

Book Reviews

Thomas P. Campbell, ed., *Tapestry in the Baroque: Threads of Splendor*, exh. cat. New Haven and London: Yale University Press for The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007. 563 pp., 175 color pls., 169 b/w ill., bibliog., index. \$75.

Following the great success of his *Tapestry in the Renaissance: Art and Magnificence* (2002),¹ Thomas Campbell has once again succeeded in satisfying the high level of aspiration and great expectations of the professional world. That most recent success was his exhibition *Tapestry in the Baroque: Threads of Splendor*,² shown at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, from October 17, 2007, to January 6, 2008. Campbell's catalogue is dedicated to the gradual emergence of tapestry manufacturing from the late sixteenth century onward. Chronologically, thematically, and didactically, it follows seamlessly from its predecessors. The Baroque era, seen as dating between 1575 and 1725, is presented; the late Baroque and Rococo periods are disregarded.

Campbell explains the historical reasons for the choice of this particular time frame. One reason was the decline around 1570 of the once-dominant Flemish centers of tapestry making, above all Brussels and Antwerp. This decline was a result of the religious strife and civil wars that raged in the Low Countries during the last third of the sixteenth century. During the second decade of the eighteenth century the definitive replacement of tapestries with paintings as the representative visual medium took place—a loss in prestige that continues today. Clearly, this fundamental change in the perception and appraisal of tapestries led to the practice of surrounding them with illusionistic borders that imitated carved and gilt picture frames, thus endowing tapestries with the conventional presentation form of paintings (see cat. nos. 55, 58). The increasing loss of quality in tapestries, which were produced in ever-greater numbers, led to their falling completely out of fashion by the end of the eighteenth century as the medium of courtly representation. Moreover, the reputation of high-value older tapestry series faded; owners hardly attended to the inventories that had been handed down to them. Furthermore, as a result of constant, excessive use and neglect, many tapestries were largely worn out.

Campbell's essays form the didactic framework of this catalogue. In addition to the introduction, "The Golden Age of Netherlandish Tapestry Weaving" (pp. 3-15), and the first chapter, "The Disruption and Diaspora of the Netherlandish Tapestry Industry, 1570-1600" (pp. 17-27), he is the author of all the contributions about the social and historical aspects of the production of and trade in Baroque tapestries, their use, and reception. His detailed, self-contained essays are "The Development of New Centers of Production and the Recovery of the Netherlandish Tapestry Industry, 1600-1620" (pp. 61-75); "Stately Splendor, Woven Frescoes, Luxury Furnishings: Tapestry in Context, 1600-1660" (pp. 107-21); "Collectors and Connoisseurs: The Status and Perception of Tapestry, 1600-1660" (pp. 325-39); and "Continuity and Change in Tapestry Use and Design, 1680-1720" (pp. 491-507). Taken together, these information-rich essays serve not only the reader but also other authors as reliable documents for the characterization and comprehension of widely varied developments.

On this occasion, as with *Tapestry in the Renaissance*, Campbell was able to enlist the most renowned international experts. Thus from the beginning it was guaranteed that the catalogue texts represented the current state of research,³ and even partly defined research in a new way. Thus, Wendy Hefford's essay, "The Mortlake Manufactory, 1619-49" (pp. 171-83), was based on many years of research for a forthcoming book on English tapestry of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to be published by the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; and Lucia Meoni's essay, "Tapestry Production in Florence: The Medici Tapestry Works, 1587-1747" (pp. 263-75), profited from preparatory work for the exhibition "La nascita dell'arazzeria medicea. Dalle botteghe dei maestri fiamminghi alla manifattura ducale dei 'creati fiorentini,'" which was held during the summer of 2008 in Florence.⁴

The sole region in Europe where an appreciable number of tapestries were produced and traded during this time period was the Spanish Netherlands (Flanders). Descriptions of the developments there, with many fateful highs and lows, are extended over several chapters and run as a thread through the entire catalogue. Not until the general decline and loss of the monopoly once held by the traditional Flemish centers did the prerequisites for the emergence of effective tapestry manufacturing in other locations in Eu-

rope fall into place (Campbell describes this in "Disruption and Diaspora," pp. 17-27). The engines of these developments were almost always highly qualified master-weavers from Flanders, who generally went into exile on religious grounds, to locations where their skills were then employed for the prestige of a new lord of the land. In this process the founding of tapestry manufacturing often led to the consolidation of the economy in the master-weavers' new hometowns. High-value products originating in France were to dominate the international market; the name "Gobelins" became the synonym for "tapestries par excellence." The special paths of developments in Italy, the northern Netherlands, and England, too, are acknowledged in individual chapters. In contrast, the comments on exiled workshops in Germany are quite short and focus on Hans van der Biest, who worked at the court of Duke Maximilian I of Bavaria from 1604 to 1618 and collaborated closely with the court painter Peter Candid (see Campbell, "New Centers," pp. 61-75, cat. no. 8). The blame for this should not be assigned to the authors, however; rather, it is unfortunately a symptom of the current status of research on tapestry production in the German-speaking countries,⁵ which has not kept pace with general developments for some time.⁶

