GETTY MUSEUM PRESENTS

WOVEN GOLD: TAPESTRIES OF LOUIS XIV

Exhibition is the first major tapestry show in the Western U.S. in four decades

Woven Gold amongst a series of exhibitions and special installations at the Getty marking the 300th anniversary of the death of Louis XIV

December 15, 2015 – May 1, 2016
at the Getty Center

LOS ANGELES – The art of tapestry weaving in France blossomed during the reign of Louis XIV (r. 1643-1715). Three hundred years after the death of France’s so-called “Sun King,” the J. Paul Getty Museum will showcase 14 monumental tapestries from the French royal collection, revealing the stunning beauty and rich imagery of these monumental works of art.

Woven Gold: Tapestries of Louis XIV, exclusively on view at the J. Paul Getty Museum at the Getty Center from December 15, 2015 through May 1, 2016, will be the first major museum exhibition of tapestries in the western United States in four decades.
“Under Louis XIV, tapestry production flourished in France as never before, with the Crown’s tapestry collection growing to be the greatest in early modern Europe,” says Timothy Potts, director of the J. Paul Getty Museum. “Thanks to unprecedented loans from the Mobilier National in Paris, the largest modern-day repository of Louis XIV’s holdings, Woven Gold offers a dazzling showcase of the art of tapestry design at the height of its technical and artistic achievement under France’s ‘Sun King.’”

Potts continues, “Presented on the occasion of the tercentenary of Louis XIV’s death, Woven Gold, together with two special installations of French decorative arts and frames of this period, provide a spectacular overview of the visual arts at the height of ancien régime extravagance. These exhibitions underscore the extraordinary impact that the Sun King has had on taste up to the present day, just as they showcase the richness of the Getty’s collection of seventeenth-century French art.”

In the hierarchy of court art, colorful and glittering tapestries—handwoven after designs by the most renowned artists—were the ultimate expression of status, power, taste, and wealth. The exhibition will feature 15 monumental tapestries ranging in date from about 1540 to 1715 and created in weaving workshops across northern Europe as well as one modern tapestry. Most of the tapestries come on exclusive loan from the Mobilier National, the French national agency that preserves the former royal collections. Eleven have never before been exhibited in the United States. Two of the tapestries were specially conserved for the exhibition through support provided by the Getty Museum.

The exhibition will also feature preparatory drawings, related prints, and an enormous cartoon (an oil on canvas painted to scale as a guide to the weavers) alongside the immense hangings. The tapestries in the exhibition were woven after designs by Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio, Italian, 1483-1520), Peter Paul Rubens (Flemish, 1577-1640), Charles Le Brun (French, 1619-1690), and others, and come from the most notable workshops in Europe, including the Gobelins, which rose to preeminence under Louis XIV’s patronage. Several of the best-preserved and most famous examples of Gobelins weaving will be on view in the exhibition.

“Woven by hand with wool, silk, and silver- or silver gilt-wrapped thread, after designs by esteemed artists, a tapestry – at the most luxurious end of the production spectrum – was a creation requiring tremendous time, money, and talent,” explains Charissa Bremer-David, curator of sculpture and decorative arts at the Getty Museum. “Woven Gold celebrates the extraordinary legacy of the French royal collection in the tercentenary of Louis XIV’s death (1715 - 2015) and reveals the Sun King as a collector, heir, and patron of tapestry.”

By the end of Louis XIV’s reign, the Crown’s collection of tapestries was staggering in its aesthetic beauty and number—more than 2,650 pieces. The collection was especially notable for the Renaissance hangings assembled by François I (reigned 1515-1547). Louis XIV augmented this valuable inheritance with other magnificent tapestries that became available after the Fronde, France’s mid-17th century civil war. Once Louis XIV assumed independent rule in 1661, his administration systematically fostered French manufactories with new commissions. These treasured textiles adorned royal palaces when the court was in residence and lined outdoor public spaces on special occasions.

With tapestries arranged chronologically according to the year of their original design (not final production), Woven Gold is divided into three sections: early sets of Renaissance tapestries purchased for Louis XIV in the 17th century, sets of tapestries inherited by the king, and new sets of tapestries commissioned by the Crown.
Louis XIV as Collector

When Louis XIV assumed independent rule at the age of 22, the tapestry holdings of the Crown were exceptionally rich and splendid. Nevertheless, Louis's own taste and aspirations for the monarchy prompted him to augment the collection, and his agents actively pursued the great 16th- and 17th-century sets of tapestries as they became available on the art market, favoring those after the designs of Raphael. Through these valuable acquisitions, Louis XIV effectively brought the art of Renaissance Rome to the heart of the French realm.

