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## TEXTILES



The role played by textiles in interior decoration in France in the eighteenth century was a capital one. During the reign of Louis XIV, the efforts of his minister Colbert had ensured that French tapestry, the worthy descendant of the great northern tradition of tapestry weaving, became the finest in Europe. Similarly, the French silk industry, born to imitate products from Italy and further afield, assumed a leading role in Europe. Just as it had done with other products of French industry, the civilized world supplied itself with French textiles, which were exported as far afield as China and Peru.

### THE SAVONNERIE

Workshops producing carpets *velouté façon de Turquie* (like velvet, with a thick knotted pile) were established at the Louvre in the early seventeenth century as part of Henri IV's initiative to revive industry and the arts after the Wars of Religion. By 1671, these had moved to a disused soap works (hence the name Savonnerie) at Chaillot on the western outskirts of Paris. From 1714, there was a single workshop, managed by an *entrepreneur* (contractor).

The early production of these workshops consisted of carpets for floors and tables, with flowers on a dark background, but, by the time of the summit of Louis XIV's reign in the 1680s, they were already being woven to designs provided by the great team which, under Charles Le Brun, created a unified style in art as a means of glorifying the King.

#### PREVIOUS SPREAD

While British ambassador in Paris in 1765, the 3rd Duke of Richmond obtained some Gobelin tapestries from a *tenture* of *Don Quichote* of some twenty *pièces*. These had been woven between 1762 and 1764, and were intended for Marly, but were not all purchased by Louis XV. They are still preserved at Goodwood.

Savonnerie tapestry of the 1720s, with allegorical emblems of Spring, and contemporary chairs and chair covers. The tapestry is a rare example of a Savonnerie wall-hanging and forms part of a set of four showing the Seasons. It was a private commission and bears the arms of Count Franz-Joseph Czernin von Chudewitz and Isabella Maria de Mérode, who were married in 1717.

From then on, designs were supplied almost exclusively by artists working for the Crown, and fulfilled a double function, playing a part in the general decorative scheme of a project, and, more importantly (once a design had been approved and was found to be successful), being woven again and again, even if fashion had changed, until the cartoon became so worn that it was no longer usable.

Carpets formed the principal production of the Savonnerie, but other types of objects were woven there as well, such as panels for folding screens and firescreens, covers for chairs and benches, pictures copying oil paintings, including portraits, and *portières* (door curtains). The Savonnerie made more of these in the first half of the eighteenth century than during the neoclassical period, when woven silks, the principal competition for Savonnerie in these fields, became even more popular.

Fortune did not always favour the Savonnerie. The Duc d'Antin reported to Louis XIV in 1708 that it was on the point of collapse ("*cette belle Manufacture est sur le point de sa chute*"), and that he intended to reverse this situation. In the event, the Louis XV period marked a high point. The King, in the company of Marigny and Gabriel, was generally personally involved in the choice of designs, and annotated alternatives bear the royal "*bon*" in his own hand, in addition to the phrase "*bon à choisir*", the formula signifying that a design was worthy of being submitted to him. The lack of interest shown by Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette in the Savonnerie may have contributed to the fact that in carpet design the Louis XV period was more successful than that which followed.

Most of the Savonnerie's production was intended for the King. Carpets and other pieces went to the Garde-Meuble where they were kept until they were needed, either for a room in one of the palaces or to be given to foreign dignitaries. Savonnerie carpets featured among the splendid presents given by Louis XV to the Ottoman Sultan in 1742; not only did he want to show the Sultan that his country could manage without Turkish carpets, he also wanted to impress him with the quality and richness of French carpets, woven on this occasion with borders of gold thread. The gesture was somewhat ironic since Turkish carpets (like English ones) were the subject of almost prohibitive customs duties upon entry into France, and were therefore uncommon.





*Savonnerie paravent* (screen) of the first half of the eighteenth century, one of a pair. At 2.73 m, these represent the tallest of the screens woven by the Savonnerie, and were probably intended for a *salon* or large *antichambre* in one of the royal palaces. The cartoons for this screen were provided in 1714 by François Desportes for the birds, and by Jean-Baptiste Blain de Fontenay for the surrounds.

*Painted design, circa 1720, by François Desportes, for the leaf of a Savonnerie screen.*





Other clientele could aspire to owning such prestigious works of art, but it has been estimated that not more than fifty carpets were woven as private commissions by the Savonnerie during the eighteenth century. Marigny, as Directeur des Bâtiments, was naturally well placed to own some, and a design survives for a carpet he commissioned in 1769 in imitation of tiger skin. Among complete outsiders was William Beckford, who arrived from England in 1792, at a moment when the Savonnerie was delighted to find someone who took an interest in their expensive product. Two small carpets, intended for his father's Adam house, Fonthill Splendens, were woven to designs executed especially for Beckford, and in keeping with the Adam interiors.