The period of gradual recovery and the second period of prosperity for the Flemish tapestry-making industry are inextricably linked to Peter Paul Rubens, the outstanding artist of the time (see Campbell, "New Centers," pp. 61-75, and cat. nos. 10-11; and Guy Delmarcel, "Tapestry in the Spanish Netherlands, 1625-1660," pp. 203-17, and cat. nos. 19-24). Rubens first became familiar with the art of tapestry within his own family circle. His mother, Maria Pypelinckx, descended from a family of tapestry dealers, and his second wife, Helena, was the youngest daughter of Daniel Fourment of Antwerp, a prosperous dealer in tapestry and silk. Otto Venius, one of Rubens's teachers, was a trained cartoon painter. Moreover, in his youth Rubens had already intensively studied the cartoons of the most famous *Acts of the Apostles* tapestries. These were originally designed by Raphael in 1515-1516 for Pope Leo X to hang in the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican.⁷ Rubens designed at least four large sets of tapestries, each one of which can be regarded as a chief work of Baroque tapestry art. Furthermore, paintings that were not originally intended to become cartoons were later adapted to meet this purpose.

Rubens's successful debut in tapestry design was marked by his series called *The History of the Roman Consul Decius Mus*, who voluntarily laid down his life for the sake of his troops and homeland. The painter interpreted this as an

exemplary act of patriotism, but it was not a common subject in art (cat. nos. 10, 11). The preparatory work lasted almost two years (1616-1617), after which he finally delivered eight monumental cartoons, all painted exquisitely in oil on fine canvas, to the workshop of the master-weaver Jan Raes II. The cartoons were later to become treasures of the Princely Collection of Liechtenstein. The *Decius Mus* series was the first to bring the verve and grandeur of Rubens's Baroque style to tapestry design. Along with the unparalleled display of color, Rubens introduced a completely new style, which was soon to become exemplary for other artists and weavers. As a result, from this time onward, the dyers had to adapt their palette to that of the painter, despite the fact that the color-fastness of the dyes they had to choose suffered over the course of time. The concept in oil took precedence over the final textile version.

Just five years after the *Decius Mus* series, Rubens's innovations for the twelve-part series *The Life of Constantine the Great* directly influenced the production of two foreign manufacturers. During a stay in Paris in 1622, he created largely seminal designs, which were characterized by a classical style of almost archaeological precision. The question of whether the *Constantine* series was a direct commission from the French king Louis XIII or whether two entrepreneur weavers, Marc Coomans (Marc de Comans) and Frans van der Plancken (François de la Planche), acted as intermediaries has not yet been conclusively resolved (see Isabelle Denis, "The Parisian Workshops, 1590-1650," pp. 123-47; cat. no. 14).⁸ Whatever the answer may be, the *seria princeps* of the Constantine cartoons was woven into tapestries by Coomans and van der Plancken in their Faubourg Saint-Marcel workshop, probably on order of the king, who in 1625 gave the series as a present to the Papal Nuncio, Cardinal Francesco Barberini, a nephew of Urban VIII. The cardinal was so pleased with this gift of regal splendor that he had additions made from designs by Pietro da Cortona. These were woven in his own private manufactory, the Arazzeria Barberini in Rome, where some of the most ambitious series in Italian Baroque style emerged until Francesco's death in 1679 (see James G. Harper, "Tapestry Production in Seventeenth-Century Rome: The Barberini Manufactory," pp. 293-303, cat. no. 35).

Rubens's next and undoubtedly most famous series is *The Triumph of the Eucharist*. It is widely considered to epitomize of his revolutionary new style. The inventiveness of his compositions is coupled with the technical bravura of the weavers, extending the illusionistic boundaries of Flemish tapestry production further than ever before (see Del-

marcel, "Tapestry in the Spanish Netherlands," pp. 203-17, cat. nos. 19-24). The Eucharist series was commissioned in 1626 by Archduchess Isabella Clara Eugenia for the convent of the Descalzas Reales (Barefoot Clares) in Madrid. The ambitious series consisted of twenty tapestries. It was woven in the workshop of Jan Raes II in Brussels and sent to Spain in 1628. The tapestries hung in the convent church in two rows arranged one above the other, border touching border. In order to achieve a unified impression, Rubens replaced the conventional ornamental borders with an ingenious framing device: illusionistic architectural borders, inside of which the scenes are shown on trompe-l'oeil tapestries unfurled and held in place by diligent putti (p. 219, and see figs. 19-21). A playful intellectual concept and inventive spatial formula were thus created which were entirely new at the time. The painter carefully studied the visual effect of this arrangement in small *bozzetti* (painted sketches) (see cat. no. 22).