Triumph of Bacchus, about 1560, Brussels workshop of Frans Geubels (Flemish, flourished 1545 - 1585). Design overseen by Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio, Italian, 1483 - 1520); design and cartoon by Giovanni da Udine (Italian, 1487 - 1564), in collaboration with other artists from the workshop of Raphael. Tapestry, wool, silk, and gilt metal-wrapped thread. Le Mobilier National, France. Image © Le Mobilier National. Photo by Lawrence Perquis

The Triumph of Bacchus, part of The Triumphs of the Gods series, follows a design that was conceived, under Raphael's supervision, by Giovanni da Udine (1487-1564) about 1518-19 and painted in collaboration with other artists from the master's workshop about 1518-20. The edition of the tapestry acquired by Louis XIV was woven later, in the Brussels workshop of the great weaver Frans Geubels (flourished about 1545-1585) in the middle of the 16th century. The monumental hanging depicts the pagan deity Bacchus presiding over a celebration of wine, wine-making, and revelry. While the original design was intended for erudite Christians who viewed classical themes in a religious context, secular monarchs such as Louis XIV and other connoisseurs greatly admired The Triumphs of the Gods tapestries as supreme expressions of Renaissance art by the esteemed master Raphael.

Louis XIV as Heir

In 1666 the royal inventory of tapestries comprised 44 extremely valuable sets, woven with profuse quantities of precious metal-wrapped thread. This collection of illustrious but aging medieval weavings had been complemented by the additions of highly important Renaissance hangings acquired by François I. Until about 1600, the most prestigious sets, especially the more costly ones portraying human figures, came from the powerful network of well-financed tapestry merchants in Brussels and Antwerp. At that time, the French tapestry
industry was weaker and less efficient than its northern competition. From the turn of the 17th century, however, King Henri IV (reigned 1589-1610) built up the domestic industry in an attempt to turn the luxury textile market to the kingdom’s advantage. Parisian workshops began to flourish and, increasingly, more French weavings entered the Crown’s collection. A half-century later, Louis XIV, grandson of Henri IV, inherited this rich patrimony.

The Chariot of Triumph Drawn by Four Piebald Horses (also known as The Golden Chariot), on view in the exhibition, came out of the Louvre workshop of Maurice I Dubout (French, died 1611) around 1606-7. It followed a composition by Antoine Caron (French, 1521-1599) dating back to about 1563-70. Henri IV commissioned the first tapestry sets from the over-arching narrative known as The Story of Queen Artemisia from Parisian weavers such as Dubout. Several artists collaborated to create the full-size cartoons. Henri Lerambert (1540/50-1608) painted the cartoon for this scene and its border, which includes the coat of arms of Henri IV. The vibrant green and yellow-toned tapestry depicts the funeral procession of King Mausolus in 353 B.C., his chariot adorned with symbols of death and mourning.

**Louis XIV as Patron**

Beginning in 1661, Louis XIV strategically employed the literary, visual, and performing arts to glorify the monarchy and aggrandize his public persona. As the ultimate patron and protector of the arts, he founded new academies and manufactories to serve these objectives and to promote his reputation as the arbiter of informed, refined taste. Tapestry was an especially costly and prestigious symbol of royal power and aesthetic discernment. In 1662, the Royal Tapestry Manufactory at the Gobelins was established under his aegis to produce extremely high quality tapestries after the most accomplished designs for the adornment of royal residences. The manufactory fulfilled its mandate to great success throughout the remainder of Louis’s reign and beyond, for the Gobelins manufactory continues to this day.

The Entry of Alexander into Babylon, about 1665 - probably by 1676, Gobelins Manufactory (French, founded 1662 - present). Cartoon by Henri Testelin (French, 1616 - 1695), after Charles Le Brun (French, 1619 - 1690). Tapestry, wool, silk, gilt metal – and silver-wrapped thread. Le Mobilier National, France. Image © Le Mobilier National. Photo by Lawrence Perquis

One of earliest and most significant productions of the Gobelins manufactory was *The Story of Alexander*, conceived by the court artist Charles Le Brun (French, 1619-1690). The five-
part series celebrated Le Brun’s patron, Louis XIV, by employing the traditional trope of likening the king to an admired ancient role model. Inspired by the life of Alexander the Great, the magnificent tapestries after Le Brun’s designs rivaled the greatest 16th-century weavings depicting ancient heroes. The critical success of the Alexander paintings and the tapestries woven after them in precious metal-wrapped thread also established the painter and manufactory as the indisputable successors to the most distinguished artists of the history genre and the famed master weavers of Brussels. The exhibition features several preparatory chalk studies by Le Brun, and a slightly later cartoon for one of the five scenes, The Entry of Alexander into Babylon, which was executed by artists at the Gobelins. The tapestry of this scene, woven between 1665 and 1676, is a glittering masterwork depicting Alexander’s victory cavalcade proceeding through Babylon’s beautiful main thoroughfare.

**Contemporary Tapestry**

Tapestry continues to be a vibrant and expressive artistic medium. *Woven Gold* closes with a contemporary weaving commissioned by the Mobilier National from Raymond Hains (French, 1926-2005). Titled *Diptyque 1 from D’Eustache à Natacha*, its concept and design are particularly ingenious because it captures, in wool and linen, the likeness of a computer screen complete with tool bar above and three windows open. Two of the windows reference a 17th painting by the Baroque artist Eustache Le Sueur (1616-1655) who, in his turn, had designed tapestries.

