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EUROPEAN TAPESTRIES IN  
THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO



# EUROPEAN TAPESTRIES IN THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

Koenraad Brosens

*With contributions by*

Pascal-François Bertrand, Charissa Bremer-David,  
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The Art Institute of Chicago



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*European Tapestries in the Art Institute of Chicago*











# ❖ FOREWORD ❖

Guy Delmarcel

THE collection of ancient tapestries at the Art Institute of Chicago comprises at present close to one hundred items that have been purchased by, or, more frequently, donated or bequeathed to, the museum over more than a century. These objects came from many different countries, and were woven by various manufacturers using models and cartoons provided by a diverse assortment of artists. None of them were intended for display in a museum. In fact, a museum's collection is a highly artificial gathering of items, which look a bit like passengers on a railway platform: some may be alike, some may be different, but all remain mute, standing side by side, gazing at each other without reciprocal knowledge of one another's identity, before finally going their separate ways on different trains. The last part of the comparison is particularly true for tapestries, which, due to their sensitivity to light, are normally exhibited only for limited periods of time before being returned to storage. It is the art historian and the curator's task to bring them back to life, trying to find out where and when they were conceived, what original function they served, and what their subsequent destiny has been. Indeed, each tapestry has its own story, sometimes known and quite fascinating, in other cases still undiscovered.

Initially intended to cover the walls of castles and abbeys to keep warmth inside the buildings, tapestries were among the most prestigious objects owned by the upper classes. When some unknown artist or weaver, probably in northwestern Europe in the middle of the fourteenth century, conceived the idea of representing stories on these weavings, as opposed to merely decorative patterns, tapestry embarked on its own glorious career in the figurative arts, rising to the level of wall painting in Southern Europe and, much later, to the level of painting on wood or canvas. Their owners could enjoy the romances represented, but they could also often identify with the heroes of the past, imagining themselves a new Hercules, a new Alexander, or a new Cyrus. The variety of subjects is endless and astonishing, as is duly reflected in the Art Institute's collection. They range from biblical and Christian themes to allegory, ancient history, heraldry, and mythology, as well as representations of daily life and hunting and merely decorative greenwork or verdure—those so-called winter gardens which sometimes constitute the bulk of a collection.

Above all, tapestry is distinguished by its serial aspect. Many weavings in the Art Institute's collection nowadays appear to be independent works of art, but most originally belonged to series of several related pieces woven from cartoons that could be put on the

loom repeatedly to produce multiple suites or "chambers." Reconstructing the sets to which such isolated pieces originally belonged was one of the main challenges of the present research. The Art Institute can proudly exhibit several such partial suites, including pieces from a sixteenth-century edition of *The Months*, two weavings from a seventeenth-century edition of *The Seasons*, and the enormous late-Baroque fourteen-piece *Story of Caesar and Cleopatra* ensemble.

Many items in the Chicago collection are masterpieces, highly representative of an epoch or a style. These pieces include the late medieval *Resurrection*, the Renaissance *Medallion Months* and *Pomona Surprised by Vertumnus and Other Suitors*, the aforementioned Flemish *Story of Caesar and Cleopatra*, the Gobelins *Autumn* and *Winter* and *Grotesque Months*, the Beauvais *Elephant* and *Emperor Sailing*, and the Aubusson *Outdoor Market*. Some of these pieces are even of royal or princely origin. But many other tapestries from less well known series or with less distinguished provenances also offer the reader a sometimes surprisingly interesting subject or story.

Scholarly literature about ancient tapestry has greatly increased over the course of the past decades. Numerous books, exhibition catalogues, and articles have provided ever more refined insights into the many questions surrounding the origins, production, and iconography of tapestries. This has led to a widespread diversification and specialization of the field. Christa C. Mayer Thurman, curator of the Art Institute's collection, therefore made the wise decision to enlist the participation of other specialists in the field, thus leading a team of several reputed scholars from the United States as well as from Europe. As a result, this catalogue presents the reader not only an in-depth analysis of the Chicago holdings, but also a broad perspective on tapestry history. Many entries indeed contain fascinating comments about artists, designs, and weavers, opening new and unknown perspectives with implications that reach far beyond the object at hand. Moreover, the authors consistently prepared their contributions with a large cultivated audience in mind, and so this catalogue not only introduces the Art Institute's tapestries to scholars and the public, but also provides the reader a pleasant and instructive handbook of the medium.