Two pieces from the series were exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum, the magnificent *Triumph of the Church over Ignorance and Blindness*, the thematic centerpiece of the series, and the smaller, secular *Hierarchy in Adoration* (see cat. nos. 21, 24). There Ecclesia appears enthroned upon her triumphal carriage, the embodiment of the Catholic church vested with all the insignia of papal authority, effortlessly pushing aside its powerless enemies. This was a particularly instructive highlight of the exhibition, and, together with the accompanying exhibits, it let one follow step by step the preceding design process, including the tapestry designs (drawn in mirror image to the desired orientation of the finished tapestry). At the beginning lay a small *bozzetto*, painted the right way around, designed quickly with a thin application of color, with which the painter established the fundamental figure groupings. A far more careful, detailed, and colored *modello* followed, which conclusively resolved the spatial relationships and already showed the mirror image of the composition, so that a full-scale cartoon could be drawn according to it. As tapestries are woven from the back, the finished image appeared once again in its original orientation (see cat. no. 19). The final tapestry designs documented to be definitively by Rubens for the *History of Achilles* were not represented in the exhibition. It is reasonable to suppose that they were commissioned for the business of his father-in-law, Daniel Fourment.

In addition to Rubens, Jacob Jordaens, who was an industrious and inventive tapestry designer, is known to have drawn no fewer than seven complete series and to have collaborated in many more. If one wished to fault the con-

cept of the exhibition, it might be in representing this extremely productive artist by only two works: the early, still largely conventional *Maid-servant with a Basket of Fruit* from an eight-piece series *Scenes of Country Life* and the splendid and witty composition *Creation of the Horse* from an eight-piece series titled *Horsemanship*, woven between 1665 and 1666 by Everaert Leyniers III in Brussels for Emperor Leopold I (see cat. nos. 25, 26).

The well-organized presentation of the last phase of Flemish Baroque tapestry production in a distinct section of the exhibition may have been an eye-opener for many visitors (see Koenraad Brosens, "Flemish Production, 1660-1715," pp. 441-53). The artistry of the lively colorful designs by Phillippe de Hondt and the richness and quality of weaving by the Judocus de Vos workshop in Brussels were unexpected. The tapestries created for John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, the great military adversary of Louis XIV, included allegorical armorials as well as an eleven-piece series representing the duke's victories in battle. Among these, the tapestry illustrating the third Siege of Bouchain traveled to New York and together with the dramatic *Naval Battle* from the *Art of War* series offered ample visual proof in favor of their outstanding artistic rank (cat. nos. 55-57).

Among the exile countries, France undoubtedly adopted a leading role and hence three chapters of the catalogue are dedicated to the developments there. Isabelle Denis discusses the first of the groundbreaking cartoon designs by Rubens and the heyday of the various early Parisian workshops of 1590-1650 shaped by Simon Vouet (pp. 123-39), to which the beginnings of the workshop in the Hôtel des Gobelins, later the leading workshop, belonged. The preeminence of native French manufactories in European tapestry production was achieved under the patronage and protection of the Sun King, Louis XIV. By his order, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, superintendent of the Bâtiments du Roi, established the famous Manufacture Royale des Gobelins between 1662 and 1664. There he gathered together an exemplary group of artists and craftsmen, not only weavers, but also painters and cartoon designers (see Pascal-François Bertrand, "Tapestry Production at the Gobelins during the Reign of Louis XIV, 1661-1715," pp. 341-55). The extraordinary achievements of the Gobelins workshop were in large part due to the vision and artistic skill of the court painter Charles Le Brun, who was one of the most prolific and innovative tapestry designers of the time. Three works by him are thus duly acknowledged: first, *Water* from his four-piece series *The Four Elements* (cat. no. 39), and, second, the impressive *Battle of the Granicus* from his five-piece series

Story of Alexander the Great (cat. no. 40).⁹ The chapter's most detailed and sophisticated discussion is dedicated to Le Brun's strikingly ambitious fourteen-piece series *The History of the King*, celebrating Louis XIV's talents as statesman, warlord, and patron of the arts (cat. nos. 41-47). Two tapestries, each representing a key moment of Louis's still young political career, *The King's Entry into Dunkirk* and *The Audience with Cardinal Chigi*, were displayed together adjacent to preparatory studies by Le Brun and to Adam Frans van der Meulen's preliminary watercolor *View of the City of Dunkirk*. Moreover, Louis XIV was well known for his great interest in the manufacture of tapestries. His regular visits to the Gobelins workshops are legendary and as such became one of the major topics of the series. Le Brun's preliminary drawing of this event was also shown in the exhibition.

