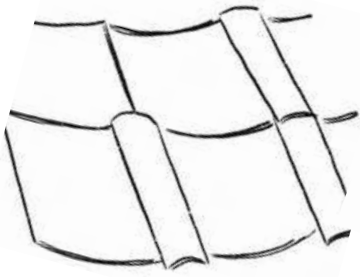


Terracotta Tiles

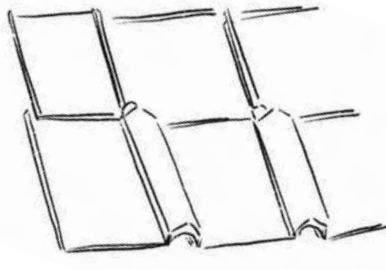
© Cosmos Public Works



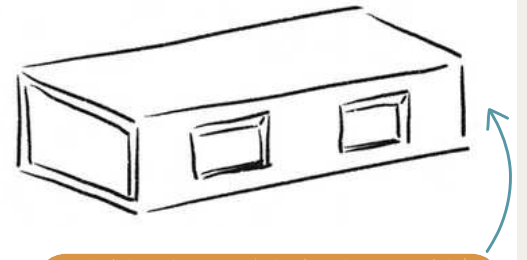
Each kind of tile is named according to its placement in a building, crafting process and cultural context. Here are some examples:



Corinthian Greek roof tile



Lakonian Greek roof tile



Roman Tubili, a hollow tile for distributing hot air in villas and bathhouses

A tile is a storybook crafted on a building. The choice of colour and pattern design often reflects the society's culture, religious beliefs, geographic location and history. Here are some examples:

Figures and Scenes

Tiles on Pharaoh Ramses III's tomb depict a battle scene so detailed that you can see the tattoos of Libyan soldiers. Other glazed tiles found at Nimrud show figures of Neo-Assyrian Kings — Ashurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III being attended by servants.

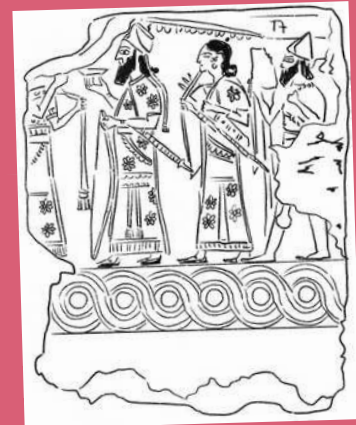


Illustration of tiles found at Nimrud show figures of Neo-Assyrian Kings - Ashurnasirpal II

Techniques in pigment extraction

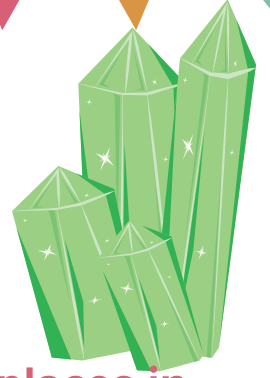
In Aztec ceramics, there is an almost set colour palette of blue, ochre, red, white and black. These are all mineral-based colours — the colouring pigments are made from minerals. The absence of other colours like green

(a common colour in Xaltocan, Mexico) could be for two reasons: (a) Aztec people couldn't extract green from minerals, (b) because of the symbolic association green had, they were not allowed to use it commonly.



Symbolic meanings of colours

Among the indigenous people in Xaltocan, Mexico, green is associated with Xiuhtecuhtli, the god of fire. It is also the 'limited colour' for elites. The shiny finish is associated with jade, emeralds, chalchihuitls and other precious stones.



Lack of characters on religious places in Islamic culture

Tiles in Islamic shrines, mosques and other religious buildings are mostly floral motifs. This is because of Islamic beliefs forbidding the depiction of God's creation in religious places, and also the inspiration from Chinese porcelains.

Pottery figures on rooftops as a symbol of luck and protection

Tiles with drawn-on or built-on guardian figures are seen as a form of protection and a wish for good luck in Chinese and Korean culture. Dragons and other figures are commonly found on the roof ridges of traditional Chinese and Korean buildings as a way to ward off evil spirits.