The present volume is embedded in a tradition of similar publications, in which the United States has played a leading role over the past forty years. Homage should be paid first of all to Adolfo S. Cavallo, author of the 1967 catalogue of the tapestries in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. His pioneering publication traced the outlines of a sound methodology which became a model for future major

catalogues of this type, including Anna G. Bennett's publication on the tapestries held by the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco (1976; 2nd ed. 1992), Edith A. Standen's catalogue of the post-medieval collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1985), the three volumes thus far published of the holdings of the Patrimonio Nacional, Madrid, by Paulina Junquera de Vega (1986) and Concha Herrero Carretero (2000), Cavallo's own book on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's medieval tapestries (1993), Candace J. Adelson's

volume on the tapestries in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (1994), Nello Forti Grazzini's catalogue of the holdings of the Quirinale in Rome (1994), Lucia Meoni's first volumes on the Medici collection in Florence (1998; 2007), and lastly, the catalogue of the tapestries in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, by Ebeltje Hartkamp-Jonxis and Hillie Smit (2004). We may only hope, now that the Art Institute of Chicago has published its collection, that other major museums will follow its example and disclose their treasures as well.



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# ❖ INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ❖

*Christa C. Mayer Thurman*

IT is with an enormous sense of pride and satisfaction that we put forth this volume, the first scholarly catalogue ever undertaken of the Art Institute's collection of European tapestries. In comparison to the vast numbers of such works held in national collections and distributed among countless museums and institutions worldwide, the Chicago assemblage of tapestries is relatively modest in size. But the museum's holdings, which grew somewhat miraculously over the past one hundred years, nonetheless include wonderful examples of the art of tapestry weaving and manufacturing. Formed largely through gifts to the Art Institute from donors who themselves never aspired to build comprehensive representations of the art form, the collection still manages to offer many splendid works whose publication here will, we believe, please scholars and art historians who have long sought a catalogue of these largely unknown and under-published pieces, as well as arouse new interest among the Art Institute's members, patrons, and visitors. The anticipated opening of the museum's Modern Wing in 2009 and the ensuing reinstallation of the permanent collection throughout the other galleries hold forth the possibility that the tapestries presented in this volume may, at long last, begin to be exhibited in spaces suitable for displaying these often immense works of art. Newly conserved—as a result of an extensive thirteen-year undertaking described in this volume—these remarkable pieces deserve to be integrated with related works of art. The showcasing of these tapestries would then be a fitting tribute to the donors who were principally responsible for building the museum's collection, those present-day supporters of the Art Institute who have made possible the conservation of the works and this publication, and the individual scholars whose contributions to this volume have opened up the story of these tapestries for visitors and readers alike.

Although many people consider tapestries a component of the decorative arts, tapestry research, like the study of paintings, the field to which it is most closely related in subject matter and scale, presents a complex topic. Yet art historians have by and large touched upon it only occasionally and arbitrarily, preferring—when they do turn to the topic—to concern themselves only with the style of the pieces and the sources of their designs. Quite a different approach has been reflected in the work of textile historians, curators, and conservators, because they typically choose to emphasize fabric structures, looms, weavers, and manufacturers. Commerce, economics, and the market are yet other subjects that some studies have taken up. Unfortunately, the adoption of one approach seems frequently to have precluded

the inclusion of others. In this volume an effort has been made to draw upon many different approaches and to address various topics.

As the manufacturing of tapestries was a European phenomenon, the expertise in this field can be principally traced to Europe, where the study of these textiles has long been pursued as a scholarly discipline. Only infrequently has serious study of the medium been an option for those attending American universities. On the rare occasion when a student surfaced with a desire to write a dissertation on a tapestry-related topic under the guidance of an art historian, it was inevitable that a critical advisor and reader be selected from the international roster of tapestry scholars. The European individuals who belong to this small and specialized group are thus in high demand. Even rarer are those who have had extensive contact with actual tapestry collections. In recent times Guy Delmarcel has been an exemplar of this select group. Since 2003 he has been professor emeritus of the Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven, Belgium, but before that he succeeded the distinguished Jean-Paul Asselberghs (1935–1973) as Curator of Tapestries and Textiles at the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels. A part-time position Delmarcel assumed in 1973 turned into full-time employment from 1975 to 1990. His career took a turn in 1990, however, when he transferred to the Katholieke Universiteit, where he taught art history and the decorative arts, including the vast subject of tapestry, until his retirement in 2003. He thus brings together not only the expertise gained from having curated a tapestry collection but also the experience of teaching students, linking historical knowledge with his curatorial hands-on practice. To this day Guy Delmarcel continues just as passionately and relentlessly with his research. Familiar with and concerned for decades about the unpublished Chicago collection, he was the logical choice to serve as external reader for this volume and to contribute its foreword. The Art Institute and this curator owe him great thanks.

