

Alfraz Sayed, Ritual in Symmetry, digital print, 2025, Photography: Alfraz Sayed, Editing: Kaynat Kader, Courtesy of Design Doha - Qatar Museums

SECONDARY EDUCATION

VIEWING GUIDE

Escher & Islamic Art: 20 Perspectives

10 June 2026 - 1 November 2026

Discover what links M.C. Escher with today's artists, makers and designers.

Name: _____

Class: _____

Date: _____

This viewing guide takes you right through the museum. It will also help you discover who M.C. Escher was and what inspired him – things that still inspire artists today!

How it works?

- Borrow a clipboard and pen from the museum.
- The room numbers are on the doorposts.
- Stand at least 30 cm from the artworks, and don't lean against the walls or on the display cases and plinths.
- Please be considerate towards other museum visitors.
- Only pencils are to be used when you are in the museum rooms.
- Follow the guide, find the right artwork and answer the questions.

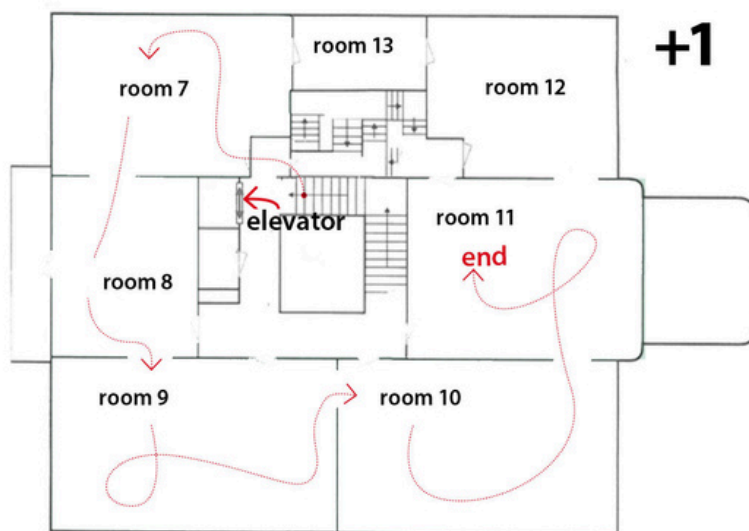
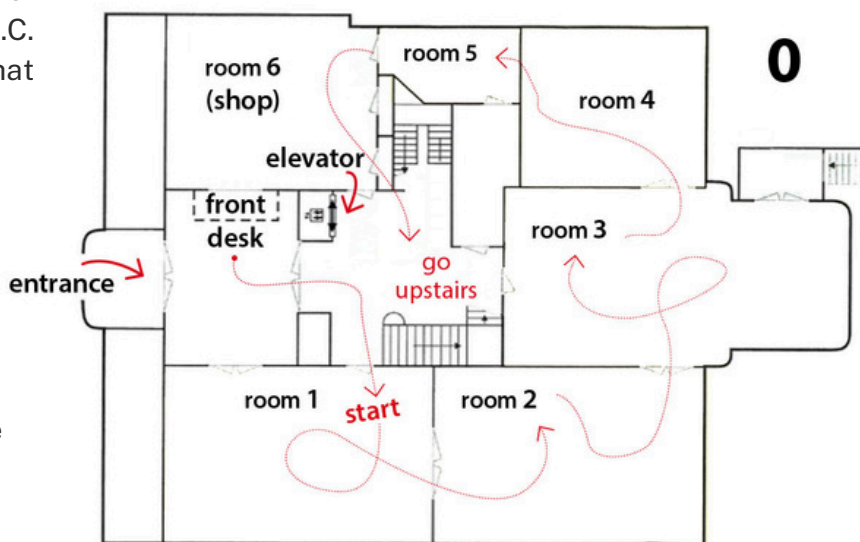
The plan will show you where you are.

Go to room 1 on the ground floor. The guide begins there.

It ends in room 11.

Have fun!

FLOOR PLAN



Room 1 – THE YOUNG ESCHER

This is Maurits Cornelis Escher. He was born in 1898 in the Dutch city of Leeuwarden. You can see him reflected in the sphere that he's holding. He became famous around the world for his prints full of optical illusions, neverending patterns and incredible metamorphoses.