Thomson, John. *Mandarin Dwelling, Canton*
© The Met, New York

Glazed Earthenware Tile c. 1450-1500

© Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Glossary

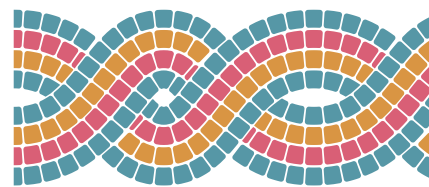
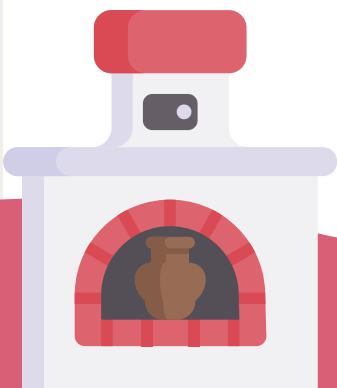
Glaze: A glossy coating on ceramics

Kiln: A larger oven, used for firing clay to make different ceramics goods

Terracotta: A fired red earthy clay with more a rough appearance

Glaze: Glazed on these tiles added tin oxide, giving a shiny effect

Mosaic: Putting a collection of small coloured glass, stone or ceramic pieces together

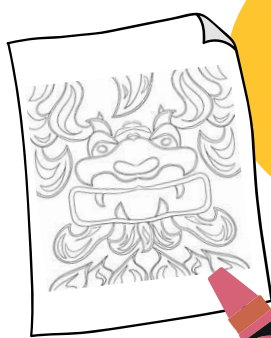


Activity 1: Colour your own tiles!

Age: 8+
Time: 60 minutes

What you will need

- Colouring pencil or your favourite colouring medium
- Printed sheets from this pack



Method

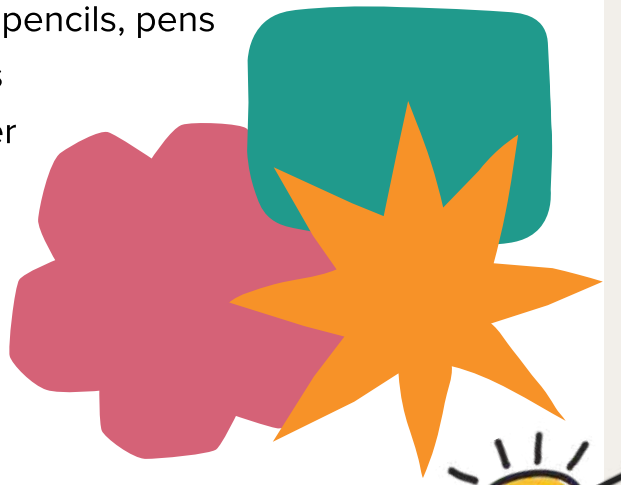
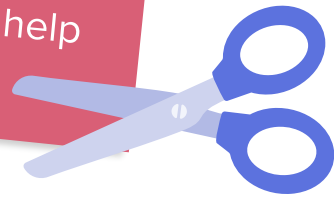
1. Take a deep breath, put on some relaxing music
2. Fill your design with the colour of your choice
3. Display your finished design!

Bonus Activity: Create your own design!

REMEMBER
Be careful when using scissors to cut out the characters, or ask an adult to help

What you will need

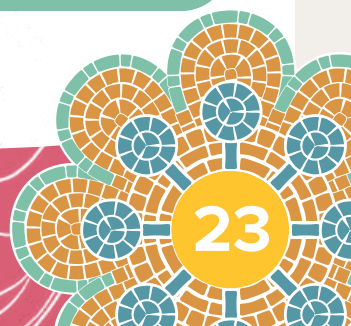
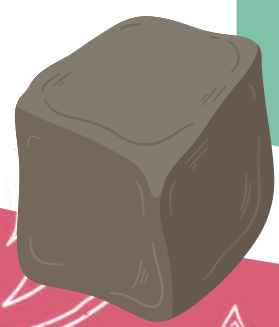
- Colouring pencils, pens or crayons
- Plain paper
- Scissors



Method

1. Grab a square piece of paper or cut out a shape that you like.
2. Then draw the outline of your pattern / mythical creature / flowers.
3. Colour in!

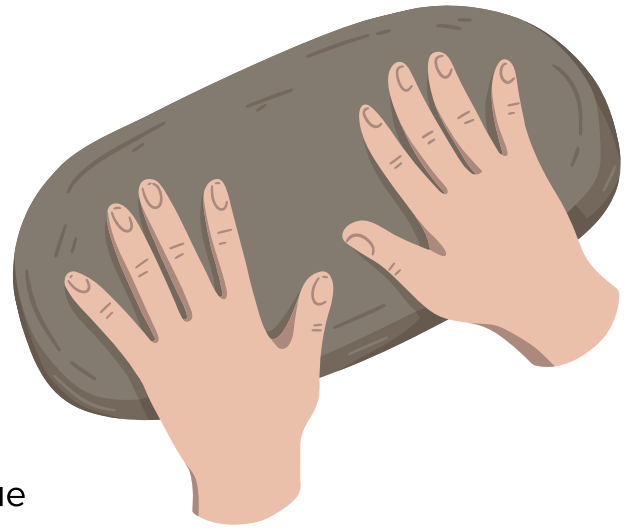
You can also buy a piece of prepared square clay from craft shops and draw your design on the tile!



Activity 2: Make your own clay tile!