While teaching in Leuven, Delmarcel passed on his passion for tapestry to a number of those who sat at his feet. His tireless search for primary documents and his ability to sift them for nuggets of information, coupled with his remarkable facility with languages, enabled him to correct errors and misunderstandings that had long limited the comprehension and appreciation of tapestries in many countries. Fortunately, his approach took hold in a younger generation of scholars. One of his last and most outstanding students is Koenraad Brosens, who wrote his dissertation under Delmarcel in Leuven and is presently both a postdoctoral fellow for the Belgian Scientific Research Fund (F.W.O.-Vlaanderen) and a Visiting



Professor at the Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven. The Art Institute was fortunate that just at the time when the publication of its tapestry collection could finally be undertaken this bright young scholar appeared on the horizon. Through an arrangement with the Belgian Scientific Research Fund and the university, Koenraad Brosens was able to assume the responsibility of principal author of this volume. As the largest component of the Chicago collection is of Northern European origin, Brosens's appointment was ideal for the "Chicago Tapestry Project." Taking a collection that was haphazardly catalogued or miscatalogued, he mined archives in Belgium and Paris as he pursued connections between Flanders and France and brought forth much new information. His monumental contributions to this catalogue are evident throughout, and I am immensely indebted to Koen for enabling the Art Institute to realize a dream that this curator has nurtured for decades.

But as the Art Institute's collection includes examples of tapestry weaving from other times and places, Guy Delmarcel, Koen Brosens, and I decided to invite other tapestry scholars with particular expertise to participate in this project, so that their scholarship could be incorporated in this volume. Thus, Pascal-Francois Bertrand, Professeur d'Histoire de l'Art Moderne, Université de Michel de Montaigne-Bordeaux 3, France; Charissa Bremer-David, Curator of Sculpture and Decorative Arts, the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Elizabeth Cleland, Leo and Julia Forchheimer Research Fellow, Antonio Ratti Textile Center, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and Nello Forti Grazzini, independent scholar, Milan, joined the team during the project's last years. Their contributions speak for themselves, and I am profoundly grateful to each of them.

Yet finding the right scholars for this publication was only part of the challenge, for this long-awaited venture was closely tied to a costly and absolutely essential conservation program involving the works in the Art Institute's collection. After a twenty-five-year search, this effort culminated in the selection of what I believe was the right laboratory, the De Wit Royal Manufacturers in Mechelen, Belgium, operated under the direction of Yvan Maes De Wit. This aspect of the overall project began with my introduction to the director in the early 1990s. I followed up by taking one tapestry to Mechelen as a trial piece in 1995. The treatment of this tapestry proved to be a great success, and I liked and admired the De Wit approach to conservation and the complete, in-house system the firm had developed. Little by little, as funding was raised piecemeal, tapping support from individuals and groups of different sorts, we have over the last thirteen years achieved something extraordinary: the cleaning, conservation, and relining of seventy-eight of the tapestries presented in this book. The leadership of the Committee on Textiles—under Chairman of the Board of Trustees and, at the time, Chairman of the Committee John H. Bryan—was invaluable. Armen Minasian, a member of the Committee, suggested we start with one piece, hoping, even confident, that other Textile Committee members and other museum groups would follow suit and pledge their support.

Ultimately, a subcommittee charged with the task of enlisting others to "adopt a tapestry" was formed with Shirley Welsh Ryan (who succeeded John H. Bryan as Chairman of the Committee), Joseph W. Fell, and Armen Minasian. In the end, a number of individuals and organizations underwrote the conservation treatment of the tapestries presented in this volume. They are acknowledged under the appropriate entries in the catalogue proper, but for their financial assistance I here wish to express our sincere thanks to Nathalie W. Alberts, Neville Bryan, Joseph W. Fell, Barbara Franke, Donna McKinney, Armen Minasian, Janis Notz, Shirley Welsh Ryan, Alice Welsh Skilling, and Nicole Williams, as well as to the following organizations: the Antiquarian Society of the Art Institute of Chicago; the Rosemarie and Dean Buntrock Foundation; the Community Associates of the Art Institute of Chicago; the Fatz Foundation; the Malott Family Foundation in loving memory of Elizabeth Hubert Malott; the City of Oudenaarde, Belgium; the Textile Society of the Art Institute of Chicago; the Textile Society Trip Fund; and the James Tigerman Estate. In addition, the Community Associates generously provided a special grant to cover the cost of the expensive color separations used in the production of this book.

