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Winter 2012
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CARPETS & TEXTILES FOR MODERN INTERIORS

Reinventing the rug⁸⁶



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Spyder, Spyder, Burning Bright...

Austrian architect-designers Andreas Reichl and Noémi Kiss, aka Kiss the Reichl, turn old, disused carpets into startling wall-mounted decorative artworks. **Mitchell Albert** resists the heebie-jeebies and takes a closer look.

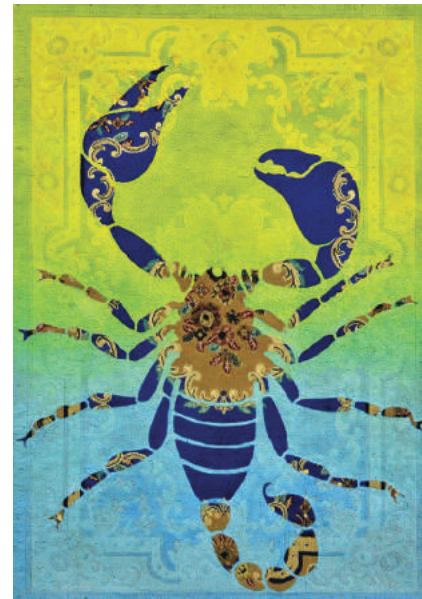


You could be forgiven for thinking you were hallucinating: a psychedelic scorpion glows vividly on the wall, emerging from a carpet with a faded European design. The indigo segments of the creature's carapaced abdomen match its fearsomely oversized claws. As if that weren't enough, there are spiders, too: many of them, crawling enormously across the surface of another faded rug, this one a modern Persian traditional design.

As far as hallucinations go, these images would make up a fairly spectacular (if frightful) one; but what you're looking at are, in fact, the intense, captivating creations of Noémi Kiss and Andreas Reichl, an Austrian architect couple who call their firm Kiss the Reichl. It seemed Noémi had something of a carpet addiction, buying old rugs at flea markets until she and Reichl found themselves turfed out of their own apartment by the ever-mounting volume of her acquisitions.

Their solution? Give the carpets a good cleaning, then unleash the bestiary of their imagination, applying acrylic paint to the rugs to create original works of art that combine 'old' and 'new' elements alike. These painted rugs – their Carpeted Carpets collection – thus assume a strictly decorative function, as eye-catching wall art.

There are lizards, carp, and crabs, too, but the arachnids predominate by far. So what's bugging these two designers? "What is interesting for us are things that are edged out of so-called 'fine' society," says Reichl of the combination of old carpets as a medium and creepy-crawlies as a subject. "For instance, with apparently ugly, dusty textiles that have fallen into disuse. The 'scabby' old carpets from the flea markets provoke an internal, emotional reaction; our recollections of tasteless furniture and old-fashioned living rooms decide whether something



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is 'nice' or 'nasty'. Even more internalised is our fear of spiders and scorpions."

Kiss the Reichl's Carpeted Carpets, then, make use of a kind of alchemy, turning repulsive things into compelling art objects. "When these unloved things 'fall in love' with each other, an astonishing effect is produced," continues Reichl. "We make unpopular things popular. Everything fits together in a new way, creating a new order; negative reaction is transformed into a ceremonious act."

If Kiss and Reichl work with philosophical oppositions (e.g. attraction and repulsion, obsolescence and reinvention), they also work with material opposition as well – with, as Reichl says, "the hard and coarse quality of the acrylic paint clashing with the soft materials of the carpet" serving as yet another element in their "collision of contradictory solutions." This collision is "soft," however: "With Carpeted Carpets, we

01 *No More Space for You*, an installation by Kiss the Reichl at OÖ Kulturquartier, Linz, Austria, October 2012

02 *Spider carpet cutout* from *No More Space for You*

03 *Skorpio*, acrylic paint on wool rug

04 *Edgars*, acrylic paint on woollen rug



05

focus on the dialogue between the different materials. You can either discern a new pattern in the acrylic painting or, where omitted, still enjoy the fabric of the original carpet. The painted spider can show the basic elements of which the carpet is composed."

The pair paint on woollen rugs, first adhering a clear stencil foil to the carpet, then drawing their preferred creature on it after determining the most pleasing incorporation of the carpet's pattern into its body. Next, they cut out the foil and apply the paint. "The most thrilling moment," says Reichl, "is when we remove the foil, because then it becomes obvious whether the concept works or not."

As observed, once painted on, the carpets become purely decorative, though Reichl contends that the carpets had already "lost

their decorative effect as well"; he adds that, at any rate, he and Kiss "think that an emotional response carries more function in itself than walking on a carpet can do. There is a lack of spontaneity in this so-well-functioning world." All the same, Kiss and Reichl plans to bring out a line of laser-cut rugs that can be used as such, whereby an identical motif is cut out of two different rugs and the one inlaid into the other, the backing consolidated with natural rubber.

Carpeted Carpets provides an interesting variation on the idea of deconstructing rugs, not quite "erasing" them as, say, carpet conceptualist Jan Kath has done, but through a process that is as much vandalism as commemoration. With their painted rugs, Kiss and Reichl acknowledge the power of time and tradition, but refuse to be bound by them. "We want to deliver work in

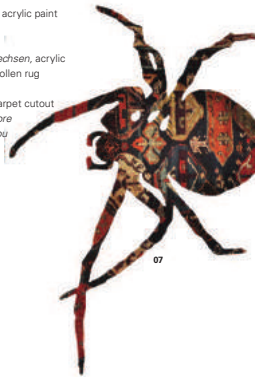


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05 *Untitled*, acrylic paint on wool rug

06 *Haremsechsen*, acrylic paint on woollen rug

07 Spider carpet cutout from *No More Space for You*



07

which manual labour, almost unaffordable today, is equally valued alongside the mind-driven machine-and-computer world."

Reichl and Kiss caution that their work "should not be taken too seriously," but of course there's a great deal of philosophy underlying their playfulness. Themes of impermanence, mortality, waste and regeneration haunt their colourful renderings of creatures not normally associated with the ornamentation of the typical domestic interior.

All very well in theory, then, but will people actually put gigantic spiders on their walls? Reichl is not in doubt: "Proof of the success of our concept is one client, a stage designer who had arachnophobia. Now, a spider carpet is hanging in her bedroom above her head!"

www.kissthereichl.at