What you will need

- Air-dry clay
- Pottery-specific paint or markers
- Transparent glaze (optional for shine)
- Paintbrush
- Flat surface for drying



Method

1. Shape the air-dry clay into your desired tile shape — square, rectangular, or even a star.



2. Let the clay dry completely on a flat surface.
3. Decorate your tile using pottery paint or markers. If adding multiple coats, let each layer dry before applying the next.
4. (Optional) For a shiny finish, gently brush on a layer of transparent glaze once the paint is dry.
5. Allow the tile to fully dry

TOP TIP:

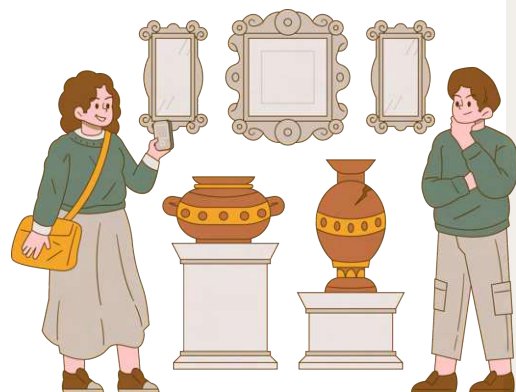
When looking at colours on tiles or buildings:

- Colours can mean different things in different cultures.
- Sometimes it's hard to tell if something is green or blue!
- One colour might have more than one name — like in Japanese or Chinese '青', means blue and/ or green depending on the phrase or sentence.