The discussion of developments in France is completed by Charissa Bremer-David's chapter, "Manufacture Royale de Tapisseries de Beauvais, 1664-1715" (pp. 407-19). After

the Gobelins, this workshop was the second-most keenly supported by Louis XIV, and it became known in particular for its inventive tapestries illustrating exotic themes (cat. nos. 50-52).

The editorial supervision of this catalogue, with its comprehensive bibliography and authoritative index, is excellent. The new photographs of the works by Bruce White are of his usual exquisite quality, and the general standard of the images is pleasingly high.

The result is that Thomas Campbell's book is an excellent example of how public appeal and a high academic standard need not be mutually exclusive.

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NOTES

1. See the review by Pascal-François Bertrand of Thomas P. Campbell, *Tapestry in the Renaissance: Art and Magnificence*, exh. cat. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press for The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002), in *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 11, no. 1 (Fall-Winter 2003-2004): 111-13.

2. Fortunately, the exhibition could be seen this time not only in New York but also, in a partially altered format, in Madrid, at the Palacio Real, March 12-June 1, 2008. A Spanish edition of the catalogue was also published: Thomas P. Campbell, ed., *Hilos de Esplendor. Tapices del Barroco*, exh. cat. (Madrid: Patrimonio Nacional, 2008).

3. This applies not only to the authors of the individual chapters but also to the catalogue entries for the individual exhibits, which were frequently taken on by the responsible curators at the lending institutions, who were of course experts on the pieces.

4. See Lucia Meoni, ed., *La nascita dell'arazzeria medicea. Dalle botteghe dei maestri fiamminghi alla manifattura ducale dei "creati fiorentini"*, exh. cat. (Florence: Palazzo Pitti, 2008).

5. See Rotraud Bauer, "Flämische Weber im deutschsprachigen Raum," in *Flemish Tapestry Weavers Abroad: Emigration and the Founding of Manufactories in Europe*, ed. Guy Delmarcel (Proceedings of the International Conference, Mechelen, October 2-3, 2000), *Symbolae. Facultatis Litterarum Lovaniensis*, Series B, vol. 27 (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2002), 63-89.

6. On the developments and current standing of international tapestry research in general, see the report by Pascal-François Bertrand and Guy Del-

marcel, "L'histoire de la tapisserie, 1500-1700. Trente-cinq ans de recherche," *Perspective: La Revue de l'INHA* 2 (2008): 227-50.

7. Jeremy Wood recently argued that Rubens's stylistic development as a draftsman is best understood through his possible study of Raphael's original cartoons in Brussels before 1600. See Jeremy Wood, "Rubens and Raphael: The Designs for the Tapestries in the Sistine Chapel," in *Manuscula amicorum: Contributions on Rubens and His Colleagues in Honour of Hans Vlieghe*, ed. Katlijne van der Stighelen, 2 vols. (Turnhout, Belgium, 2006), 1: 259-82.

8. Based on meticulous consideration of the various arguments, Koenraad Brosens recently argued in favor of Coomans and van der Plancken, who might have commissioned the series as an important part of their attempt to prosper in a highly complex and competitive market. See Koenraad Brosens, "Who Commissioned Rubens's Constantine Series? A New Perspective: The Entrepreneurial Strategy of Marc Comans and François de la Planche," *Simiolus* 33, no. 3 (2007-2008): 166-82.

9. This series has, in the meantime, had an exhibition dedicated to it recently in Paris: "Alexandre et Louis XIV: Tissage de gloire." See Jean Vittet, Philippe Beaussant, Pascal-François Bertrand, Jean-Jacques Gautier, and Arnaud Brejon de Lavergnée, *La tenture de l'Histoire d'Alexandre le Grand*, exh. cat. (Paris: Galerie des Gobelins, 2008); Jean Vittet, "Un chef-d'œuvre des Gobelins: La tenture de l'Histoire d'Alexandre par Charles Le Brun," *L'Estampille: L'Objet d'Art* 440 (November 2008): 70-71.