All the pieces that required conservation underwent the treatment process in Belgium. The accomplishments of Yvan Maes De Wit and his team of technicians have been remarkable, for they were able to resolve many tricky problems and challenges that the Art Institute's collection presented them. We acknowledge their expertise and are most grateful for the care the collection received in Mechelen over many years. In addition to Yvan Maes De Wit, I wish to thank the other members of his staff, led by Veerle De Wachter, head of the workshop: An Volckaert and Paul Michielssen, academic advisors; as well as Els Danckaers, Lien De Puyseleir, Patricia Jonckers, Maria Peeters, Olga Solovova, Ann Van Beveren, Véronique Van den Abbeele, Nelly Van den Brande, Bie Van Gastel, Sandra Vanhille, Sabine Verdict, Ingrid Van Kelst, Paula Smets, and Mariëtte Wyckmans. Yvan Maes De Wit has also graciously contributed an essay to this book in which he describes in detail the treatment of the Art Institute's tapestries in Mechelen (see pp. 21–29). Thanks are also due to Alain and Nathalie Speltdoorn of Brussels, who performed the post-conservation photography.

In 2004 a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation provided the Art Institute the essential funding for the publication of this volume, ensuring that Koenraad Brosens and the additional authors could participate. That same year the museum authorized the Department of Textiles to hire Odile Joassin, Associate Research Assistant, for four years. Odile pursued her responsibilities admirably and tirelessly throughout the preparation of entries and the planning of the accompanying exhibition. She made valuable contributions through her provenance and curatorial research, and acted as liaison to all the authors involved in this publication. She was indeed a vital member of the "Chicago Tapestry Project."

The Getty Visiting Research Scholar Program presented me with



an uninterrupted three-month residency in 2004 at the J. Paul Getty Museum to devote myself to this undertaking. During that time, much support and assistance was provided by Charissa Bremer-David of the Getty Museum and the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. Located at the Getty are the major components of the French and Company photographic archives and ledger books, which proved to be critical for this project, along with the museum's own special collections, including an extraordinary database on tapestries and microfilm copies of the collection records of William Randolph Hearst and of the noted fine art dealership Duveen Brothers, as well as almost 100,000 auction catalogs, and various resources for provenance research, along with photographic documentation pertaining to historic tapestries. Among those who assisted me while at the Getty, I want to thank in particular Wim De Wit, Head, Special Collections and Visual Resources; Martha Steele, Special Collections Cataloger; Sabine Schlosser, Scholar Program Associate; and especially Karen Guntermann, Research Assistant. Additional thanks go to Charles Salas, Head, Research and Education; Deborah Gribbon, Director of the Getty Museum at the time; and the late Thomas Crow, who was then Director of the Getty Research Institute. Furthermore, I was ably assisted in my examination of French and Company material in 1995 by Onica Busuiocanu, former Senior Special Collections Cataloger at the Getty Research Institute, when the Getty Archives were at their previous location in Santa Monica.

Of related significance were the tapestry files at the Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, California, made available through Curator Shelley Bennett; the tapestry files at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, made available through Sharon Takeda, Senior Curator and Department Head, Costumes and Textiles; and the collection records at the Hearst Castle, San Simeon, California, made available through Curator Jana Seely. I am also grateful to Thomas P. Campbell, Curator, Department of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts, and Supervising Curator, Antonio Ratti Textile Center, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and to Ian Wardropper, Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Chairman, Department of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, who made available additional French and Company photographic albums, as well as the Edith A. Standen Tapestry Research Files at the Metropolitan Museum, and the tapestry database of the Ratti Center.

At the Art Institute my endeavors have been supported by Jack P. Brown, Executive Director of the Ryerson and Burnham Libraries; Bart Ryckbosch, Archivist; and the staff of the Ryerson and Burnham Libraries; and by my colleagues Martha Wolff, Eleanor Wood Prince Curator of European Paintings before 1750, Department of Medieval to Modern European Painting and Sculpture; Suzanne McCullagh, Anne Vogt Fuller and Marion Titus Searle Curator of Prints and Drawings, and Martha Tedeschi, Curator of Prints and Drawings, both in the Department of Prints and Drawings; and Richard F. Townsend, Chair, Department of African and Amerin-