Field-trip or day-trip idea: 'Art makes art.'

Visit your local museum/gallery/heritage site for inspiration! Pick out elements you like from the collection then make this into a pattern or illustration of your tile. You can take photos or create sketches to help you. Add some of your own sprinkle of magic into your design.



Have a little stroll around your local area! Visit a park nearby or country trails and spot for leaves, flowers, fruits, birds and other little animals. Floral and natural elements are also popular themes for tiles!



WANT TO LEARN MORE?

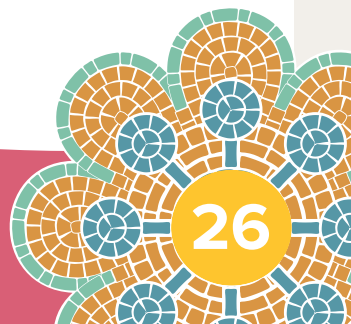
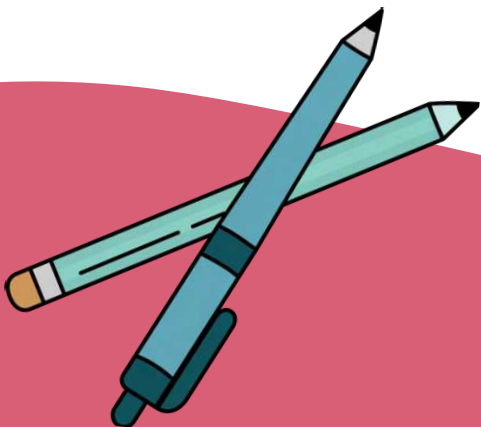
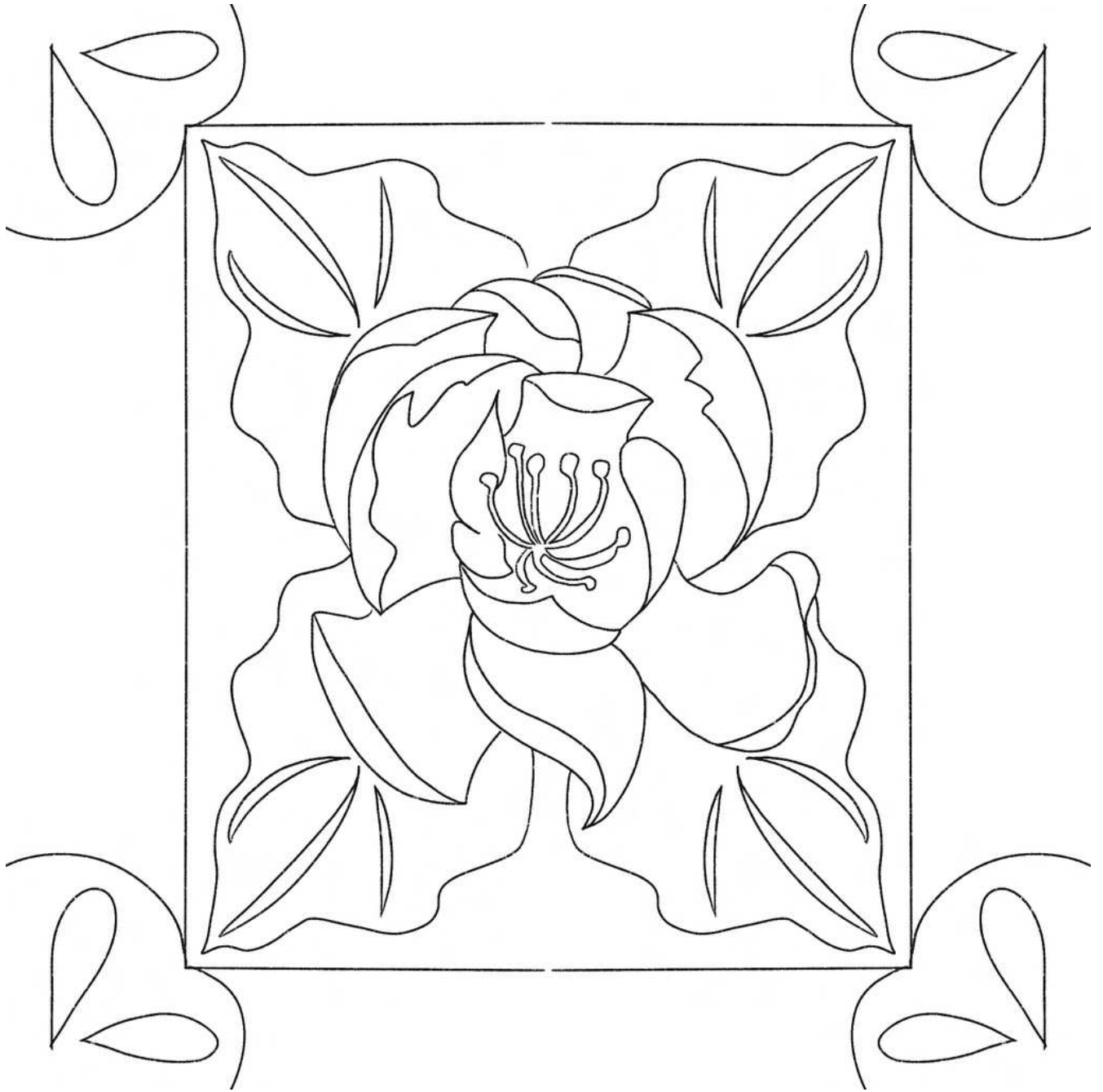
- *5000 Years of Tiles* by Hans van Lemmen
- *The Archaeology and History of Colonial Mexico* by Enrique Rodriguez-Alegria
- *Talavera Ceramics: At the Intersection of Art, History, and Law in Mexico* by Heather Casey