The Duvivier family, *entrepreneurs* at the Savonnerie from 1743 to 1826, took an active part in every aspect of the production, including

translating sketches into detailed cartoons. Pierre-Josse Perrot was the artist responsible for many of the finest cartoons of the Louis XV period; his panels framed by scrolls with flowers and leaves are among the happiest inventions of the eighteenth century. Soufflot, the architect who had accompanied Marigny to Italy in 1749, became *inspecteur* at the Savonnerie in 1755; it was, however, a little-known artist called Michel-Bruno Bellengé who was to interpret neoclassicism for the Savonnerie in a set of fluent cartoons making use not of architectural detail but of arabesques incorporating elegant vases and garlands of flowers.

Savonnerie carpet, woven in the Duvivier workshop, from a cartoon by P. J. Perrot. Similar carpets were woven for Fontainebleau and Choisy between 1744 and 1756.





## WOVEN TAPESTRY

The great tapestries of the seventeenth century were slightly out of place in the new interiors of the eighteenth, but they nevertheless continued to be hung in rooms for which solemnity was the prime requirement; for example at Versailles, where seventeenth-century and even Renaissance tapestries decorated the Grands Appartements until the end of the *ancien régime*.

Tapestry increasingly tried to imitate paintings in order to fit in with modern decoration, to the extent that dyes were multiplied to provide an increased number of colours and shades within colours, and the borders of tapestries were woven to resemble giltwood picture frames. Indeed some tapestries were woven without borders: "Borders can be applied to these tapestries, but they can also be framed in giltwood, if you prefer not to have tapestry borders," wrote Cozette, one of the Gobelins *entrepreneurs*, to Claude Bonnet in 1754.

Many of the finest painters provided cartoons for tapestry weaving, but two names are of paramount importance, to the Gobelins and to Beauvais as well as indirectly to Aubusson: Jean-Baptiste Oudry and François Boucher.

### THE GOBELINS

Louis XIV's furniture and tapestry workshops, lodged in a building formerly occupied by the Gobelins family (hence the name) had closed in 1694 for economic reasons, but reopened in 1699. It had the status of Manufacture Royale, and much of its production was intended for the King, either for decorating one of the royal palaces, or as presents. The workshops within the Gobelins had some degree of independence, and others could approach one of the *entrepreneurs* for private commissions.

