



## Decorative Arts: Design since 1860 (616)

Mon, 2nd Nov 2020, Live Online | Viewing in Edinburgh

### Viewing Times:

Viewing now closed.

## Lot 137

**Estimate:** £4000 - £6000 + Fees

### **WILLIAM DE MORGAN (1839-1917) ARTS & CRAFTS SIX-TILE PANEL, CIRCA 1880**

the tiles painted with a vase of flowers entwined by a serpent, within an ebonised wood frame

50cm x 35cm

**Exhibited:** William De Morgan Exhibition, Leighton House, London, 18 May - 24 June 1972, No. 50. (part)

**Literature:** Greenwood, M. *The Designs of William De Morgan*, Richard Dennis 1989, p. 180, pl. 458 (design drawing illustrated)

**Provenance:** Metford Warner

The Roger Warner Collection, Christies, 20<sup>th</sup> January 2009, lot 225

Private Collection, London

**Note:** Metford Warner (1843-1930) owned the wallpaper manufacturing company Jeffrey & Co., and contributed to the change away from French taste in wallpaper design employing designers such as Walter Crane, Owen Jones, Charles Eastlake, William Burges and Edward W. Godwin to produce designs for wallpapers. His grandson Roger Warner was a renowned antique dealer based in Burford Oxfordshire who directed taste towards objects that previously had been disregarded or even derided, ensuring that popular, regional and vernacular arts, whether wooden furniture, pottery, treen, metal-wares, textiles and domestic utensils, were saved and studied.

### The Tiles of William de Morgan

There had not been a tile-making tradition in England since the reformation and it was not re-introduced until the 1830s, at the beginning of the great period of Victorian church building and restoration. Initially confined to tiling for floors by the 1870s the market for decorative tiles was enormous, and virtually every new building project incorporated a tiled element of one sort or another, extending in some cases to the walls and even the ceilings.

It was in this burgeoning market that the renowned Arts & Crafts ceramicist William de Morgan (1839-1917) made his name. The eldest of seven children, de Morgan was born in 1839 and showed early promise as an artist. During his formal education at the Royal Academy Schools he met influential artists like Simeon Solomon and Henry Holiday. In 1862 Holiday introduced de Morgan to William Morris who was to become a life-long friend and collaborator and who offered him a job.

Morris & Company was only two years old at this point and de Morgan began with the firm designing stained glass with Burne-Jones and also decorating tiles, to the designs of Morris. During his work with glass De Morgan noticed that if silver nitrate stain was fired at the wrong temperature on the

glass it would reduce and produce an iridescence on the surface.

Fascinated by this lustrous effect he began experimenting with glass and ceramics, buying blank tiles and plates, decorating and firing them in a makeshift kiln at his home in Fitzroy Square, which subsequently burnt the roof off. Doubtless this unfortunate event precipitated a move to Chelsea in 1872, marking the end of his stained glass career. It also marked the beginning of his own business producing tiles and other ceramics to his own designs. De Morgan went on to produce tiles for many large commissions. After his period at Merton Abbey he moved the business nearer to his home at Fulham. By the turn of the century his designs had fallen out of fashion and he stopped production in 1907 lamenting that "All my life I have been trying to make beautiful things...and now that I can nobody wants them." Despite this setback he managed to change his career late in life and became a successful novelist.

His tile designs can broadly be categorised as plants and flowers, usually of Middle Eastern influence; exotic or fantastical animals and medieval galleons at sea, of which there are several fine examples of each type in this sale.