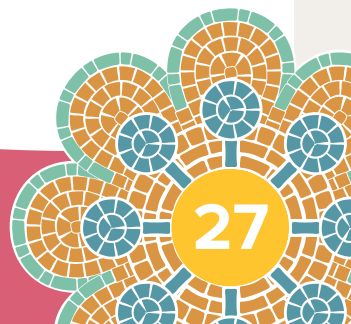
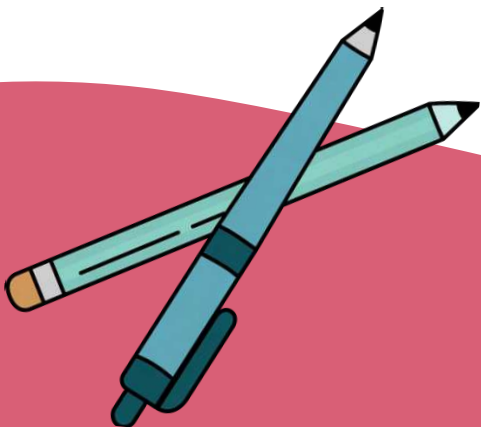


Tile Designs: Easy to Complex

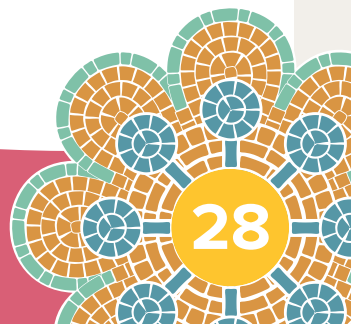
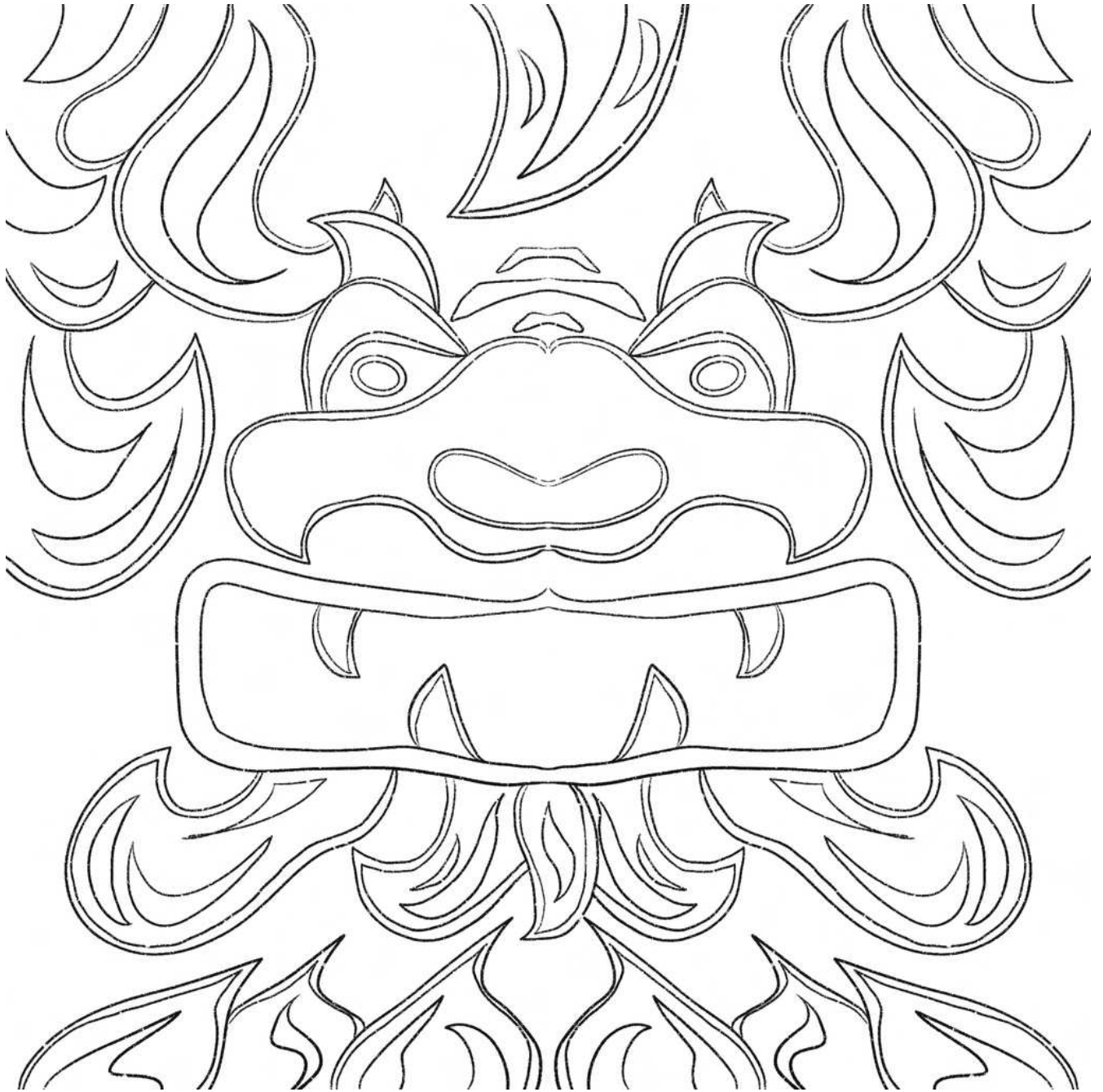
Victorian period inspired floral design



