

# *Decoration or Devotion?*

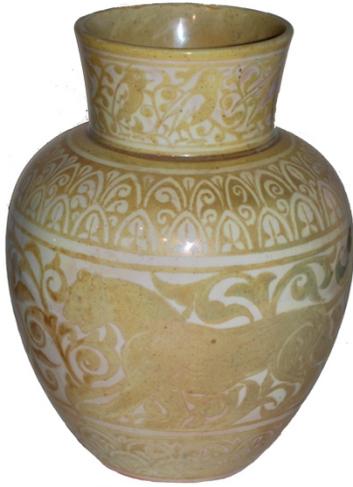
The Lives and Art of William and Evelyn De Morgan

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This exhibition invites you to observe the De Morgans' artwork and to consider why certain symbols appear in Evelyn's paintings and William's ceramics.



1



William De Morgan, *Gold Lustre Animal Vase*, 1888-1904

Golden feline creatures skulk around the vase, camouflaged into the foliage that twists around them. The band they are held within seems to trap their narrative within that area of the vase, enclosed either side by the trefoil decoration. A short neck protrudes from the top of the piece, providing an extra surface for patterning and motifs to spread.

2



William De Morgan, *Fish and Petal Rice Dish*, 1872-1904

The rippling design depicted on the bowl is also in the form of the bowl itself. The undulating surface of the dish becomes the waves of the pool, as if the bowl is full of babbling water. Fish swim around the scene in vivid red and radiant turquoise, continuing William's Middle Eastern palette. The concentric blue stripes of the water are continued through the circular leaf pattern around the rim of the dish, and onto the back with a basic stripe design, unifying the design motifs.

3



William De Morgan, *Bottle with Floral Decoration*, 1888-97

This bulbous vase swells at the neck, the dark cobalt blue deepening the sunken crevices. William uses only foliate design elements in this piece, appropriating symbols such as the dark central shape, reminiscent of a fleur-de-lis. Broad leaves span the globular sides of the bottle, wrapping it within their natural protection, encasing the earthenware column.

|

4



William De Morgan, *Gold Lustre Griffin Vase*, 1872-1907

Golden griffins are the main focus of this vase. They are poised in different positions, wings spread with pride, presenting their power and strength. The gold lustre against the cream background is vivid and regal, glowing vibrantly as if lit from within, radiating light and lustre.

5



William De Morgan, *Floral Vase*, 1872-1907

Round panels coat the sides of this vase, dark and foreboding against the brightness of the turquoise and white background. Humble, red flowers poke their heads out of the darkness, lightening the lower half of the pot. Vines and sprigs travel upwards, towards the fluted rim of the vase, signalling towards the vibrant turquoise glaze within. This vase epitomises the Aesthetic Movement's belief that art should exist purely for beauty; 'Art for Art's Sake'.

6



William De Morgan, *Bear and Rabbit Bowl*, 1872-1904

Intricate but blocky, this design shows a manganese hare upon a broad bear, a motif borrowed from Indian folk painting. The two animals are contained within the small circular base of the bowl, whilst a repeated pattern travels around the wide rim. The polychrome design causes the animals to blend in to the busyness of the piece, making them coloured shapes rather than distinct features.

7



William De Morgan, *Gold Lustre Floral Vase*, 1872-1904

In a brilliant golden lustre, William illustrates a swirling floral design amid two bands of solid colour. The small amount of white ground that is left visible presents the pattern, so it remains delicate yet bold. A repeated swirling vine, large and thick, creeps around the ovoid vase, linking all of the separate floral forms, providing them with something solid to cling to.

8



William De Morgan, *Turquoise Vase*, 1872-1907

A bulbous form in brilliant blue. Like a globe with no land, just endless sea. Or an over ripe blueberry, ready to burst, its crinkly halo lightening. William's intense use of this vibrant blue is shocking, yet distinctly attractive. An indulgent vision. The form and limited palette of this vase are reminiscent of Turkish ceramics, whose decorative elements were exploited by William De Morgan in his wares.

9



William De Morgan, *Dragon Bottle*, 1872-1907

Scales, palm leaves and lustre dominate this vase, texturising the shiny surface. Swirls of red are carried upwards, following the winding tail of a blue-green dragon as it undulates up the vase's neck. Although a bold subject, the creamy pink background and varied colour palette give this vase a sophisticated appearance, whilst simultaneously showing William's Orientalism and appropriation of Middle Eastern design.