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I am also indebted to members of the Publications Department, led by Susan F. Rossen, Executive Director. First and foremost, my thanks are extended to Assistant Editor for Scholarly Publications Amy R. Peltz, who was principally responsible for this substantial volume. She was aided in her efforts by Robert V. Sharp, Director of Publications; Carolyn Heidrich, Production Coordinator; Joseph Mohan, Photography Editor; and Kate Kotan, Production Assistant. In the Department of Imaging I want to acknowledge Christopher Gallagher, Associate Director; Robert Hashimoto, Senior Photographer; and Robert Lifson, Photographer; in Graphic Design, Lyn DelliQuadri, Executive Director; in Marketing and Public Affairs, Erin Hogan, Director of Public Affairs; and in Museum Registration, John Molini, Manager of Art Packing, who was assisted by Lorna A. Filippini in the design of the tapestry transportation crates that his crew executed. These crates have since become the model for other museums in the shipment of their works.

For their part in the design and production of this book, I wish to acknowledge two individuals who, over many years, have rendered extraordinary service to the Art Institute. Dean Bornstein, a remarkably talented graphic designer, has executed scholarly catalogues for this museum's collections of early Italian drawings, American art, and, most recently, European paintings, and he has here given us yet another elegant and well-conceived volume. Pat Goley of Professional Graphics, Rockford, Illinois, has guided the creation of exquisite color separations for countless Art Institute books. I am grateful to both of them for their work on behalf of our collection of tapestries.

To present this collection to the public in its newly conserved splendor was a significant challenge in itself, but one that resulted in *The Divine Art: Four Centuries of European Tapestries*, the long-awaited exhibition accompanying this publication. For his efforts on the installation of the tapestries, I thank Markus Dohner, Exhibition Designer, who undertook a task that was formidable, even with the assistance of a computer capable of displaying the entire exhibition superimposed on the floor plan of Regenstein Hall. In the Office of Physical Plant, under Associate Vice President William Caddick, numerous carpenters, electricians, painters, and other crew members contributed their expertise in specific areas. I thank them all, along with Beatrice Chu, Associate Vice President of Design and Construction.



Merely saying thank you seems rather inadequate when one's involvement with the countless critical challenges of such a publication and exhibition stretched over many years, and such is the case with two former members of the Department of Textiles—two very special individuals—Cynthia J. Cannon, Assistant and Secretary in the Department of Textiles from 1969 to 2002, who shared in the difficult organization of this project from the very beginning, and Lorna A. Filippini, who in the capacity of Associate Conservator served the department with distinction from 1976 to 2005. Lorna was succeeded by the present Conservator, Lauren K. Chang. Jane Hutchins, an independent textile conservator, flew in from Vancouver and completed a number of preconservation examinations and reports before Lauren Chang was on board. Departmental Scientist Eva Schuchardt has over many years contributed identifications of fibers. Isaac Facio and Gretchen Spittler assisted in the recent dispatch and receipt of tapestries, as well as with the challenges of the installation.

Through various means over several years, I have corresponded with and exchanged information with numerous scholars. I am grateful to Thomas B. F. Cummins, Professor of Pre-Columbian and Colonial Art History, Department of the History of Art and Architecture, Harvard University; Lucia Meoni, independent scholar, Soprintendenza Speciale Polo Museale Fiorentino; Anna Rapp Buri and Monica Stucky-Schürer, both independent scholars, Switzerland; Julie Jones, Andrall E. Pearson Curator in Charge of the Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, and Elena Phipps, Conservator, Department of Textile Conservation, both at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Sara Taylor, Assistant Research Curator, the Department of Textiles, the Art Institute of Chicago; and Wendy Hefford, former Curator of Tapestry, and Linda Parry, former Deputy Keeper, both in the Furniture, Textiles, and Fashion Department, the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. I am grateful for their specific answers to a number of questions pertaining to the Chicago tapestries. I also extend my thanks to Clare Browne, Curator, European Textiles 1500–1800, the Victoria and Albert Museum, who acted as liaison in providing me access to the files of noted textile scholar Henry Currie Marillier. Their input is also acknowledged in numerous entries throughout this volume. Finally, Starr Siegele, Adjunct Curator of Prints at the Allentown Art Museum, Pennsylvania, provided clear and precise information in regard to the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, specifically about Jean-Baptiste Marie Huet and his circle.

