



Images from the Popham Design factory in Marrakech, including the bags of cement used to make Crowner's tiles (top left); the tiles in the midst of being painted; and a friendly feline who calls the factory home.

Sarah Crowner

The story behind an artwork, in the artist's own words

I'VE ALWAYS WANTED to make a painting that a person could stand on. I liked the idea that someone can view a composition on the wall while standing within a different composition on the ground. A couple of years ago, I made an installation composed of a 1,000-square-foot platform covered with handmade, blue-green glazed terracotta tiles. I loved working with terra-cotta, but for my show at Mass MOCA I wanted to try a different tile-making technique—using cement this time, which I knew I could hand paint and seal, and then install

the way I would if I were composing a painting. I discovered the Popham Design factory in Morocco, which was open to fabricating uncommon shapes and forms, where the tiles are made using cement—such a soft, absorbent texture, unlike the glassy, reflective glazed clay I used before. Mathematically, my new pentagon form can be tiled and repeated only with its mirror; it needs its opposite in order to repeat. To me, these tiles look like an open book, bird's wings, or leaves.

I traveled to Marrakech in January to

work in the factory, and painted each tile individually. If you look closely, you can find certain motifs repeated everywhere: in architecture, in nature, in art. I'm curious to see how the tiles' forms will react with or against the shapes in the leaflike paintings I am making, as well as with the birch trees outside the museum windows, which will be blooming when the show opens. MP

Sarah Crowner's exhibition "Beetle in the Leaves" opens April 16 at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in North Adams.