10



William De Morgan, *Eagle Vase*, 1872-1907

Spread wide, the wings of the eagle take shape in the twin-handled form of the vase. Winding away from its earthenware body, the handles also become vines, reaching out from the fruitful foliage that acts as the eagle's backdrop. Each mark on the eagle's body and wings connotes a feathered texture, dutiful in its repetition, making the eagle's form into a pattern in itself which explicitly strips the creature of any symbolic signification.

11



William De Morgan, *Plumed Bird Vase*, 1888-1907

A golden bird flaunts his plumage across this vase. The flaring of his feathers is mirrored in the flaring of the vase's lip, flicking out to create a voluptuous form. The bird's accentuated head, thin neck and protruding breast continue this dynamic shape. A background of copper-red flora gives the pot a regal feel whilst boldly presenting the design against the white ground. William has achieved a fluid piece that intertwines the design of both surface pattern and ceramic body.

12



William De Morgan, *Turquoise Jug with Handle*, 1872-1904

An elegant form, this long necked jug creates a fluid silhouette. The large, projecting handle domesticates the shape, turning it from a stationary, classic vase to a more dynamic, active form. This is echoed in the textured turquoise glaze that coats it, reminiscent of William's treasured Persian colour palette.

13



William De Morgan, *Fighting Beasts and Snake Dish*, 1888-1907

Commandeering elements from different cultures and combining them to form interesting, aesthetic designs was William's trademark behaviour. Here, we can see the same Chinese design used in the red and gold, *Fighting Beasts with Serpent Dish*, but altered through the use of William's popular Persian colour palette. The deep, ultramarine blue, vibrant turquoise and dulcet shades of olive green make this a mellow concoction of worldly motifs.

14



William De Morgan, *Plate with Lion and Quatrilobed Cartouche*, 1872-1904

Here, the use of the Persian ogee ('s' shaped line) sees William move away from his usual circular design format. The much boxier white centre that this cartouche leaves him with allows the beast to take on a more typical stance, four legs on the ground, walking forward: no twisting neck or winding tails. Instead, the vibrancy is brought through colour, awakening the design with a Persian palette of rich blue, turquoise and olive-green glaze.

15



**William De Morgan, *Moonlight Lustre Floral Jardinière*, 1872-1907**

As if struck by moonlight, this stocky jardinière glows in an array of blue and grey lustre glazes. The colour palette signals William's Persian influences, as well as the ogee ('s' shaped) décor that circulates the thin rim of the piece. Dictated by an elegant grey-metallic line, the fluid pattern glides across the surface of the pot, creating a subtle yet busy combination of foliate forms. William's 'Moonlight' lustre glazes use copper and silver oxides reduced in the heat of the kiln to leave a metallic film on the ceramic's surface. They are technically very difficult to produce and demonstrate his ability and mastery of the craft.

16



**William De Morgan, *Bottle with Feline Creatures*, 1888-1904**

A mellow mix of turquoise and cobalt twists around this thin-necked earthenware vase. Four feline creatures lounge over the curvaceous body of the piece, their feather-like fur draping down. The limited palette of the glaze has a harmonious role, linking the basic foliate design with William's invented creatures.

17



William De Morgan, *Ferocious Lion Dish*, 1888-1907

A decorative lion, fanciful and ornate, sashays across the dish, drawn upright like a proud dressage horse. His upright posture possibly a satirical play on the pride of his middle-class patrons. William's design is much more painterly here. A large variation of tone can be seen in the lion's yellow-gold fur and mane. Ungrounded by the tufts of leafy foliage, the lion becomes separate from the background, as if pasted on top. Through this displacement, the lion and the leaves exhibit William's practice of combining decorative motifs.

18



William De Morgan, *Red Lustre Dish with Centaur*, 1872-1907

Featuring a part-human design, this dish sees William take an unusually painterly approach. The figure of the centaur is split into two parts, one reflecting the typical block ruby lustre that William often used for animal designs, and a second that relies heavily on the white of the ground. This difference forces you to notice the two separate textures and forms, highlighting the transition from fur to skin. The curve of the centaur's bow is echoed in the strong border that edges the plate, containing the knotted tangle of vines within. A focus on pattern and texture resides powerfully in this design.



William De Morgan, *Red Lustre Hollowware Bowl with Heron*, 1872-1907

As if caught in the act of snatching a fish, a golden heron flaps its wings and flings its head away from us. By winding its neck back like this, William unifies the design into a more circular form to fit within the constraints of the dish. A mark on the back reveals that Joe Juster decorated the bowl, alternating the gold and red lustres against the white ground. The leaf patterning around the flaring lip of the footed dish echoes the circular shape of the heron, making a unified concentric design.



