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Snake Goddess

Madeleine Cody: In 1903 Sir Arthur Evans, excavating at the ancient palace of Knossos on the island of Crete, discovered fragmentary statuettes of faience, a compound made of ground quartz with an alkaline binder, depicting female figures holding snakes. Two of these figures became iconic images of Minoan civilization as soon as they were published, and ever since, archaeologists, art historians, and feminist scholars have worked to determine their role and significance in Minoan culture. Later, similar unexcavated “snake goddess” figurines appeared on the antiquities market, and some were purchased by museums. Among these were ivory and gold examples whose color palette inspired Judy Chicago; however, the authenticity of these figures has since been questioned. The snake motif is apparent in the capital letter *S* on the runner’s front and two shimmering, entwined, and embroidered gold snakes on the back of the runner. These can best be viewed across the table while making your way around *The Dinner Party*. Inkle-loom woven strips border the runner and are embroidered with patterns similar to those found on Minoan garments. The ruffled fabric on the front and back of the runner refers to the costumes of early snake-goddess figures, who wore tiered skirts. The Heritage Floor names around the Snake Goddess place setting are those of ancient Greek, Roman, Egyptian, European, and Mesoamerican goddesses who were associated with snakes (often because of their role as goddesses of the underworld) or with divination.