In Sitges, Spain, I was very fortunate to be able to access the Charles Deering–Miguel Utrillo Correspondence Archives through the guidance of Dr. Vinyet Paynella, former librarian of the Biblioteca Popular Santiago Rusiñol; she also introduced me to her successor Maria Cavalleria Saborit. I am very indebted to Señora Saborit and her staff and to Sitges historian Roland Sierra. Some great discoveries about the fourteen *Caesar and Cleopatra* tapestries designed by Justus van Egmont did turn up in Sitges. Furthermore, the archives

of Arxiu Mas at the Amatller Institute of Hispanic Art, Barcelona, provided a number of unknown facts; and the staff at Leeds Castle, Maidstone, Kent, England, shared information and photographs. Further research resources included the David and Simon Franes Tapestry Archive, London, and I wish to thank David Franes for providing critical information.

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Finally, I wish to dedicate this volume to the three Art Institute directors who were critical to this undertaking: Charles C. Cunningham, James N. Wood, and James Cuno. Charles C. Cunningham, director from 1965 to 1972, brought me to Chicago and asked me to develop the museum's textile collection in every way. "Why don't you start with the tapestries," he said in one of our initial conversations. That was forty-one years ago! Second, James N. Wood, who directed the Art Institute from 1979 to 2004, became rather curious about the museum's tapestry holdings in the early 1990s. But his interest had to confront issues related to the condition of the works of art themselves and the challenge of raising funds for conservation treatment that could not be carried out in house. As I have described above, securing the De Wit laboratory for the conservation of the pieces, agreeing to put Koenraad Brosens under contract as principal author, and letting me accept a visiting position at the Getty Museum for a sustained period of research were all decisions for which I owe Jim Wood an enormous debt of thanks. And thus we come to James Cuno, who succeeded Wood in 2004 as President and Eloise W. Martin Director, and who provided the necessary financial support so that this project could be completed, most especially by enabling the hiring of a research assistant for four years and by committing to the addition of four very gifted tapestry scholars to the authorial team. For all this and more, this book is dedicated to these three distinguished directors of the Art Institute.





FIG. 1 Members of the Antiquarian Society at the Art Institute of Chicago for the opening of the Hutchinson Wing, January 1923. In the background hangs *Venus and Adonis (?) with a Duck Hunt* (cat. 14a).



# ❖ A COLLECTION AND ITS DONORS ❖

Christa C. Mayer Thurman

THE great accumulation of personal wealth in the United States between the Civil War and the Great Depression aroused a desire for the fruits of European cultures old and new and provided the means necessary to acquire them. The merchants and industrialists of the Gilded Age—including those of Chicago following the disastrous fire of 1871—purchased European art and artifacts in an ever-increasing volume, supported by an organized and specialized art trade. To some degree the American well-to-do sought to gain the trappings of aristocratic life, a desire reflected in the revival of historic architectural styles and in the importation of actual architectural elements—as at James Deering’s extraordinary palazzo, Vizcaya, in Miami, Florida, or Potter Palmer’s “Rhine castle” on Lake Shore Drive in Chicago—and sometimes even whole buildings. Textiles and tapestries, necessary furnishings for such a lifestyle, were in most instances acquired more as *staffage* than as important works of art appreciated in and of themselves. Tapestries were frequently cut to fit existing domestic spaces, or used as upholstery, but they formed an integral part of upper-class interior decoration into the 1920s. Working with dealers such as Lehmann Bernheimer in Munich or Jacques Seligmann in New York and Paris in serving the tastes of the time, professional designers and decorators—such as Chicago’s Healy and Millet or New York’s Tiffany and Company or French and Company—could be relied upon to integrate old and new into elegant settings for the lives of the newly rich. These agents regularly provided the complete contents for grand period houses, even including antique wooden wall paneling and entire rooms. At a broader level, department stores such as Chicago’s Marshall Field and Company offered decorating services and dealt extensively in antique furnishings for the upper middle class as well as for the wealthy. Examining the Art Institute’s tapestry collection as a whole, one realizes that direct purchases have been relatively infrequent; the great majority of acquisitions have come as gifts or bequests from such collectors. Thus, this essay takes a look at several of the major donors—individuals, families, and groups—who, beginning in 1890, helped to shape this Chicago collection.