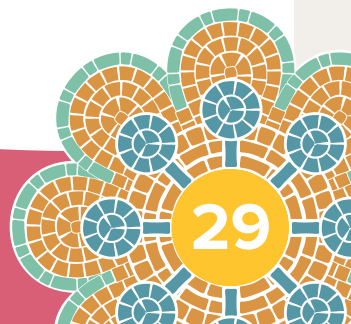
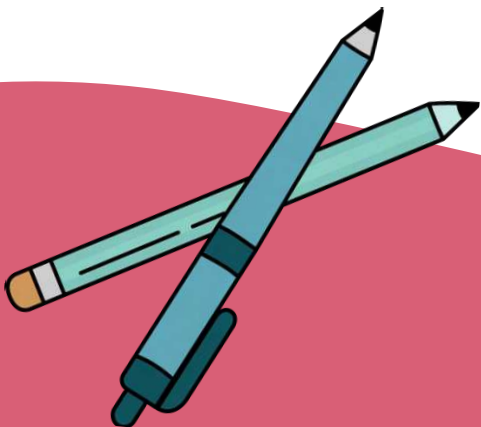
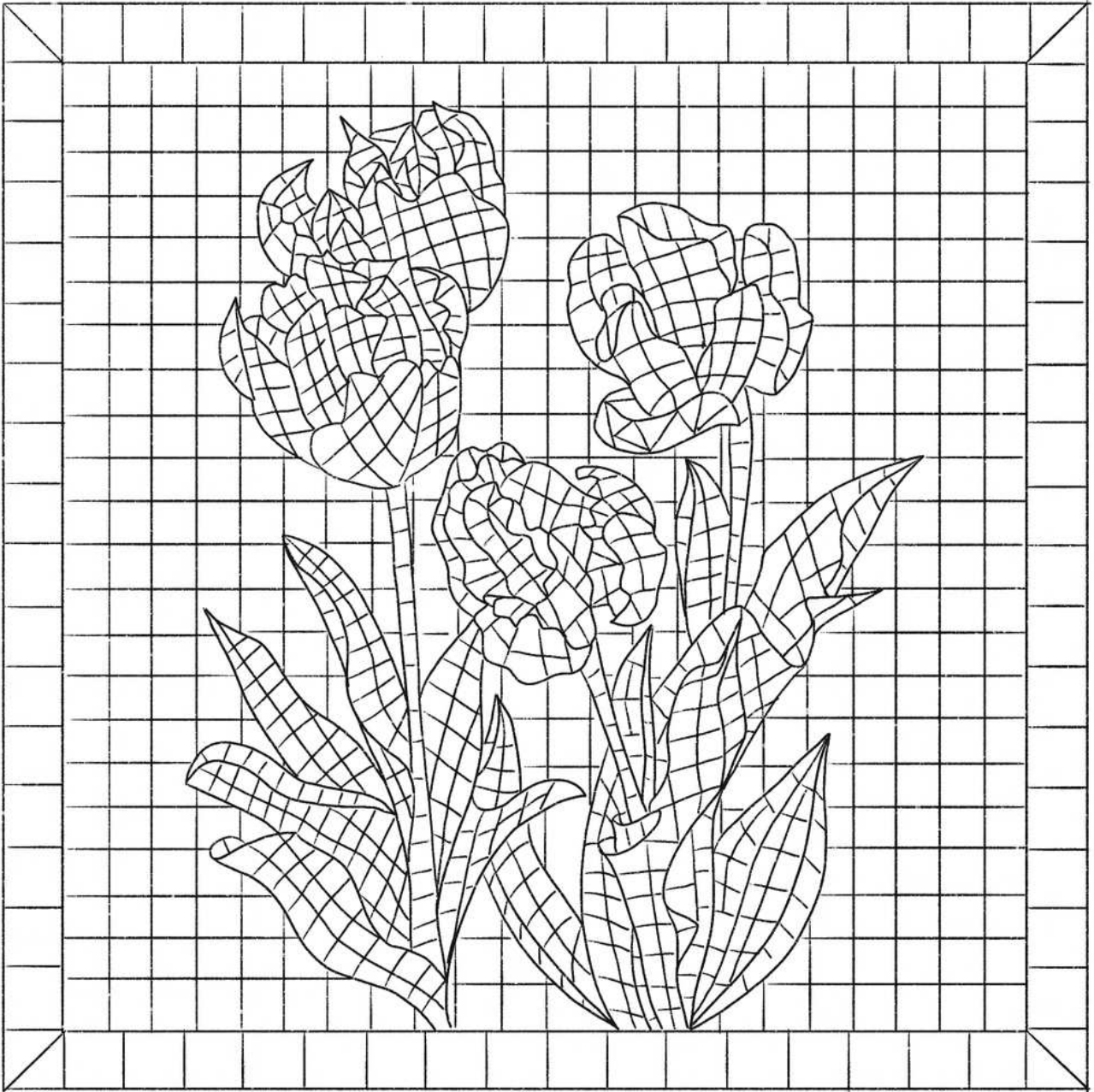
Dragon and cloud, a popular element in Chinese decorative art