William De Morgan, *Red Lustre Dish with Fantastic Leaves*, 1872-1907

Formed of flowers, leaves and petal shapes, this beast is a very naturalistic form. It is constructed from foliate motifs, the eye made from a small yellow flower, its beak like a vine or leaf. The creature's body ebbs into pointed waves, echoing the image of a boat in its belly but a rocky sea scape across its spine. William has used floral imagery to construct another of his imaginative creatures, deviating from the typical use of the foliate forms and appropriating the shapes for a different use.

21



William De Morgan, *Ruby Lustre Sphinx Dish*, 1872-1907

The curvaceous, twisting form of a lioness stands upright against a woven bed of gold-lustred leaves. A human breast protrudes from her smooth muscular form, anthropomorphising the heraldic animal. Upon her winding neck sits a human head, wide-eyed and staring, topped with a crown, all united by the same red lustre. The symbolic power of the sphinx in Greek and Egyptian cultures is disregarded by William here, as he mocks the associated meanings of these animals, his focus purely on their aesthetic forms. The sphinx is joined by a rabbit and a dog, completing the circular motif of animals, focusing your eye on the overall shapes, colours and design, rather than the charged Asian association with the zodiac.

22



William De Morgan, *Ruby Lustre Antelope Dish*, 1872-1907

This majestic antelope seems quite regal in its ruby lustre and against a gold lustred ground. The fluid, curved nature of its form reflects the concentric red circles that mark the ridges in the bowl. The foliate accents around the rim cover more space than the antelope himself, yet he proudly dominates the design. A mark on the base reading 'C.P.', attributes Charles Passenger as its decorator, yet William's fluent design approach can be detected through the unbroken roundness of the design.

23



**William De Morgan, *Ruby Lustre Elven Men and Vase Dish*, 1872-1907**

An image of symmetry, two elven men scour at each other, crouching as if ready to pounce. Their bodies are formed from foliate motifs, growing up from the base as they morph into leaves and plant stumps at the feet. A large vase conjoins them, filling the central space so an empty white expanse cannot distract from the unity of the characters. In this same way, vines and leaves chase the elven forms into the circular restrictions of the dish, fusing the three individual elements together.

24



**William De Morgan, *Ruby Lustre Holloware Bowl with Gold Antelope*, 1872-1907**

William manipulates the antelope's form, making it more circular, to fit within the constraints of the bowl. He tucks the head towards the chest and raises the hoofs to different heights to stagger and curve their decline. He echoes this, as in *Red Lustre Bowl with Gold Heron*, in the foliate border that brings unity to the design. Alongside leaves and snakes, the underside of the bowl is marked 'W. De Morgan Fulham J.J.', telling that Joe Juster decorated this dish. This is a prime example of William's aesthetic focus, manipulating a motif for a decorative purpose.

25



William De Morgan, *Ruby Lustre Dish with Cupid Decoration*, 1872-1907

Much like *Red Lustre Dish with Centaur*, William creates the human form in white against a ground of red lustre in order to depict human skin differently to the fur, often shown as block-colour. Around the rim, a sunburst of pattern radiates from the central figure, flooding the dish with red, floral rays. This transforms the plate into a floral motif in itself, intensified by the large rose design that covers the underside of the dish, as if the petals could close upwards to protect little Cupid.

26



William De Morgan, *Fierce Winged Beast*, 1872-1907

A curious beast radiates from the dish in a luminescent red lustre. As another of William's imaginative creations, its unusual combination of wings, fur and talons is central. Set against a wreath of floral twine that grows upwards from below the creature, the block-coloured animal stands out boldly.

27



William De Morgan, *Fighting Beasts with Serpent Dish*, 1872-97

Regularly appropriating the imagery of other cultures, William exhibits Asian influences here. Following the design trends of the Victorian period, the feline creatures on this dish carry tropes of Chinese dragons in their serpentine necks, eagle's claws and scale-like texture. Their fluid bodies become connected motifs that wind around each other and the dish, the snake's wiggling body echoing this, keeping each motif distinguishable but together.

28



William De Morgan, *BBB*, 1888-1907

An incredibly adaptable design, BBB was produced for a stove manufacturing firm called 'Barnard, Bishop and Barnards' to border their hearths. They required a motif that could be placed horizontally and vertically, so William produced this versatile floral form that can be rotated in any direction. The geometric, curved nature of the design, along with the undirected leaves that encircle it, make for a cleverly constructed intricate design. This was an extremely popular motif of William's that exhibits his more scientific, geometric practice, using motifs and symbols for aesthetic purpose.