*Woven Gold: Tapestries of Louis XIV* is curated by Charissa Bremer-David, of the sculpture and decorative arts department at the Getty. It was organized by the J. Paul Getty Museum in association with the Mobilier National et les Manufactures Nationales des Gobelins, de Beauvais et de la Savonnerie. Generous support for the exhibition has been provided by the Hearst Foundations, Eric and Nancy Garen, and the Ernest Lieblich Foundation.

**Related publications**

*Woven Gold: Tapestries of Louis XIV* is accompanied by a catalogue produced by Getty Publications. Lavishly illustrated, the volume presents for the first time in English the latest scholarship of the foremost authorities working in the field. It is authored by exhibition curator Charissa Bremer-David, who has published extensively on the subject of French tapestries, and includes essays by Pascal-François Bertrand, Arnauld Brejon de Lavergnée, and Jean Vittet.


**More Louis XIV at the Getty**

As 2015 is the tercentenary of the death of Louis XIV, the Getty launched two exhibitions and a special installation exploring the Sun King’s tremendous influence on Western art and his distinctive role as collector, heir, and patron of tapestry and other arts.

Style presents a survey of the exquisite carved and gilded frames produced during the reigns of four French kings. Framed paintings and frames will represent five stylistic periods (Louis XIII, Louis XIV, Régence, Louis XV, and Louis XVI) with both mainstream and extraordinary examples. Showing the development of wall furniture from restrained, to elaborate and dynamic, to a more reserved and linear style, the array presents a magnificent compendium of French design and craftsmanship, and explores the vocabulary of ornament, construction, and gilding techniques specific to frames made in France. Addressing the important relationship between a painting and its frame (which sometimes date from different periods and regions), the exhibition also considers the significance and use of antique frames in museums.

The Getty Museum’s collection of decorative arts is particularly strong in works associated with the reign of Louis XIV. Through July 31, 2016, a special installation Louis XIV at the Getty in the Museum’s South Pavilion focuses on a variety of extraordinary pieces in the Getty’s collection made during Louis’ lifetime, when France became the leading producer of the luxury arts in Europe. The installation includes an elaborate suite of tapestries made for one of Louis XIV’s sons, a monumental Cabinet-on-Stand attributed to the royal cabinetmaker André-Charles Boulle, and a small ivory table that is one of the few surviving objects known to have been owned by the king. In addition to these decorative arts, an important Florentine bronze, formerly in the personal collection of the king, and a selection of richly illuminated manuscript leaves depicting designs for emblems celebrating the triumphs and virtues of the French monarchy under the Sun King are on view.

Earlier this year, A Kingdom of Images: French Prints in the Age of Louis XIV, 1660-1715 was on view at the Getty Research Institute (GRI) from June 16 to September 6, 2015. Organized by the GRI in special collaboration with the Bibliothèque nationale de France, this exhibition explored the rich variety of prints that came to define French power and prestige in the era of Louis XIV—from grand royal portraits to satiric views of everyday life, and from small-scale fashion prints decorated with actual fabrics to monumental panoramas of Versailles and the Louvre. During the Sun King’s long reign, Paris became the center of the printmaking world, a position it would maintain for 200 years. Featuring nearly 100 works from the GRI’s Special Collections and the Bibliothèque nationale de France, this exhibition traveled to the Bibliothèque nationale de France in November 2015.

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The J. Paul Getty Trust is an international cultural and philanthropic institution devoted to the visual arts that includes the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Research Institute, the Getty Conservation Institute, and the Getty Foundation. The J. Paul Getty Trust and Getty programs serve a varied audience from two locations: the Getty Center in Los Angeles and the Getty Villa in Pacific Palisades.

The J. Paul Getty Museum collects Greek and Roman antiquities, European paintings, drawings, manuscripts, sculpture and decorative arts to 1900, as well as photographs from around the world to the present day. The Museum’s mission is to display and interpret its collections, and present important loan exhibitions and publications for the enjoyment and education of visitors locally and internationally. This is supported by an active program of research, conservation, and public programs that seek to deepen our knowledge of and connection to works of art.

Visiting the Getty Center
The Getty Center is open Tuesday through Friday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. It is closed Monday and most major holidays, open on July 4. Admission to the Getty Center is always free. Parking is $15 per car, but reduced to $10 after 4 p.m. No reservation is required for parking or general admission. Reservations are required for event seating and groups of 15 or more. Please call (310) 440-7300 (English or Spanish) for reservations and information. The TTY line for
callers who are deaf or hearing impaired is (310) 440-7305. The Getty Center is at 1200 Getty Center Drive, Los Angeles, California.

Additional information is available at www.getty.edu. Sign up for e-Getty at www.getty.edu/subscribe to receive free monthly highlights of events at the Getty Center and the Getty Villa via e-mail, or visit www.getty.edu for a complete calendar of public programs.

A Chariot of Triumph Drawn by Four Piebald Horses, about 1606-1607, Louvre workshop of Maurice I Dubout (French, active 1606-1611). Cartoon by Henri Lerambert (French, about 1540/1550 – 1608) after Antoine Caron (French, 1521-1599). Tapestry, wool and silk. Le Mobilier National, France. Image © Le Mobilier National. Photo by Lawrence Perquis