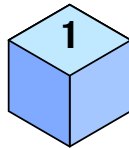
Escher didn't paint, he made prints – mainly woodcuts and lithographs. This is also known as graphic art.

M.C. Escher, Hand with Reflecting Sphere, lithograph, 1935



Can you see the explanatory text above the glass display case? It shows how a woodcut and a lithograph are made.

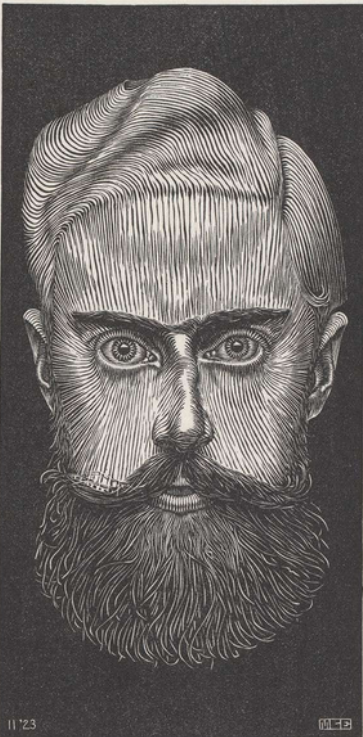
Find the two self-portraits by Escher in room 1. Look at them carefully. They might look like they have been drawn, but one is a woodcut and the other is a lithograph.



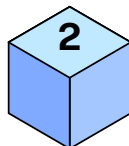
Describe one difference that you notice between the woodcut and the lithograph.
Tip: Describe the difference in terms of grey tones, black/white and hard/soft lines

- Lithograph
- Woodcut

M.C. Escher, Self-Portrait, woodcut, 1923



Did you know that... a print always turns out as a mirror image? So the artist also has to draw the picture in mirror image on the wood or stone.



(activity) How would you picture yourself in a self-portrait? Team up with a classmate, find a good spot in this room and take a selfie (no flash!).

Escher, Self-Portrait, lithograph, 1929



Did you know that... Escher didn't really like school? After high school he went to study in Delft, but he left when he was 21 and moved to Haarlem to learn a different skill.

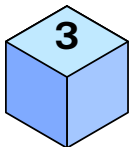


M.C. Escher, Sea Shells, woodcut, 1920/21

While he was training to be a printmaker at the School of Architecture and Decorative Arts, Escher had a teacher who saw that Escher would rather draw than do maths. The teacher showed him how to make woodcuts. He made all kinds of prints, and experimented with patterns and symmetry, as in *Sea Shells*.

Find the print *Sea Shells* (in display case)

In *Sea Shells*, Escher repeats the same shell design four times: mirrored, side by side and one above the other. The shells are still individual forms, but here you can already see the first step towards his later endless patterns. Escher carves various shells from a woodblock and prints the block twice onto a sheet of paper. By folding the sheet whilst the ink is still wet, two counterproofs are created alongside the two regular prints.



How many different types of shells can you see?
Circle the right answer

8 – 11 – 15



M.C. Escher, Eight Heads, woodcut, 1922

Find the print *Eight Heads*

Shortly after this, Escher made *Eight Heads*. You can see eight heads repeated in a strict pattern. Some are upright, others are upside down. Escher again started with a single wooden block into which he cut eight heads. He printed this 'stamp' several times, sometimes only partially.



Do you see how the heads fill the entire sheet, without any holes or overlap?
Do you think you could repeat the pattern endlessly? Why, or why not?

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Did you know that... Escher made everything by hand? From drawings and woodcuts to the prints on paper. There were no computers, tablets or smartphones in his day!

Go on to room 2.

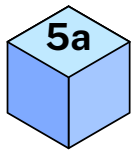


Room 2 – TRAVELS

Escher's love of patterns became even greater when he went travelling. He visited the Alhambra, a medieval Spanish-Islamic fortress and palace complex. He was very impressed by the mosaics on the floors and walls. These mosaics are endless mathematical patterns, which are also known as tessellations.