William De Morgan, *Islamic Seven Segment Leaf*, 1872-1907

Taking inspiration from Islamic pattern, William explores the swirling floral geometric designs used in the culture. This linear repeat pattern could be used to border something or create a continuous line of fluid pattern across a space. The use of vivid blues and dark greens is common of his 'Persian' ware, creating a cool, vibrant design. Although the number seven is of high importance in Islam, William secularises the form of the seven-segment leaf, appropriating it for aesthetic purposes and eradicating its other meanings.



William De Morgan, *Iznik Floral Tiles*, 1872-1907

Classic cobalt, turquoise and olive greens form a tile clearly inspired by Turkish 'Iznik' designs. William's earthy colour palette was something he applied to many of his pieces, perhaps enjoying the harmonious tones and serenity of the combination. The floral design continues across the tiles, the cropping leaving some flowers halved, making this a piece better viewed in panel-formation. Buds and leaves seem to sway in a gentle breeze, causing an entanglement of foliage to cover almost all of the space.

31



William De Morgan, *Floral Tile: Marlborough, 1888-97*

Two different perspectives of this broad flower are shown, revealing the layers of textured petals that clump to form the sun-like circle. Alternating between light and dark, the petal ring almost seems to rotate, emphasised by the side view as the petals lift from their settlements. The leafy background off-sets the floral motif, providing a natural ground for them to grow from. This bold flower is dominant in the tile, allowing a bold design result.

32



William De Morgan, *Double Carnation, 1888-97*

This rotatable floral motif can be viewed from any orientation. The design itself seems to spin on a central axis, winding into a tight knot of leaves, petals and buds. As a close friend and occasional partner of William Morris, William De Morgan took inspiration from his idiom. The type of leaf used and the concentricity of the motif is closely related to Morris and Co. designs and clearly intended to appeal to the same market. The choice of flower also shows how William De Morgan cross-contaminated his inspiration, the carnation being a staple of Iznik ceramics and Middle Eastern design. We can see William's appropriation of motifs in this design, and how he combined them with his aesthetic motivation.

33



William De Morgan, *Snake in a Fruit Tree Bottle*, 1888-1904

The snake's winding form was of great use to William. Its sinuous mobility as it curves from side to side could cover vast spaces and unite disparate elements. Here, the serpent ripples across the vase, showing its breadth and height. It is traveling up a luscious fruit tree, reminiscent of the Biblical story of Genesis and the Garden of Eden. William's use of religious motifs here, boldly paired with a blue and turquoise Iznik pattern, reminds us of his aesthetic focus, putting the conceptual aside.

34



William De Morgan, *Ruby Lustre Griffin Tile Panel*, 1872-1907

Different tones of ruby lustre show four griffins, identical in design but opposed in orientation. Three face left and one faces right, confronting its neighbour. Twirling vines, undulating stalks and blossoming flowers surround the creatures, busying the cream background. Where the tiles alternate direction from the left, the patterns meet each other and interact, mirroring one another to make new patterns and shapes. The leaves falling from the top of the left two tiles become a harmonious composite, reflecting each other and forming a shape of their own, an example of the unity of the piece.

35



William De Morgan, *Relief Dragon Tile Panel*, 1872-1907

Three scenes featuring the same dragon-like creature are spread across this triptych panel. From the left, the first two could be from the same mould, facing the third as it opposes the linear composition. A vivid red lustre engulfs the central tile, breaking up the mirrored colours of the outer two. The stripe used on the skin of the creatures gives the illusion of raising the relief further from the surface. This holds the influence of Halsey Ricardo, William's business partner, known for his use of relief. The floral background unifies the panel, sharing motifs of distinct flowers, leaves and branches as if all embedded in the same plant.

36



William De Morgan, *Fantastic Bird*, 1872-1907

William's playful imagination can be seen in the invention of this fantastical bird, striding across the tile with its chest puffed in pride. William is known to have collaborated with Dr Reginald Thompson in conceiving marvellously strange creatures, jeering each other on in evolving one even stranger than the last. This griffin-esque creation fills the surface of the tile, a monochrome vision of ruby red lustre. The floral sprig design that fills the background echoes the fluidity in which William drew his characters, each line holding an exact purpose.

