Italian Glass Mosaic Construction Process

The construction of a large Italian glass (smalti) mosaic is complicated. Once a concept is agreed upon, a full-size painting is completed and photographed. A full-size black and white print is pulled and the values are isolated. It looks like a big black and white puzzle. Those lines are transferred to a clay bed when using a temporary substrate (clay or lime) for the indirect method or to a prepared panel when using the direct method. This is the map for the smalti.

Original Painting

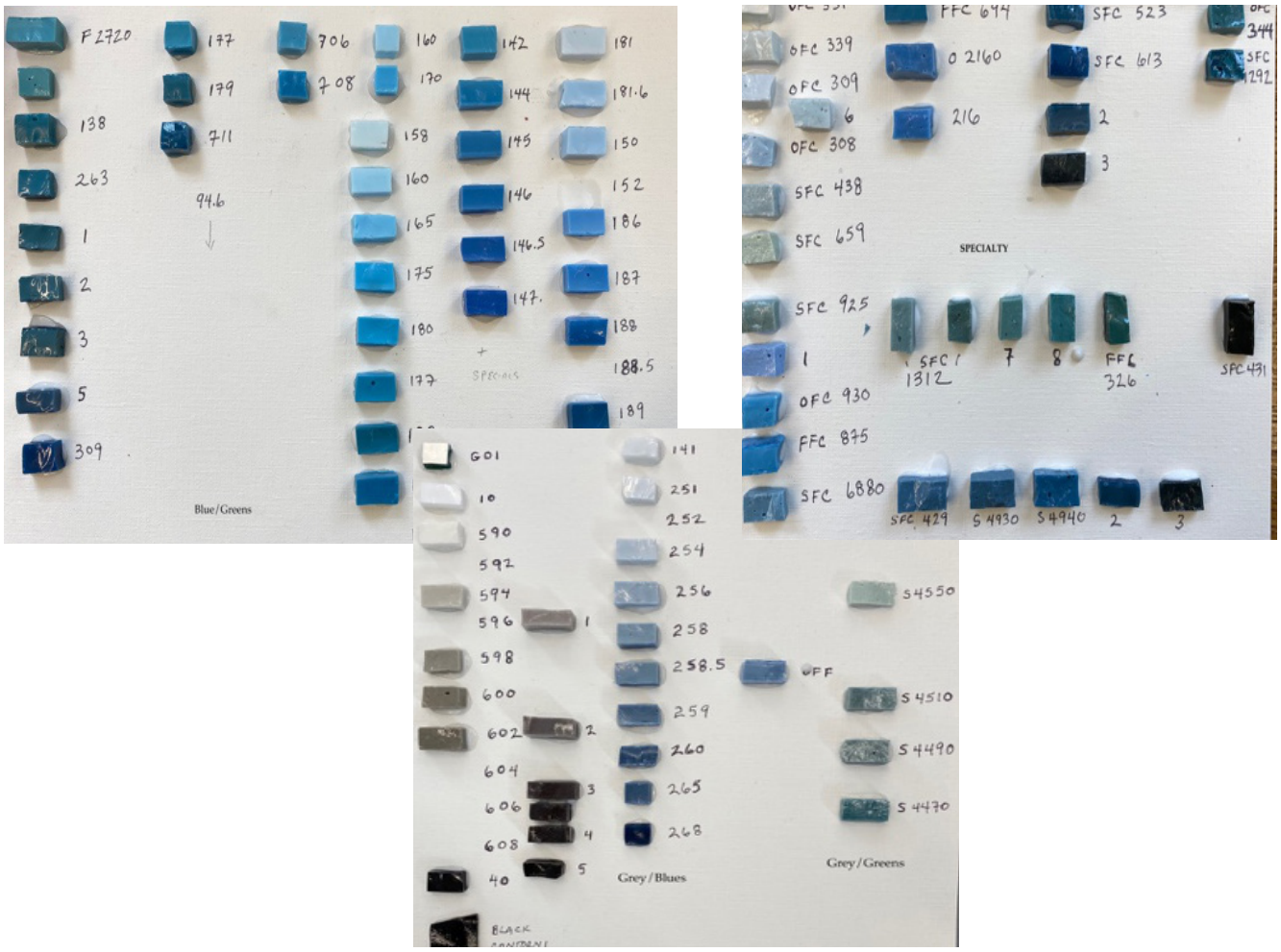
Black and White Print

Value Isolation

Panel Preparation

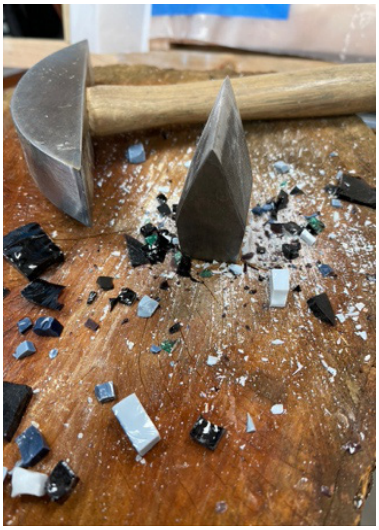
Addition of Clay to the Work Panel

Value Sketch transferred to Clay Ready to Begin. Italian glass (smalti) selected and organized by color and value.



Smalti Board Samples

The real work begins. Cutting the glass and stone to the smaller pieces that will be used to create the mosaic.



When the mosaic is completed, it's covered with a layer or two of cheesecloth and then a slurry of bone glue is painted on top. Once dry, it's a very stiff, hard, strong and will easily allow us to remove the clay from the back of the glass and transfer the mosaic to its final substrate. The bone glue is not only strong, it's water soluble and easy to remove when the time is right.

When it's completely dry, a metal grid is attached to the face of the mosaic for stability.
Then the mosaic is flipped and the clay is removed.

Thin set is spread in a thin even layer on the back of the now clean mosaic and the final substrate (in this case aluminum panel with cleats for hanging) is placed on the wet thinset. When dry, the piece is flipped and tidied and voila! The aluminum edge is added and it's ready to be hung.