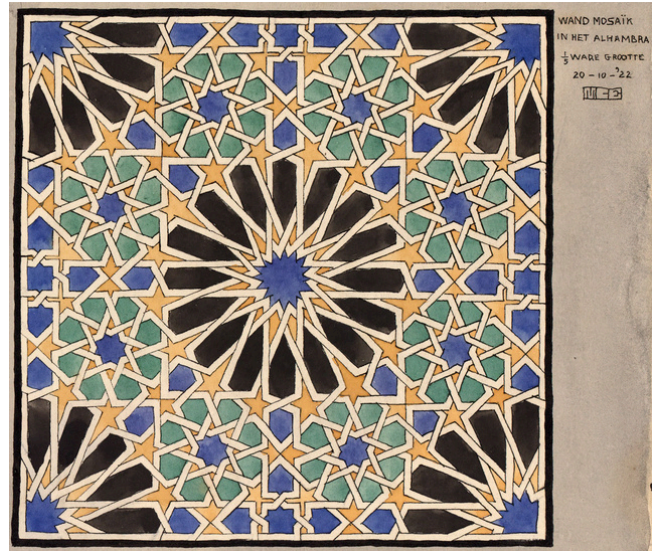
Escher copied down the patterns and learned all about shapes that fit perfectly together. This concept became fundamental to his art. The shapes became the basis for his metamorphoses, infinite spaces and optical illusions.

Look at the drawing of a mosaic that Escher made at the Alhambra.

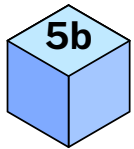


When you make a drawing, where do you get your inspiration?

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Tip: Do you get your ideas for your drawing from... memories, music, photos, something else?



M.C. Escher, Study of a mosaic from the Alhambra, India ink, watercolour and pencil, 1922



Can you also travel in your mind? Explain why you think you can or can't

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Did you know that...Escher kept a travel journal and wrote lots of letters? He also had a camera, which was unusual at that time. It took a long time to print a photograph and cost a lot of money. Escher made more sketches than photographs.

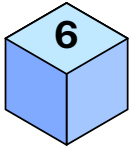
Carry on to room 3.

Room 3 – ART AS CONNECTION

The exhibition shows how Escher was inspired by Islamic tile patterns. As well as his prints and drawings, it also includes work by 20 contemporary artists and makers from around the world. They all make very different work, based on their own background, but they share a fascination with patterns and repetition. Their work is shown beside Escher's to make it clear that his ideas still inspire artists today.

Find the artworks of Leila Nazarian.

Leila Nazarian decorates skateboards and surfboards using traditional Iranian crafts like mirror mosaics. By combining this old technique with skate culture, she shows that art can connect different worlds, just as in Escher's work.

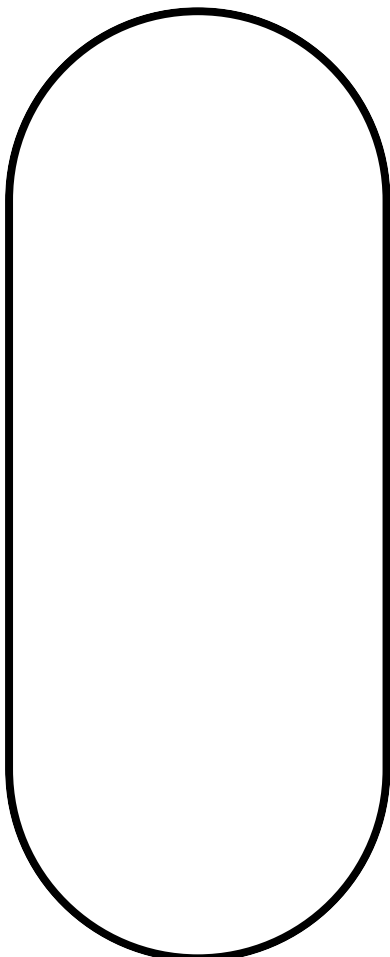


6 Patterns and decorations from skateboard culture don't usually look like this.

If you could decorate your own skateboard, what would it look like? Draw it here. Let your imagination loose!



Leila Nazarian, *Mirrored Horizons*, skatedecks, 2025



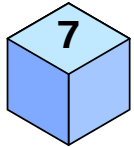
Go to room 4.

Room 4 – PATTERNS AS A BASIS

Walk through this room and look at the art by Escher. The figures in his artworks fit together seamlessly, and constantly repeat: reflecting, shifting, revolving.

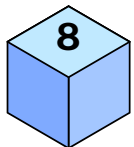
The unique thing about Escher's designs is that he based them on the same underlying mathematical patterns as those in the Alhambra mosaics, but rather than using abstract shapes (squares, triangles etc.), he used recognisable human and animal figures, such as squirrels and dragonflies. These infinite patterns are called tessellations.