37



William De Morgan, *Otter and Fish Tile*, 1872-1907

Against a twirling texture of foliage and sprigs sits a red lustre version of William's popular motif featuring an otter catching a fish. The image twists in a serpentine composition, the linear form of the fish curling within the six-inch square. Enormous against the slight, saturated otter, the fish takes centre stage with its vibrant goggling eyes and intricately patterned scales. With large wing-like fins and a winding 'neck', the fish becomes dragon-like in form and size, exemplifying how William's appetite for aesthetics outweighed the importance of technical accuracy and reality in his designs

38



William De Morgan, *Peacock*, 1872-1907

A variation of patterns and lines come together to build a steadfast peacock. Its powerful plumage dictates the design with impressive feathers fanning out across the space. The dispersed feathers are echoed in the floral sprigs in the background, unifying the image and disconcerting the eye as it tries to calculate the busy red monochrome lustre. William's use of this recurrent motif and curved shape across the design exhibits his awareness of the aesthetic qualities of each element: focussing on visual attributes not conceptual ideas.

39



**William De Morgan, *Fantastic Ducks – Repeat B*, 1872-1907**

This busy tile depicts a raft of ducks, moving energetically around a hectic foliate ground. In his classic ruby red lustre, William entices the eye through an enigmatic use of the single-toned line camouflaging the ducks amongst the foliage. The monochrome design creates a unity that is continued through the repeated plant sprigs, filling the space around the fantastical creatures. If laid in a group, this motif would create an ornate yet unified panel as a result of its limited palette, technique and subject.

40



**William De Morgan, *Dragon Tile*, 1888-97**

A lone dragon in red lustre sits against an empty cream background making for a bold tile, focused on the single motif. As one of William's simpler designs, the image may have been painted on to the tile at his pottery in Fulham, told by the signature eagle-winged stamp on the back. The dragon is curved round to compress its full body into the six-inch square, winding its neck to compact it. In this way it becomes almost floral, functioning as a bold, minimal motif to juxtapose against a fuller design.



William De Morgan, *Heraldic Lion Tile*, 1898

Mirroring each other, two beasts move across the tile. A lion travels to the right, and a lioness below it, to the left. Different from his other ceramics, the 'Heraldic Lion' is a low-relief, coated in a thick layer of red lustre. The stamp on the reverse reads 'DM98', providing the year of production and ascribing it to the Sands End Pottery. It is thought the relief designs were the idea of William's business partner, the architect Halsey Ricardo. The drawing for this tile shows strength and ferocity in the lions' expressions, lost slightly in the obscured relief depiction. However, the shapes, colour and dynamic motif is richly captured, consequently a success.



Evelyn De Morgan, *The Worship of Mammon*, 1909

Mammon is the depiction of wealth as an evil influence that wrongly became the subject of worship in place of God. Here, a woman is being offered a large bag of gold by a statue of Mammon, but she bypasses this, heading straight for Mammon himself. Desperately clutching at his knee, the figure becomes a supplicant to him, bending down as if in the presence of a deity. Her purple-pink robes seem almost flesh-like, bruised and pale like her damaged outlook on worship and true spiritual wealth.



William De Morgan, *Cherub and Dove Tile Panel*, 1872-1907

An unusual design choice for William, this panel stands out from the rest. Commonly, the combination cherub, bow and arrow would signal the presence of Cupid, the God of desire. Taking aim, Cupid is poised to shoot, surrounded by doves, the birds of love and desire. Their white, flapping wings stretch across the panel in a muted cream, allowing the brightness of Cupid and of his broader wingspan to dominate. Nine six-inch tiles combine here to make an aesthetically balanced, unusually charged image.

Evelyn De Morgan, *Blindness and Cupidity Chasing Joy from the City*, 1897



'Hunted Joy flies through the gate.  
Blind Blindness is left desolate.  
Cupidity the city's fate.  
The hungry hounds insatiate,  
Stays fettered to a sightless mate.'

[Poem transcribed on the right of the canvas]

This mystical personification of Joy being chased out of the city is metaphorical of humanity's ignorance to the joys of enlightenment. Cupidity wears a shining crown and lustrous clothing, clutching at a pile of gleaming jewels. He looks down, away from Joy as she flies away, ignoring her presence, concerned only with earthly possessions. Blindness cannot see her pure glowing embodiment, blind both in sight and in thought. Shackled to each other, they are together in their earthbound ways, 'blind' to the *joy* that could be theirs.

