

**2022-2023 Mansion Docent Training
Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens
French Tapestry-Specific Notes Using SFP Framework**

Style

What do these objects' appearance reveal about the people who made and used them?

France is arbiter of taste in 1700s, and richest country in Europe

Subject-matter

- Dipping into the classical past.....Roman Ovid—his mythological narrative poems...“Loves of the Gods”the Olympian gods often as pairs of lovers
 - Eg. *Bacchus and Ariadne, Jupiter and Antiope* (or *Bacchus changed into a grape*)
- Pastoral.....looking to idealized nature and peasantry.....Italian Festival...and flowers on seat covers
 - Fantasy of implausibly idyllic...peasants happy, elegant courtiers lounging
 - Wooded glades, sunlit, evoking languid afternoons in countryside, dotted with ruins
 - Eg. “The Quack Doctor” and “The Magic Lantern” from the Italian Villages Scenes

Novelty: To attract customers must have new subjects, needed designers to come up with designs

Imitated paintings.....shading of colors, some with borders like frames

Changes-Innovations:

- In 1700s manufacturers tried to diversify their production by less monumental works....move to smaller Parisian homes, need smaller tapestries
 - Beauvais found tapestry covers were commercially successful...eg. La Fontaine chairs
 - Gobelins: eg. diplomatic gift chairs and sofa
- On seat furniture, new invention: upholstery stretched on frames that are movable (1725-30)....self-presentation of status
 - Only on high quality chairs and extremely wealthy—had a servant in charge of the preservation and seasonal changes....Remove for seasons: silk summer; velvet or needlepoint for winter
 - Eg. Gobelins chairs and sofa

Today, colors are faded

Function
What purpose did it serve? Literally? Figuratively? Who used it?

Literal

Part of interior decoration as wall covering

- could set in wooden paneling or frames
- wall hangings, could be for complete decoration for a room, for each wall panel, even small ones around chimney

Seat or screen covers

Diplomatic gifts, or furnishings for French embassies abroad

Symbolic/Figuratively

- not easily transportable, or readily affordable....self-presentation, status
- diplomatic gifts.....boost French economy and standing/influence on world stage

For collectors like Post, aligned yourself with collectors of the past (who collected tapestries), and luxury goods of the past...shows your good taste

Transportive, theatrical....for entertainment

- beyond the room: portray an illusion of scenic vistas beyond the confines of the room
- within the room: while in the room, you get transformed into actors in the tapestry scenes

For whom?

- For French royal palaces, civic entities
- Homes of wealthy
- For other country's royals

Production
How was it made? Who made it?

During 1700s French tapestry became the finest in Europe

Long process of production....could take years

Materials.....wool, silk, metallic threads

Collaborative.....

- tapestry designer provided cartoons (pictures), like Boucher (worked at Beauvais and Gobelins, 1734-1769)
- weavers at tapestry manufactory
- dyers, and science of dye process

Cartoons could be used repeatedly over and over....manufactory invests in images, need to be widely appealing

Could have multiple subjects in each set, like Loves of the Gods which had nine, and customer could order full or partial sets...allows for choice

- Italian Village Scenes....125 hangings woven over 25 years
- Loves of the Gods....34 commissions, most of 3, 4, 6 hangings, with the crown accounting for 9 of the orders

Changes over time to meet demands of consumers, and respond to changes in homes

- From large wall to seat furniture
- Pop-out seat panels for changing with seasons

Customer could be crown, or the wealthy

- Gobelins—mostly crown (manufactory located in Paris)
- Beauvais.....most of its production for public sale, rather than crown (manufactory located 40 miles N of Paris)

Gobelins exists today