

The Nine Graces: Objects of Desire

At the very beginning was Chaos, but then right after was wide-bosomed Gaia (Earth) the ever-safe foundation of all immortals that hold the peaks of snowy Olympus, and murky Tartarus (Underworld) in the depth of wide-pathed Earth, and then Eros, most beautiful among the deathless gods, he loosens the limbs and seduces the mind and wise counsel.

Hesiod, *Theogony* 116-122

Simon Ogden's new handcrafted rugs by Dilana are archaeological in their making and design. They draw on a series of small linoleum works, *The 9 Graces* (2015, private collection - Auckland). In those works Simon explored the notion of intimacy in a systematic manner through cut-outs of linoleum manufactured from the late 1800s through to the 1960s. Each piece features male and female genitalia arranged in the same archetypal and sexually suggestive iconography. They almost touch and are presented as if emerging out of naturalistic environments created through the careful placement of colours and patterns. Birds feed on a drip and the floral designs release recollections of erotic desire conceived as a generative force associated with the flesh and life but extending to creativity and intellectual drive (fig. 1).

The rugs are an organic flow-on from the linoleum works. On the one hand, they override the original medium and yet evoke it by being floorcoverings themselves; on the other hand, they translate the visual nature of the linoleum works and their humble delicacy into multi-sensorial spaces and exquisite objects of desire. Now we can walk barefoot on the images, our hands can touch the changing textures, our fingers can probe loopholes and fissures; we can even go as far as to lay on them and be seduced by their celebratory feel. Finally, we can appreciate the graceful allusions and dissimulations embedded in Simon's wide-ranging exploration of sensuality through media and forms.

To some extent, Simon alludes to William Morris (1834-1896) who designed wallpapers and textiles by drawing on the natural world, including his garden. Morris's complex stylisation of flowers – when observed closely - reveals a provocative insinuation of the sensual (example in fig.2). The ubiquity of the erotic in the ancient world has supported Simon's decision to cross the boundaries between arts and crafts and to engage with sensuality head-on (examples in figs.3-4). Early Renaissance iconography where the erotic is manipulated into a number of metaphors of the divine and its embodiments has inspired the gracefulness of Simon's design (example in fig.5). Interested in the flow of the various parts, Simon has also drawn on the interconnecting rhythm of Indian base relief sculptures (example in fig.6). These are only some of Simon's points of reference. Working with artisans and artists is what drives this project.

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Each rug is 2400x1300 mm; 100% NZ wool, silk, 19th century gold thread, with elements of mother of pearl, and gold. Each is a unique work signed by the artist.



Fig. 1 One of the nine linoleum works from *The Nine Graces* (2015)



Fig. 2 One of Morris's designs



Fig. 3 Mosaic 2nd/3rd century; Charis = Grace



Fig. 4 Oil-lamp Pompeii (79 AD)



Fig. 5 Pietro Perugino, *Assunzione* (1504-1057)



Fig. 6 Khajuraho, base relief (AD 900-1130)