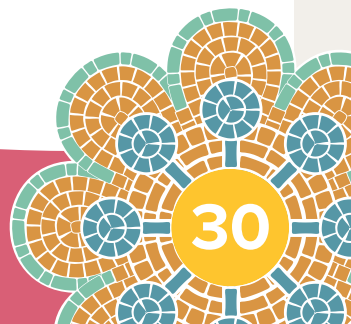
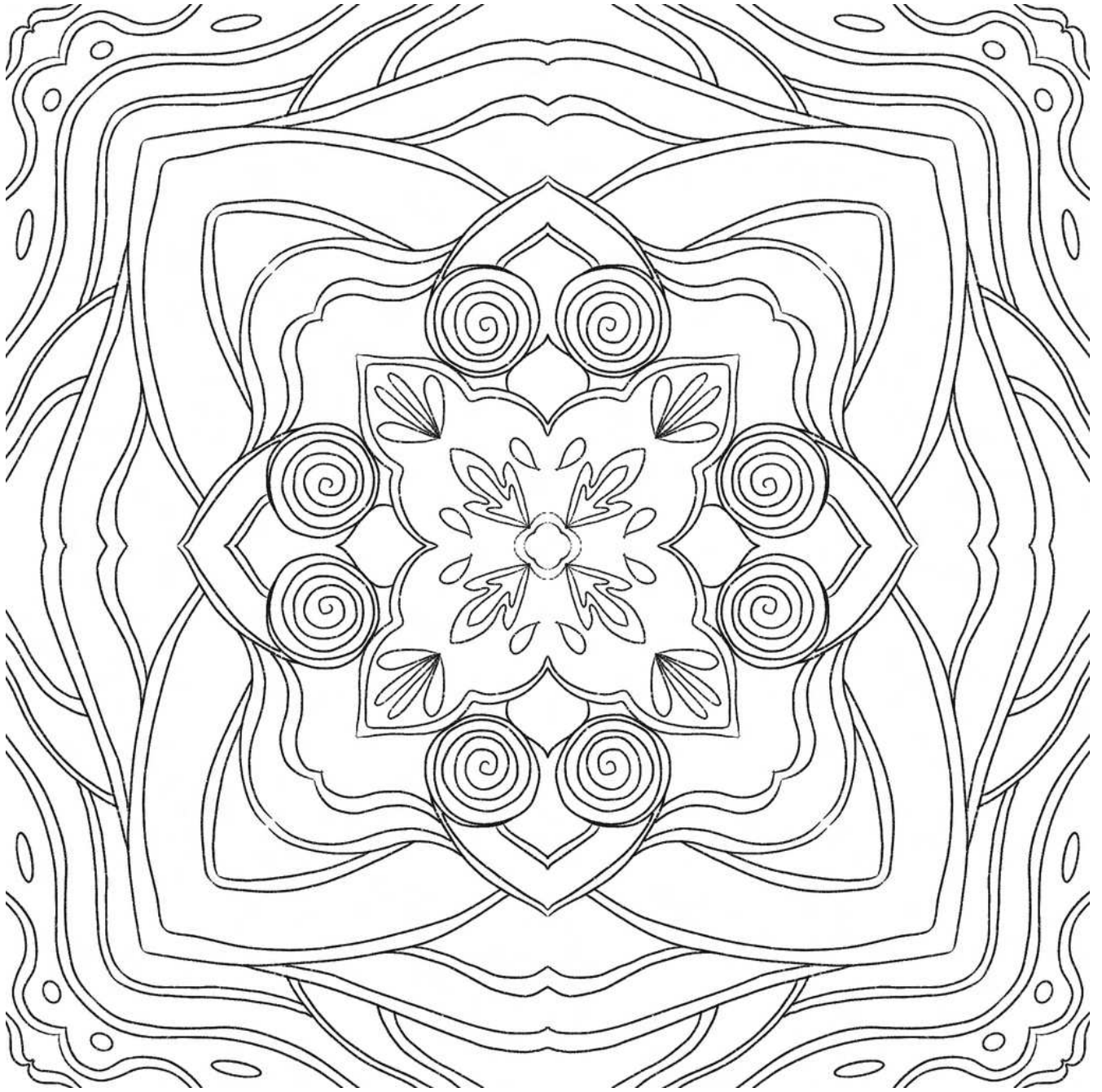
Inspired by the stone lion commonly found at Chinese architecture



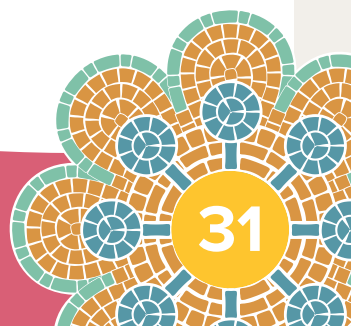
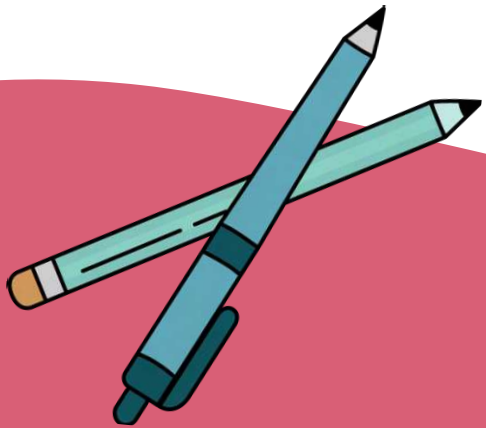
Recreating mosaic effect