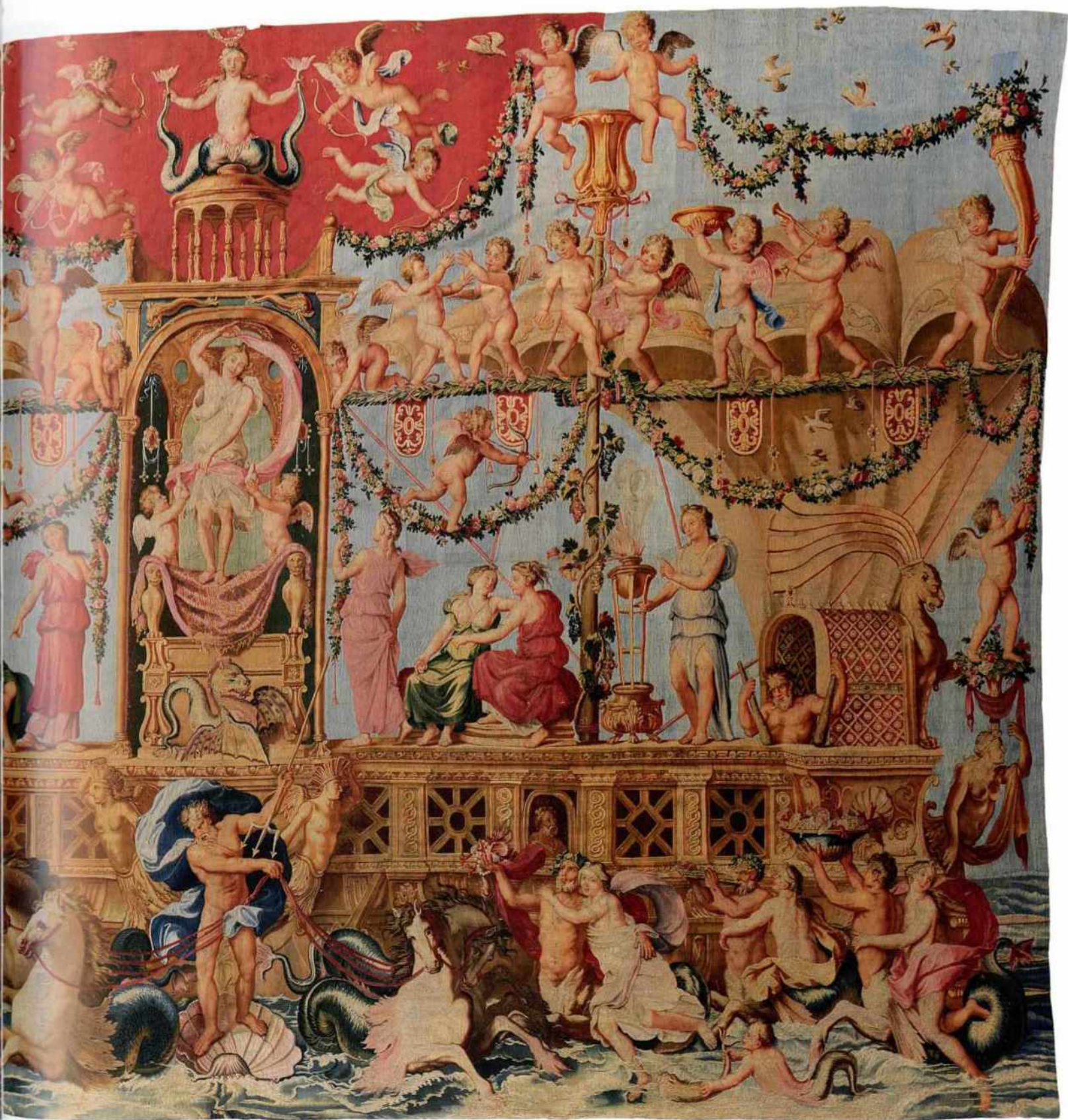
Cartoons were ordered from leading painters. These consisted of a number of paintings, from which *tentures* (sets of hangings) were woven; some of these comprise a large number of tapestries. The cartoons were kept, to be used repeatedly for a period of many years. The designs for the borders of the tapestries, usually in the style of giltwood picture frames, were periodically updated, so that an early *tenture* of a subject may have a different border to a late one.

During the reign of Louis XIV, ponderous subjects such as the King's victories were chosen for tapestries, but the eighteenth century saw a greater variety, in a more charming and exotic vein, as the art of tapestry became increasingly associated with interior decoration rather than forming part of the architecture. *L'Ambassade Turque* of 1731, after cartoons by Charles Parrocel, represented an attempt to retain the grand manner, but with the elegance of the new age; in the event, it was discontinued, and in 1733 Oudry was asked for cartoons for a new and

*"Le Triomphe de Vénus"*, Gobelins tapestry from a cartoon by Noël Coypel. Inspired by a sixteenth-century original, it was woven in the *haute lice* workshops of Jans the Younger, and was part of a set begun in 1705 and completed in 1713. In 1717 the *tenture* was housed in the French embassy in Sweden, and from 1748-91 in the French embassy in Rome.









different *tenture*, the *Chasses du Roi*. In the same year he was appointed Inspecteur sur les Ouvrages at the Gobelins. The *Chasses du Roi* was one of the Gobelins' great successes; *L'Ambassade Turque* had been an unruly jumble of figures on horseback, but here the occasional figure, dressed in the blue of the royal hunting uniform, is glimpsed against the beautiful royal forests, a background reminiscent of the lush foliage of traditional *verdure*. The cartoons' enduring popularity is proved by the fact that Louis XVI had them copied on porcelain by Sèvres in 1782 for his dining room at Versailles.

Charles-Antoine Coypel provided the Gobelins from 1714 onwards with a set of twenty-eight paintings for the *Histoire de Don Quichote* which continued to be woven until the revolution. A set of these could comprise several large *pièces*, as well as other smaller ones and overdoors. This *tenture* signalled a new departure: the picture in the centre has become smaller, and is almost a mere pretext for a breathtaking *alentour* (border) incorporating a background of one-colour damask (red or yellow), brilliantly patterned, upon which elaborate gilt frames, trophies and garlands of flowers, peacocks with tails outspread, cornucopiae and coats of arms completely overshadow

*Louis XVI* armchair, probably by Jean-Baptiste-Claude Sené, covered in Gobelins tapestry. The seat cover is identical to those on chairs that match the first *Tenture de Boucher*, woven in 1764 for Lord Coventry (now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).