Evelyn De Morgan, *Earthbound*, 1897



'He sinks the captive of his prize,  
Nor even knows that others rise'

[Last two lines of the poem Evelyn exhibited alongside this work]

An elderly miser clutches to his wealth, dressed in the gold that has dictated his fate. His yellow-gold crown gleams against the muted darkness of the Angel of Death's robes, like a candle flame about to be snuffed into blackness. The man's oblivion towards the joyous light of a moral soul ascending to heaven above him conveys Evelyn's warning to the viewer of the effects of a lack of faith and of earthly, material preoccupation.



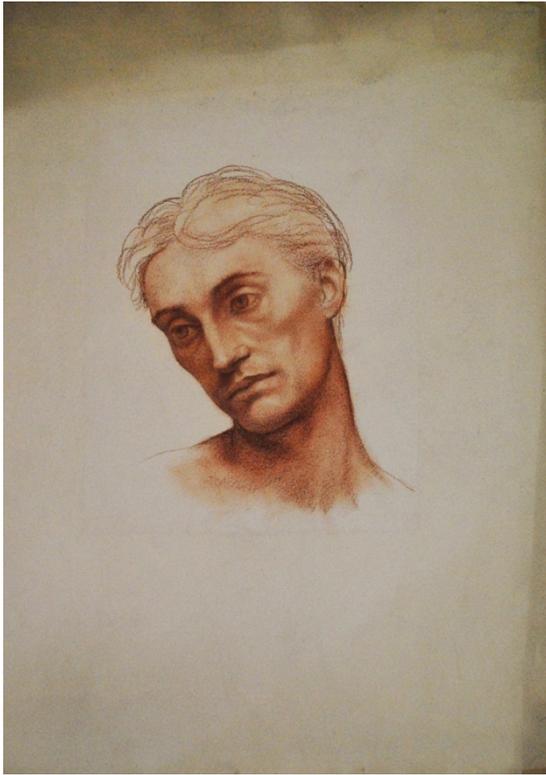
Evelyn De Morgan, *Cadmus and Harmonia*, 1877

'With lambent tongue he kissed her patient face,  
Crept in her bosom as his dwelling place,  
Entwined her neck, and shared the loved embrace.'

[Ovid's  
*Metamorphoses* - when first exhibited]

Evelyn calls on the tales of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, depicting the moment in which Harmonia's husband is transformed into a snake. She is mountainous against the rocky backdrop, clearly considered the central cog to this story. Harmonia is depicted as a beautiful young girl with long red locks and pale plump skin, Evelyn having changed this from the elderly woman of the original tale. The snake twines around her, ensnaring her entire body, her contrapposto position (tilted hip) mimicking this serpentine form, foreshadowing her wish to join her husband in fate.

*Cadmus and Harmonia* was the first of Evelyn's pictures to be exhibited at the Dudley Gallery in London. It was purchased by Sir Charles Dilke, who later suffered from a very public, embarrassing divorce after a scandalous affair with his brother's mother-in-law and her daughter. Dilke was painted by G. F. Watts and his portrait is on view in the Watts Gallery.



Evelyn De Morgan, *Study of a male head for 'Boreas and Oreithyia'*, 1896

The lonesome downward gaze of this study can be matched to that of Boreas in Evelyn's 1896 painting. Features such as the large eyes, delicate brow bone, long thin nose and high cheek bones can be paired quite perfectly. However, the stark difference in the hair in this study, compared to that in the painting, suggests the intent behind the wind-swept locks in the final work. This showcases Evelyn's use of meaningful visual signs, dropped into her work to pass messages to the viewer.

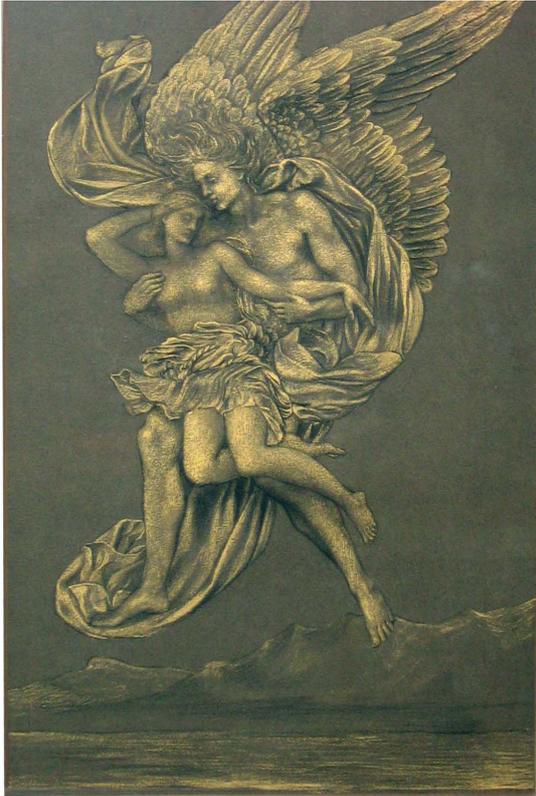


Evelyn De Morgan, *Boreas and Oreithyia*, 1896

'He shook out his wings and trailed the dusty cloak over the mountain tops. He engulfed the panic stricken Oreithyia in his dusky wings.'