The very first notable patrons of the decorative arts at the Art Institute were the members of the Antiquarian Society, the museum’s oldest support group, and it was they who underwrote the purchase of three tapestries by Director William M. R. French from “a respectable family in need” in Rome, which were later recorded as “the gift of Charles J. Singer through the Society.” The acquisition included a seventeenth-century Flemish tapestry from a series devoted to *The*

*Story of Odysseus* (cat. 18) by Jan van Leefdael of Brussels, as well as two significant, early-seventeenth-century French panels from a series known as *The Story of Artemisia* (cats. 39a–b).<sup>1</sup> The following year, 1891, Mrs. John J. Glessner, a member of the Antiquarian Society and a leading supporter of the arts in the city, proposed that the group should direct its financial support specifically to establish “a nucleus to buy articles pertaining to the industrial arts such as pottery, china, tapestries, embroideries, etc., to be presented to the Art Institute,” a motion that was readily approved by its board and applauded by the museum’s president, Charles L. Hutchinson.<sup>2</sup>

Following the very first tapestry exhibition held at the Art Institute (*The Charles M. Ffoulke Collection*, January 1–15, 1896), the Antiquarian Society acquired for the museum’s permanent collection from the works on view—the private collection of the Washington wool merchant Charles M. Ffoulke (1841–1909)—two Flemish tapestries: *Venus and Adonis (?) with a Duck Hunt* and *Pluto and Proserpina with Falconry* (cats. 14a–b). For these the Society provided the funding as a group (fig. 1). Further significant Antiquarian acquisitions took place in 1911—*The Crossing of the River Granicus* (cat. 57), one of the large signed panels of 1619 by Karel II van Mander from *The Story of Alexander the Great* series—and again in 1934 when the Edith Rockefeller McCormick collection was sold in New York. Although Mrs. McCormick’s spectacular *Large Leaf Verdure with Animals and Birds* (cat. 31, endpapers, and fig. 2) had been on loan to the Art Institute since 1923, it had to be included in the auction and only returned to Chicago because the Antiquarian Society provided the funding for its purchase from the Jessie Landon Fund. The Antiquarians also occasionally served as a gift agent, as in the case of the acquisition of the *Large Leaf Verdure with Balustrade and Birds* (cat. 34) from Mrs. Potter Palmer II, which entered the museum’s collection in 1923 as a loan and twenty years later was accepted as a gift from her through the Society.

Although many individuals have donated tapestries, some names recur with frequency over the years. Principal among them is that of Robert Allerton (fig. 3). Scion of a wealthy Chicago family and involved with the Art Institute of Chicago from 1915 onward, Allerton became one of its major Trustees and chairman of the Decorative Arts Committee. His concerns for the textile collection included not only acquisitions—for which he created a fund in 1923—but also such practical issues as its facilities: in 1926 it was Allerton who established the museum’s first textile galleries, endowed in memory of his stepmother and known as the Agnes Allerton Textile Wing.