Did you know that... Escher loved nature? As a child, he would walk in the woods with a magnifying glass to look at the smallest plants and animals.



In one of the tessellations you can see two creatures instead of just one. What are they?
A and a

Find photographer Alfaz Sayed's photographs



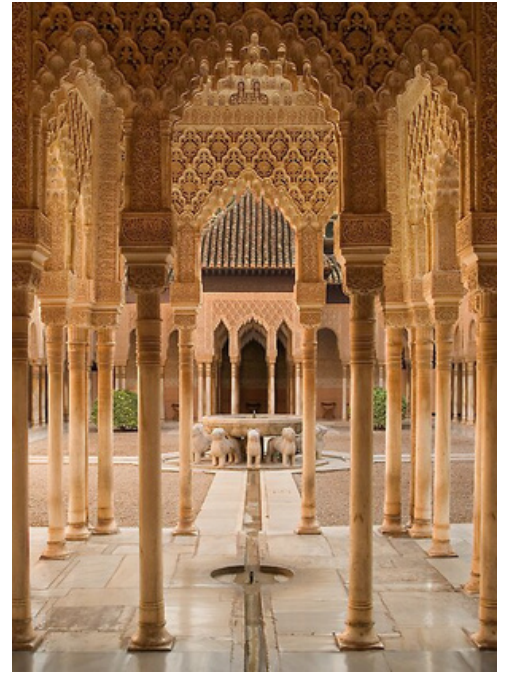
How do they remind you of Escher's art?
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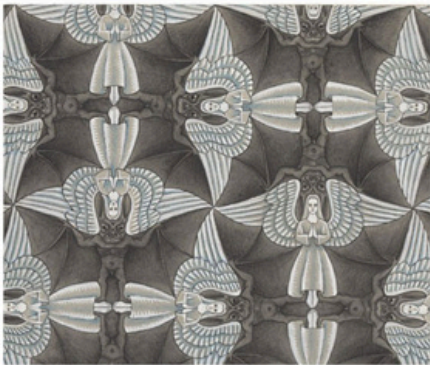
M.C. Escher, Regular Division of the Plane with Squirrels, no. 7, pencil and watercolour on paper, 1936

Take a good look at Escher's tessellations on the wall on the right.

There are different kinds of regular tessellations. The patterns can all repeat endlessly, but the pieces in them are different shapes. The direction sometimes differs too. There are three examples below.



Which tessellation belongs to which system? Draw a line connecting the picture and the correct answer.



translating

mirroring

rotating

Room 6 is the museum shop, there are no questions here. Head through to the central hall and proceed up the stairs to Room 7 on the first floor.

Room 7 – CHANGE

10

Find the print *Sky and Water I*. There is a tessellation hidden in this print, but something else is happening too... the birds and fish are changing!

Put a cross by the correct statement below.

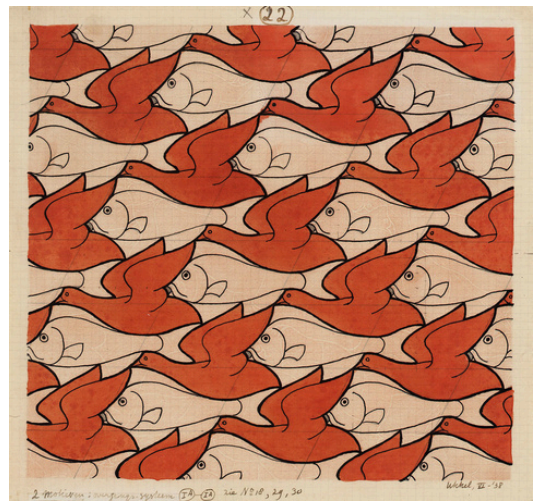
- Birds are changing into fish and fish into birds
- Birds are changing into water and fish into sky

M.C. Escher, *Sky and Water I*, woodcut, 1938



There are no questions in rooms 8 and 9. Carry on to room 10.

M.C. Escher, *Regular Division of the Plane with Fish and Birds*, no. 22, India ink, coloured pencil and watercolour on paper, 1938



Room 10 - OPTICAL ILLUSIONS

Escher could spend hours thinking about new worlds full of optical illusions, always with Italy in the back of his mind. In his later prints, he often distorted reality. Escher liked to trick the viewer.