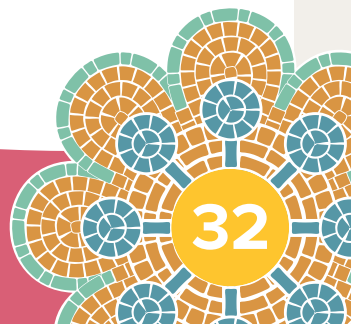
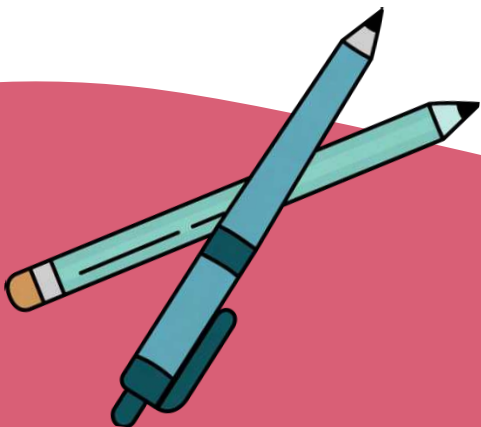
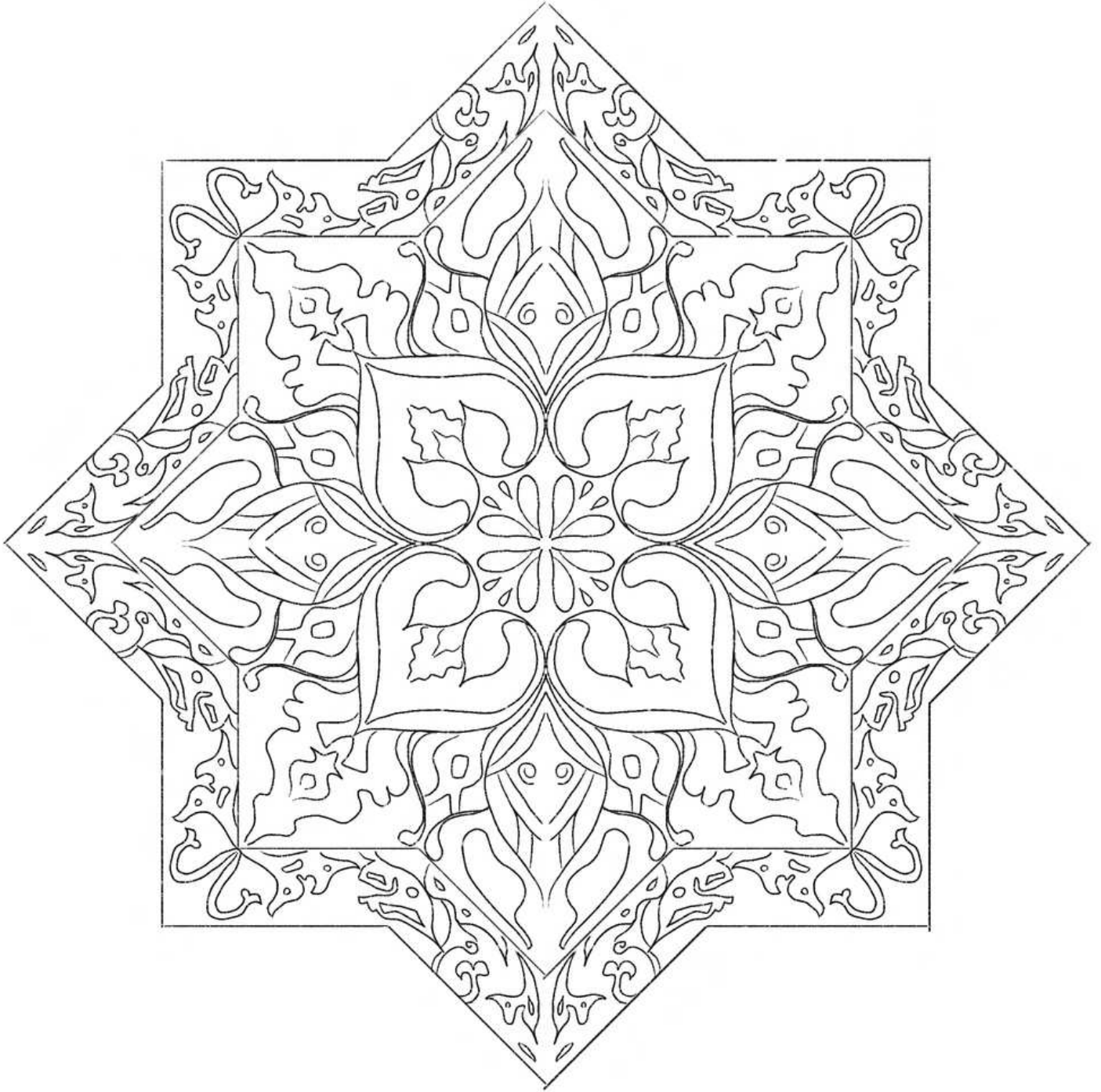
Inspired by the beams of Gyeongbokgung, former royal palace in Seoul, South Korea



Inspired by a tile panel made in Iznik, Turkey



Inspired by a tile made in Iran



Elements chosen from painting frame corners