[Ovid, *Metamorphoses* VI]

Purple-winged Boreas, god of the North Wind, holds his love, the beautiful Oreithyia, close to him. His rugged hair whips across his face and sheets of fabric plume around them as they soar above the river of Illisus, the place from which Boreas snatched her. Through the blustery movement of the composition Evelyn conveys the struggle of their flight, composing the narrative of unrequited love and Oreithyia's unwilful capture. Evelyn's use of cross composition tightly knits the bodies, subtly calling on the myth of the rape amongst the clouds.



Evelyn De Morgan, *Compositional Study for Boreas and Oreithyia*, 1895-6

Evelyn intertwines the two figures in a tighter hold, suggesting the strength with which Boreas took her and kept her. Boreas appears central, lording the canvas with his mighty wings and muscular form whilst Oreithyia diminishes into him, a classical depiction of the two. Evelyn changes this in the later work, sprawling Oreithyia's figure across the central glow of the painting. Making them more equal in representation gives Oreithyia more of a part in her own story.



Evelyn De Morgan, *Sleep and Death: The Children of the Night*, 1904

A cloak of darkness enrobes a small family, cascading as if dropped from the heavens. Night is falling. Two children perch on a rocky outcrop limply touching their mother, entwined in a serpentine composition. Wind catches the mother's cloak, whipping around her mirroring the dark blue waves of the seascape behind. The smallest child looks out, resting on a burnt-out torch, aware the final sleep is close. Evelyn calls upon the Victorian preoccupation with death and mortality through this gaze, connecting you with the subject and making you consider your own mortality. The crescent moon above signals the imminent darkness when the torchlight goes out, suggesting the cyclical nature of mortal life.



Evelyn De Morgan, *Luna*, 1885

*Luna* is draped in the moon's seat, her body moulding to the thin crescent. An expanse of soft, radiant skin reflects the moon's glow, emitting light as brightly as the moon itself. Ropes twist around her figure tying her to her role of Moon Goddess: the puppet-master of fate, pulling the strings and controlling life on the ground below her. The ropes also bind Luna to the moon, loosely as though she might escape. Here, Evelyn shows her rejection of the patriarchal Victorian pseudo-science that aligned women's menstrual cycles with the moon's cycle, dictating women's place in the home as 'natural'. *Luna* connects women with the moon's strength, presenting them as powerful goddesses. Suspended among the soft clouds, above the mountainous landscape, Evelyn depicts *Luna* turning away with ease and majesty, drooping into the curve of the moon exhibiting a dreamlike energy.



Evelyn De Morgan, *The Light Shineth in Darkness and Darkness Comprehendeth It Not*, 1906

Evelyn contrasts a radiant angel looking down in judgement at three cowering figures chained to the earth by iron shackles. Her concern for society's diminishing faith is seen through these bodies as they cover their eyes and block their ears, closing themselves off from enlightenment. Taken from the Gospels of St John 1:5, the title conveys this growing detachment from religion as society became more secular. Evelyn uses the brilliance of the angel's orb-like rainbow aureole (a halo of light) against the murky darkness of purgatory whilst pained souls cower from the angel's downward judgmental gaze, curling limply away from her.



Evelyn De Morgan, *The Kingdom of Heaven Suffreth Violence and the Violent Take It by Force*, 1878

Ten women ascend from darkness to light representing the soul's progression from its earthbound body to spiritual freedom. A woman in pink gazes at her earth-binding shackles, her crown and colourful garment symbolising her material preoccupation. Above, another wears a blindfold, her blindness illustrating society's blindness to faith. Those beyond progress to spiritual freedom, looking up towards the light of their faith. They climb, eventually in flight, their souls escaping from their bodies, ascending into spiritual freedom. Highly charged with symbolism, this painting presents Evelyn's Spiritualist belief in the evolution of the soul as it escapes the burden of flesh.



