

Picnic Tile Panel (17th century, Iran; V&A)

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O93167/tile-panel-unknown/>



- This is a painting. But unlike most paintings we see on the walls of art galleries or other buildings this one is not painted on canvas, paper or wood. What do you think it is painted on? **Ceramic tiles, similar to ones you might have in your bathroom or kitchen.**
- In which part of the world do you think it was painted? **There are various elements that indicate that it was made in Asia such as the colours (especially the deep blues), the patterns, clothes and bottles. It is from Iran and was made between 300-400 years ago. If you guessed China, though, that was a good guess as the blue and bottles on the bottom left look Chinese and show that Chinese decoration was popular in Iran at that time. The patterns – especially using natural forms and geometric shapes – are one of the main elements of art of the Islamic World. Some children might have heard that it is forbidden to depict people (or animals) in Islamic art. This is usually true for religious art but not in “secular” (or non-religious) art of which this painting is an example.**
- What time of year is it? **Probably springtime.** How do you know? **There is an abundance of nature in bloom including flowers and leaves as well as fresh fruit.**
- Where else is nature shown in the painting? **On the bottles, bowls and people’s clothes and around the border. The border of interweaving flowers and leaves (called an “arabesque”) is another important element of Islamic art.**
- There are six people in the painting but one of them is more important than the others. Which one? **The woman in the middle.** How do you know? **She is relaxing on cushions and is in the middle of the painting. Her yellow dress and light blue “diadem” (a sort of half-crown) catch our eye and she looks rich, possibly royal.**
- What is everyone else in the painting doing? **They are bringing things to her. What are they bringing? Two of them are bringing bottles (probably of wine) and one has a large bowl of fruit. What is the one second from the right doing? It looks as if he had also been bringing wine but has put his bottle(s) down on the grass to stop and smell the beautiful flowers. It is almost as if the artist is showing off how realistic their flowers are by showing us that the man has been distracted by them. Maybe he will pick some of them and bring them to the woman.**



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- What about the man just to the right of the woman? **He is bringing something more special than wine, fruit or flowers, a scarf – probably silk. The other men very likely work for her and are bringing supplies for a picnic. Maybe her friends will join her. But the man with the scarf is probably not a servant. He might be a friend or, he might want to get into her affections...**
- If we could hear him say something to the woman, what do you think he will say? **Maybe he has a special question to ask her... “Will you marry me?”**
- How would she respond to his question? **There are different responses that she could say and different ways to say them. But maybe, as she is so important, instead of giving a response out loud she might think something.** Have a think about what she might be saying in her head...
- Why do you think the painting is an unusual shape and not a perfect rectangle? **We do not know 100% but the gap at the top could suggest that the painting was originally on the wall below a window and the window fitted into the gap.**

Follow on ideas

- Paint a modern day version of this scene. Think about the types of bottles and bowls we generally have now as well as the clothes and decorations. But use the same kinds of colours that this artist has used – rich blues, yellows and greens. Don't forget to include a decorative border. When you have finished it draw vertical and horizontal lines on top using a pencil and ruler to create a grid of squares. Make sure that any faces you have drawn are within a square and not cut off by any of the lines. When you have completed your grid cut out each square. Then stick them on to a large piece of paper to create a painting made of tiles. When you arrange them, leave a small gap between each one to make it look like the grouting that tiles have between them.
- Think about the rest of the wall of the palace where this painting would have originally been displayed. We think there was a window above it but what else? Discuss your ideas with as much description as possible and then draw the whole wall as you imagine it to have been. Or you could even make a model of the entire room in the palace using a box.

Topic links

- Islamic Art
- Patterns
- Nature/Fruit/Flowers
- Food
- Geography/Asia/Iran