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Piecing together art in Barcelona

Barcelona's most famous son, Antoni Gaudí, has left an indelible mark on the Spanish city and recently inspired **Ronan O'Connell** to try his hand at a mosaic-making workshop during a visit



essentially left to your own devices. Once in the swing of things, you'll recognise what you're doing right or wrong, and tune into your own personal style.

How?

When you're visiting Barcelona, Gaudí's work looms large. Perhaps no other architect in history has had such a profound and ranging impact on a cityscape.

Of the top 10 tourist attractions in this extraordinary city, at least four are the fruits of Gaudí's labour. There's the sprawling, leafy outdoor gallery that is Parc Güell, the monumental cathedral La Sagrada Família, and the whimsical, fantastical buildings Casa Milà (also known as La Pedrera) and Casa Batlló. Each of these sites is so wildly popular that at certain times of year you must queue for well over an hour to gain entry.

Once inside any of them, you will quickly notice Gaudí's gorgeous use of *trencadis*. There is something slightly anarchic about smashing up glass or porcelain and creating your vision with the resultant shards. In this sense it matches well with the avant-garde style of Gaudí's structures, with their playful appearances contrasting so starkly against the beautiful >>



What?

A one-on-one lesson in *trencadis*, a form of mosaic popularised by the Catalan Modernism artistic movement in Spain around the turn of the 20th century. *Trencadis* sees artists use ceramic or glass shards to create their colourful mosaics, and was most famously used by Spain's iconic architect Antoni Gaudí, whose legacy is seen throughout Barcelona.

Where?

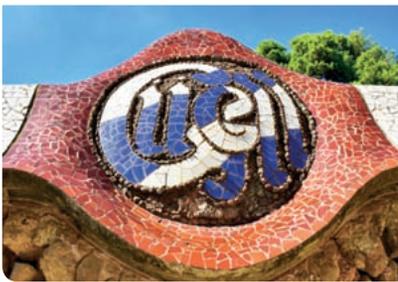
German artist Angelika Heinbach has lived in Spain for 26 years, and offers mosaic lessons from her Gothic Quarter studio, Mosaiccoss, in downtown Barcelona. Embellished by stunning ancient architecture and home to the Picasso Museum, the area around Mosaiccoss offers no end of artistic inspiration for would-be Gaudís like myself.

Why?

Few people among us robustly exercise their creative sensibilities on a regular basis. Maybe we're too busy, or too tired or we just have no confidence in our ability. This latter excuse is the one I've long clutched to tightly, repeating phrases like "I'm not good with my hands" or "I was awful at art in school" or the classic "I just don't understand art."

The wonderful thing about *trencadis*, though, is that there is nothing much to understand. You need not study its theory or refine its techniques before you start creating. Angelika provides a brief explanation of what's required – aside from the deft touch to break glass shards, the skills involved are basic – and then you're ready to begin.

While she offers helpful feedback and encouragement as you progress, you're



Opening page: Angelika Heinbach in her mosaic-making studio, Mosaiccoss; demonstrating the art of trencadis
Above, clockwise from top left: Angelika uses coloured glass to create art; trencadis is a form of mosaic created by fitting shards of glass or tiles together; Barcelona's Parc Güell showcases architect Antoni Gaudí's use of trencadis

yet undeniably-austere architecture common across Europe.

Angelika was so beguiled by Gaudí's legacy that she moved to Barcelona to live within his artistic aura. For many years her passion for art was funnelled only into a hobby, something secondary to her corporate job, but eventually her love of art took precedence and she decided to pass it on to others.

Most of Angelika's students are, like me, very much artistic amateurs. Her classes are either one or two hours long, €20 and €40 per person respectively, with an emphasis on fun over in-depth instruction.

Corporate groups attend her classes as a means of team-building, and on the second day I visited Mosaiccoss I found a crew of six female friends from Germany who were doing a workshop as part of their bachelorette trip. Each of them pieced their mosaics together with a child-like fervour, excitedly showing the others the stylistic

choices they had made. I knew how they felt. The previous day I had entered the studio as a skeptical man and left it as a big beaming boy.

I had only attended Angelika's class as it seemed it would make for a good article. Yet, within minutes of beginning to assemble my trencadis mosaic around the edges of a picture frame, I was enchanted. As I hunched over my work, carefully arranging shards of coloured glass, Angelika let loose a hearty laugh. "You're really enjoying this, aren't you?" she asked, clearly noticing my joyful intensity.

So fixated was I on my work that my response was significantly delayed. "It's surprisingly fun," I told her, eventually, before getting back to work. The greatest challenge with trencadis is using a small hand-clamp to snap a larger piece of glass into smaller shards of your desired shape.

If you are possessed of great skill, like Angelika, then you can fashion a perfect

shard, ensuring that there are only the smallest, neatest of gaps between each piece. If you are possessed of limited skill, like me, then you tend to have to make do with whatever strange-shaped shard you happen to create.

Angelika assured me that this was no problem. "Just concentrate on the colours you want to use, how to contrast them with each other, and using different-sized pieces for contrast, too," she instructed. I intended to gift this picture frame to my mother, as any good son would, and so I splashed it with a bright colour scheme, the kind of which I knew she was fond. Lemon yellows and tangerine oranges sat alongside an array of light and dark blues and greens.

"It's colourful but it's not exactly beautiful," I said to Angelika as my mosaic neared completion. But that's not entirely a bad thing, I thought to myself. For it will stick out like a beacon in my mum's home, prompting visitors to ask her where she got it. Her answer will endow me with hefty brownie points. I'll be known as the lovely son who creates art for his mother. Or perhaps the clumsy hack who butchered Gaudí's style. Either way, I'm comfortable in my masculinity.

How was it?

Since completing this workshop at Mosaiccoss, I have done three further art classes around the world. Each time, I've met fellow casual students who had no previous interest in art and were shocked by how much they enjoyed it. Their reasoning was the same as mine when describing why I had such a great time with Angelika. Beyond the innocent joys of creation, there is a serenity to be found in art, even in really, really bad art.

While you're concentrating on placing that odd-shaped shard of yellow glass next to an even more awkward piece, your mind is occupied yet lulled. There is no brain matter spare to consider interest rates or office politics or relationship woes. In that moment you have a haven.

www.mosaiccoss.com



FLY

Flybe's franchise partner Stobart Air has flights to Reus Barcelona from London Southend (from 10th May)