Evelyn De Morgan, *The Daughters of the Mist*, 1908

Iridescent luminosity surrounds four figures emitting the celestial blue-white glow of the moon in darkness: a guiding light. Pink and blue drapery intertwines the symbolic scene, dissolving into an aurora of misty cloud, carrying them with lightness, purity and freedom. Evelyn's inspiration here is Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*, both proposing the Spiritualist sentiment of moral behaviour freeing the soul. The central figure leans forward, welcoming the viewer with open arms, reflecting the story as the 'daughters of the air' welcome the virtuous mermaid back. Through this inviting composition, Evelyn invites you to consider your own path to spiritual freedom, as the women lounge in ethereal comfort.

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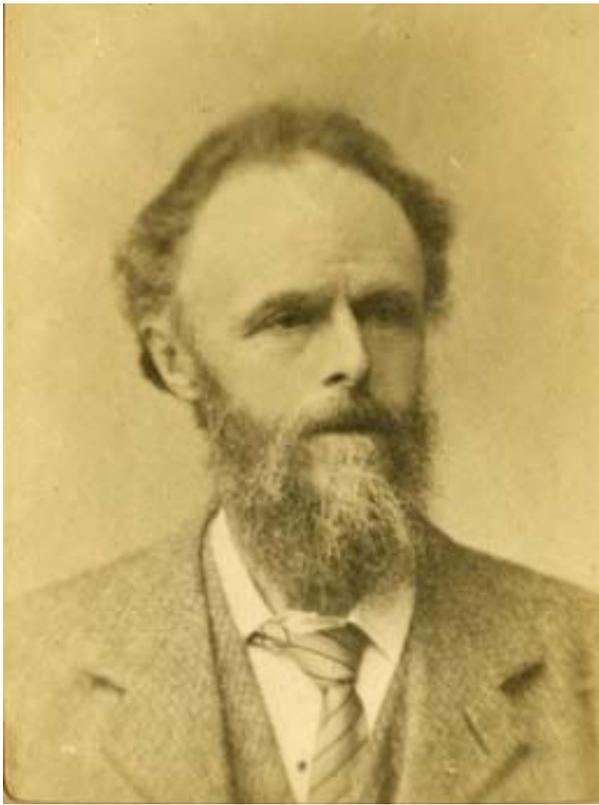
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The De Morgans moved in artistic circles and regularly visited Mary and G. F. Watts at their studio-home, Limnerslease, here in Compton.

“Mrs De Morgan is here, our only visitor. Signor [G.F. Watts] lay in the niche & talked of the change that might be wrote for mankind, were he but to realise that his present ideal is all for self, self-advancement, & chiefly by money getting for self, & instead was to fix eyes upon the grand universal idea of helping all to reach a happier & better state of things. A heaven might really dawn upon earth”

- Mary Watts' diary, 20 August 1893

Whilst Evelyn and George would discuss politics and socialism, William and Mary were interested in craft, process and making. This exhibition compares William's aesthetically driven designs with Evelyn's narrative paintings, to reveal their different motivations and approaches to creating.



William De Morgan was inspired by the huge influx of 'Islamic' and 'Persian' decorative arts from across the Middle East and Asia being collected and exhibited in the late-19th century. The Islamic 'ogee' (double S shape), the jagged saz leaf popularised in 16th-century Turkish Iznik ware, and the long-necked dragons of Asia, are peppered over the surface of the ceramics.

Owing to his playful imagination and astute comprehension of adapting a 2D pattern for a 3D ceramic surface, William stripped cultural signifiers of meaning for aesthetic gain. The winding neck of an Asian dragon was simply used to cover wide spaces with an interesting pattern, the heraldic stance of a lion allowed a broad, undulating area to be coated in lustre.

Consequently, William's global appropriation of cultural motifs contrast greatly to his wife's deeply symbolic artistic development.



Evelyn De Morgan painted parables which embody her fear for humanity's dwindling faith. Through charged symbols and motifs, she guides her audience towards a Spiritualist life of salvation, virtue and devotion. Whilst a high level of technical skill and perfectionism is apparent, her artwork serves a purpose beyond the aesthetic.

Every element of every painting was considered. Whether a gaze, a pose or a posture, each part can be interpreted as necessary, building upon the overall message of the work. Often, we find Evelyn straying from the traditional depictions of classical stories, legends and myths, centralising the women and situating them as the leaders of their own plots. She is considered an early feminist, and this motive can be seen in her more independent approach to a Pre-Raphaelite style of depiction.

As husband and wife, the De Morgans were one, once described together as

“two of the rarest spirits of the age”

- Sir Edward Poynter, President of the Royal Academy

but as designer and painter they were lone, stalwart spirits.