11

Find the print *Belvedere*. Can you spot something about this building that looks right at first, but is actually impossible?

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Tip: Look at the ladder and the columns.

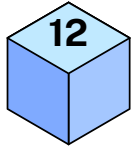
M.C. Escher, *Belvedere*, lithograph, 1958



Find the piece by Layla May Arthur.

It's a sculpture in which she plays with architecture and connecting cultures.

Compare her work with Escher's *Belvedere*.



Which do you like most/least? Can you explain why?

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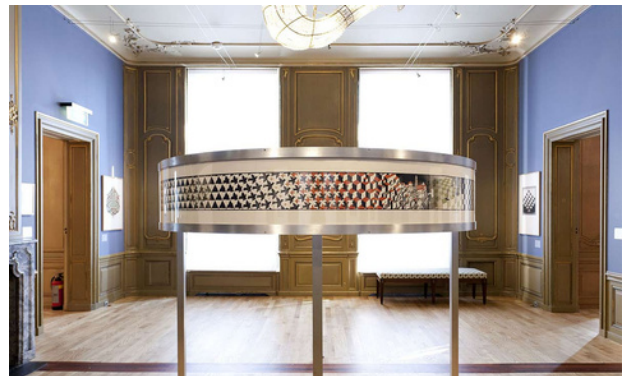
Go to room 11.

Room 11 – METAMORPHOSIS

Metamorphosis means change (in form). It happens in the animal kingdom too, like when caterpillars turn into butterflies. Escher found it fascinating and wanted to use it in his work.

His large work *Metamorphosis III*, which is exhibited in a circular display in the middle of the room, has an extra dimension. It is actually a cycle. You can keep walking round it endlessly. This is one of Escher's world-famous masterpieces.

Walk around it.



M.C. Escher, *Metamorphosis III*, woodcut, 1967-1968
Photo: Isabel Nabuurs



What animals can you discover in this long print? List three.

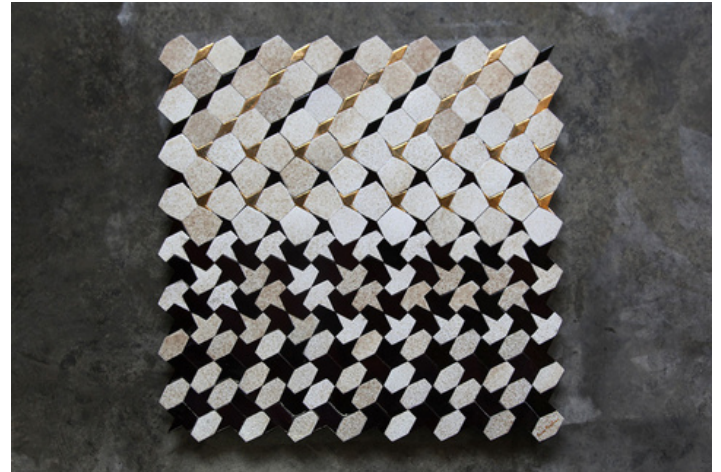
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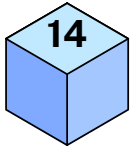
Find Metamorphosis by Amine Asselman in this room.

Moroccan artist Amine Asselman is an admirer of Escher's work. Like Escher, Asselman was inspired by tile patterns at the Alhambra.

He uses the Zellige tile technique to make art, as he wants to preserve it and do innovative things with it. This piece of art is a tribute to Escher.



Amine Asselman, Metamorphosis, Zellige-technique, 2023



Look at Asselman's artwork. What do you see in it? What title would you give it?

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This is the end of the guide.

If you would like to discover more, go to the second floor, where there are all ways to learn about Escher.

The interactive games let you see things the way Escher did. You and your class can play with perspective like he did and make yourselves bigger or smaller in *The Escher Chamber* photobooth. There is also a film that makes you feel like you are in Escher's world, and there are games and a touchscreen where you can draw your own pattern.

You can also visit our special **Op Art** (Optical Art) display. This 20th-century art movement used optical illusions to play with the viewer's perception. You think you see movement where there isn't actually any. Optical art is about fooling the eye, just as Escher did in his art.