*"Les Noces d'Angélique", Gobelins tapestry of a scene from the opera Roland et Armide, from the Tenture de l'Opéra, finished in 1749. The cartoon was painted by Charles Coypel, who exhibited it at the Salon in 1737, and the*

tapestry was woven by Monmerqué. The borders, simulating a giltwood picture frame, were designed by P. J. Perrot. Presented by Louis XV in 1763 to Paul-Jérôme, Duc de Grimaldi, the Spanish ambassador to Paris.



the central shaped panel, which is nevertheless highly exotic, with figures in Spanish costumes indulging in scenes of total buffoonery taken from the great novel by Cervantes. The designs for the borders varied, and several artists were involved in each, including Michel Audran and Alexis Peyrotte.

Upon Oudry's death in 1755, Boucher, who had already painted two of his greatest pictures, *Le Lever du Soleil* and *Le Coucher du Soleil*, (now in the Wallace Collection), as cartoons for tapestries to be woven by the Gobelins for Madame de Pompadour in 1752, was named Surinspecteur there by Marigny, and ceased working for the Beauvais factory. His major work for the Gobelins consisted of a set simply known as the *Tenture de Boucher* for which he provided paintings of Olympian gods, often as pairs of lovers. These were designed along the same principles as the *Histoire de Don Quichote* for the picture is confined to a central oval again surrounded by a frame imitating giltwood (as does the outer border). The whole seems to hang from the ceiling on brightly coloured ribbons tied in a knot at the top of the tapestry, on a damask background with garlands of flowers. Maurice Jacques was responsible for the designs of these borders, with the assistance of Louis Tessier for the flowers.

Designed to form the complete decoration of rooms, these *tentures* comprised tapestries for each wall panel, even the small ones at the side of the chimney and overdoors. They also included complete sets of seat and screen covers, some of which have oval scenes within them while others are merely decorated with garlands of flowers. The first set was woven from 1764, and was bought by an Englishman, Lord Coventry. There is nothing surprising in this, since the end of the Seven Years War had drawn the English to Paris in large numbers, but it does seem strange that every single version of this particular set went abroad, some being sold and others given, such as the set given by Louis XVI to the Comte du Nord. Madame de Genlis was to complain that it had become the fashion to relegate Gobelins tapestries to storage and replace them with English blue paper, and perhaps the Gobelins' production was more at home in foreign palaces than in Paris houses and apartments.

As well as weaving pictorial tapestries, the Gobelins was responsible for *portières* (door curtains). These were often armorial, with elaborate borders, but one of the Gobelins' first and most successful patterns was the *Portières des Dieux* followed in 1727 by the *Portières aux Armes de France* for which the cartoons had been provided by Perrot, in a style similar to the work he was executing for the Savonnerie at the same time.

## BEAUVAIS

The Beauvais factory benefited from the same status of Manufacture Royale as the Gobelins, but with greater independence, since most of its production was for public sale. In the early eighteenth century, Beauvais underwent financial problems, but nevertheless managed to produce splendid sets such as *L'Île de Cythère ou le Temple de Vénus*, a *tenture* of six *pièces*, from cartoons by Jacques Duplessis in 1724. Brightly coloured exotic coastal landscapes with classical buildings contain figures in Eastern costumes, putti and classical gods. Elaborate trophies





of love abound in the borders, incorporating quivers, lyres, putti and swans.

Jean-Baptiste Oudry's involvement with tapestry weaving began in 1726 when he began to supply cartoons to the Beauvais factory; in 1734 he became the factory's director, in partnership with one of the great silversmiths of the first half of the eighteenth century, Nicolas Besnier. His cartoons mainly showed nature in various forms, but he could venture into new ground, providing, for instance, a set after Molière, and one of *Métamorphoses*. Upon his appointment as Surinspecteur at the Gobelins he ceased to paint cartoons for Beauvais himself, but successfully found other painters to do so instead. Felicitously, his choice fell upon the young Boucher, whose first *tenture*, the *Fêtes*



"*Le jardin chinois*", one of the five *pièces* of a Beauvais *Tenture Chinoise* of 1750-54, from cartoons by Boucher. There is little that is Chinese about this lady at her *toilette*, except perhaps her hairstyle and the blue-and-white vases, but the luxuriant vegetation, the parasol and the colourful costumes all convey an exotic and Utopian feeling. The original oil sketch for the design, now in the Musée des Beaux Arts, Besançon, is larger and incorporates further Chinese figures and a Chinese pavilion.

LEFT

Early eighteenth-century panels of Beauvais tapestry with decorative and allegorical motifs.