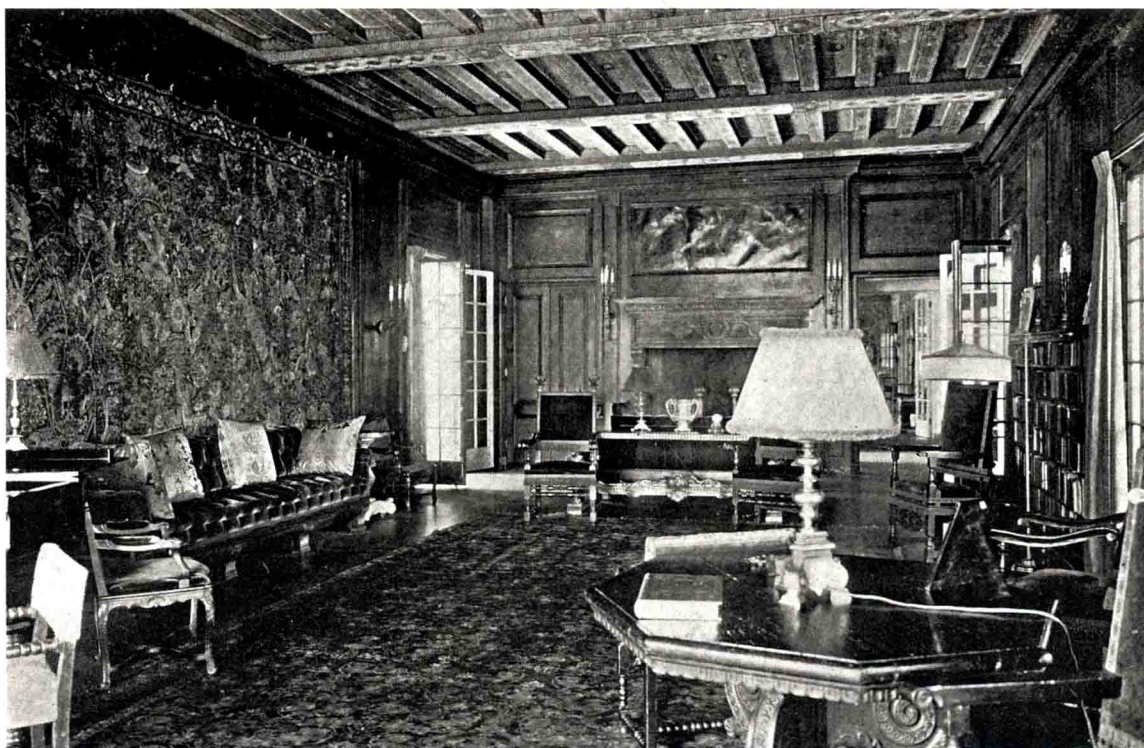


FIG. 2 Interior view of Edith Rockefeller McCormick's Villa Turicum, Lake Forest, Illinois, showing *Large Leaf Verdure with Animals and Birds* (cat. 31). From *Arts and Decoration* 9, 1 (May 1913), p. 241.

Among his very early gifts was a rare tapestry from Oudenaarde in Belgium (cat. 33), one of the few known with the town's mark in its border. Allerton also supported the purchase of *Camel Riders* from a *Wild Man* series (cat. 2), which had been exhibited at the Arts Club of Chicago in 1927 in one of the first exhibitions devoted exclusively to medieval and early Renaissance tapestry, organized by art historian Phyllis Ackerman.<sup>3</sup>

Although the tapestry acquisitions undertaken directly by Allerton or through his fund were limited in number, he also saw to it that pieces that otherwise could have ended up somewhere else found their way to the Art Institute, such as a portiere with the Medici coat of arms (cat. 56). This panel, originally woven for the Pitti Palace in Florence, had been part of Professor Elie Volpi's collection prior to its purchase by Chicagoan Martin A. Ryerson (1856–1932). After Ryerson's death, the piece was given by his wife, Caroline Hutchinson Ryerson, to the University of Chicago, as he had been president of that institution from 1892 to 1922. It hung in Goodspeed Hall there until 1944, when an exchange was made for an unidentified tapestry from Allerton's private collection.<sup>4</sup>

Years later, Allerton's name surfaced again, this time supporting a critical acquisition, *The Elephant* from the *Grotesques* series (cat. 43), and resolving a matter that had dragged on for four years. The piece had arrived on loan in 1952, and correspondence between René Boas (son of the work's previous owner) and the Art Institute's Decorative Arts curators (Hans Huth, Meyric R. Rogers, and Mildred Davison) attests to the museum's difficulty in finding the necessary purchase money. As funding remained a problem, the loan was extended annually until 1956, when the tapestry was finally secured for \$3,500

with "funds previously given by Robert Allerton."<sup>5</sup>

Allerton's fellow Trustee Martin Ryerson was a prominent Chicago lumber magnate, lawyer, and investor, and one of the most discerning collectors of his time. Deeply involved with the Art Institute, he donated to the museum over a thousand works of art in all media, and proved a generous benefactor to many other cultural institutions in the city. When the Field Museum abolished its Industrial Art Division in 1906, it was Ryerson who suggested to Edward E. Ayer (1841–1927), another notable Chicago industrialist, that he offer to the Art Institute his collection of textiles, which had been part of the Field Museum's holdings. Ryerson's advice was sound, and the following year the museum acquired, by purchase, the Ayer textiles.<sup>6</sup> Ryerson himself had married Carrie Hutchinson in 1881 and together they built over the next fifty years an extraordinary collection of American and European paintings, Asian and European objets d'art, and a group of early and important devotional tapestries that they displayed in their home on Drexel Boulevard (fig. 4).<sup>7</sup> The Ryersons had acquired the latter pieces in 1893 in Paris at the auction of the Frédéric Spitzer collection.<sup>8</sup> Given that the auction has been lauded as "perhaps the greatest event in the annals of the sales-room," it was indeed a coup for the Ryersons to gain possession of these works.<sup>9</sup> The tapestries entered the Art Institute's collection on the death of Mrs. Ryerson in 1937 (cats. 3, 4, and 55).

The connection between the Art Institute of Chicago and the family of Potter Palmer (1826–1902) and Bertha Honoré Palmer (1849–1918) is likewise reflected in a great many art objects, including a number of tapestries that ultimately became the property of the museum as gifts of their son Honoré (1874–1964). Although