*Beauvais carpet of arabesque style and in tapestry weave, late 1780s. De Menou, the director of the Beauvais factory, also produced such carpets in Savonnerie weave.*

RIGHT

*Mid-eighteenth-century Aubusson tapestry.*







*Italiennes* (four *pièces*) of 1734-5, showing groups of figures in landscapes (some of which were used by Vincennes for biscuit groups), was followed by *L'Histoire de Psyché* in 1736, and a *Tenture Chinoise* in 1741 (see page 207). After Boucher joined the Gobelins his cartoons, as well as Oudry's, continued to be employed at Beauvais, on account of their popularity, and because Beauvais found it difficult to obtain cartoons by competent artists. When Jean-Baptiste Le Prince exhibited at the Salon in 1767 a set of cartoons for Beauvais for a *tenture* to be called *Les Jeux Russiens* (as usual there was little that was Russian about it) Diderot complained of the poor composition and of a "dirty colour".

While still producing wall tapestries such as Huet's *Pastorales à draperies bleues et arabesques* during the reign of Louis XVI, Beauvais turned to the manufacture of two other specialities of note; seat covers and carpets. Large suites of Louis XVI seat furniture, normally by the *menuisier* Henri Jacob, have survived with Beauvais tapestry covers of garlands of flowers and ribbons, but other subjects were also attempted, notably a set comprising wall tapestries as well as seat covers. These were woven in the late 1780s to the designs of Jean-Jacques-François Le Barbier with scenes symbolizing the role played by France in the War of American Independence. It was ordered by Louis XVI to give to George Washington, but sadly seems not to have reached him.

In 1780 the new director at Beauvais, de Menou, who had come

from the Aubusson factory, started production of carpets in the style of the Savonnerie; Aubusson had been engaged in this activity since the mid-eighteenth century, and he realised that Beauvais too could imitate the Savonnerie cheaply. Carpets of tapestry weave as well as *façon de Perse* (woven with a pile) enjoyed considerable success in the years preceding the revolution.

## AUBUSSON

To revive the independent tapestry workshops at Aubusson in central France, which had been seriously depleted by the mass exodus consequent upon the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, a painter, Jean-Jacques du Mons, and a technical adviser from the Gobelins were both sent there in the 1730s, and until the end of the eighteenth century Aubusson was to produce charming tapestries of pastoral scenes, some woven from discarded cartoons of the Gobelins and Beauvais, and some with subjects drawn from the engravings of Boucher and others. *Verdures* remained popular, and Aubusson competed with Flanders in this field. As well as tapestries, Aubusson began to weave cheaper versions of Savonnerie carpets in the mid-eighteenth century, sometimes to designs pilfered from the Savonnerie itself.

## UPHOLSTERY: SILK AND OTHER TEXTILES

Jean-François Bimont, a *maître-tapissier*, published in 1770 an updated version of an upholsterer's manual he had written some years previously. In this work, the *Principes de l'art du Tapissier*, he seeks to instruct his colleagues about current practice in upholstery, both on the nature and use of materials, and in the technical aspects of the craft. He insists on the importance of knowing how to use the patterns woven or printed on a material: "the principal flowers should be placed centrally on walls, and at eye level", "the principal flower panel must without fail be placed on the back of chairs." If the pattern is too big to fit entirely on the back of a chair, the lower part of the bouquet should be placed on

the seat. When using striped materials, care should be taken to ensure that "two stripes of the same colour should not be sewn together", and lengths of it should be used sideways to form borders at top and bottom. The gilt nails used to fix materials to chairs should have a small space between them, and should not be placed too close to the edge of the frame in order not to damage it when they are hammered on. Another useful tip given by Bimont concerns curtains; to avoid getting them dirty they should always be fitted with pulls. Realistically, he concludes his advice with the comment that the work can only be as good as the budget is large.

Damask, Bimont tells us, is the material most frequently employed in upholstery. It may be plain coloured, or have a background of one colour and one or more colours in the pattern. This is appropriate to cover a *meuble d'hiver* (winter set), as is tapestry, while for a *meuble d'été* (summer set) a *taffetas à fleurs ou chiné* is preferable.

Curtain, wall and furniture upholstery could be changed with the seasons. This extravagant practice took place at Versailles twice a year, the autumn change happening during the Royal household's yearly stay at Fontainebleau. Lesser households often included a servant called a *valet de chambre tapissier* whose job it was to carry out this change, but

Sketch by François Desportes for a velvet cushion with gold braid and tassels. Oil on paper, first half of the eighteenth century. Desportes painted some of Louis XV's dogs seated on similar cushions.



Red, green and cream silk damask, mid-eighteenth century. An example of one of the most widely used upholstery materials.

FOLLOWING SPREAD

Marie Antoinette's *salon des jeux* at the Château de Compiègne, 1786.