



## RESTORATION OF THE VALOIS TAPESTRIES

During the 16<sup>th</sup> century large-scale tapestries were the paramount way for royalty to convey their political dominance; displaying wealth, power and social standing. A large tapestry could express this message more eloquently than paintings; royalty knew and used it. When a royal commission called for gold and silver threads woven with the wool and silk threads, the expenditure was more than the cost for a painting. The Vatican's *Acts of the Apostle* (cartoons by Raphael) cost five times more the ceiling of the Sistine chapel!

The Valois Tapestries (c.1575), a series of eight panels are unique, unlike other series, have not been separated and dispersed, and they have not been reproduced as other tapestries were. This is the only set; they were produced in the tapestry center of Brussels which was the pinnacle of excellence during the Renaissance. They have an amazing provenance; commissioned for the Catherine, Queen of France, née de'Medici, one of the most influential patron families of the Renaissance. The cycle has remained in the de'Medici family from the time they were made, going to Florence with her favorite granddaughter then descending in the family until they were gifted to the Tuscan State by the last family member – with the codicil that they never be sold or separated. Please see the photograph below of the inventory numbers on the reverse of one of the panels.

Elizabeth Cleland (May 6, 2016)

Title & affiliation: Associate Curator, department of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

The Courtauld Gallery had an exhibition, *Drawings for Catherine de'Medici*, this Spring in London showing Antoine Caron's drawings from which the cartoons were made for weaving.

Tapestries are made of materials susceptible to deterioration from sunlight and stress from the weight of hanging. The vagaries of time accumulated and played havoc with their condition.

While tapestries can be argued to have been more important during the Renaissance than paintings, the paintings fit more comfortably because of their size for exhibitions, museum collections, private collections and study are what we know more of today than tapestries. Tapestries consume considerably more space than paintings and are difficult to ship.

Funding for the restoration of all eight has been donated by a single generous patron, Veronica Atkins, through the Friends of the Uffizi Gallery here in Palm Beach. For the first time in

The catalogue, *Renaissance Splendor*, “Featuring detailed scenes of court pageantry and life-size portraits of members of the French Valois dynasty woven in wool, silk, and precious metal-wrapped threads, the Valois Tapestries are one of the most extravagant sets of hangings produced in the 16th century. The precise circumstances surrounding the tapestries’ commission and their arrival at the Medici court in Florence, as well as the significance of the specific scenes depicted, however, have eluded scholars for years. Presenting new research into the political maneuvering of the Valois and Medici courts and providing extensive physical analysis gathered during a recent cleaning of the tapestries, this volume offers brand new insight into why these magnificent works were made and what they represent.

Elizabeth Cleland is associate curator of European sculpture and decorative arts at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Marjorie E. Wieseman is Paul J. and Edith Ingalls Vignos Jr. Curator of European Paintings and Sculpture, 1500–1800 at the Cleveland Museum of Art. Alessandra Griffo is curator of 18th-century painting and sculpture at the Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence. Costanza Perrone Da Zara is conservator at Restauro Tessile de Beyer e Perrone Da Zara, Florence.” <https://yalebooks.yale.edu>

We, the Friends of the Uffizi Gallery, are honored to have been instrumental in seeing this restoration to fruition, culminating in this exhibition of global scope.

As Elizabeth Cleland said: “These lovely tapestries are unique and immensely important survivals of sixteenth-century production. This conservation work is both key to the Uffizi gallery and its displays, but also has ramifications extending beyond this context to Renaissance studies worldwide.”

Gordon A. Lewis, Jr.  
Advisory Board  
Friends of the Uffizi Gallery  
561.818.9162



Inventory Numbers of the successive de' Medici family owners on the reverse of *Festa sull'acqua - Attaque de l'île devant le chateau de Fontainebleau*



Detail of the metallic threads



***Assalto alla balena***

*Fête nautique sur l'Adour*, 395 x 395 cm (12 x 12 feet)

Manufactured in Brussels, unidentified atelier, c. 1575, Galleria degli Uffizi



*Assalto all'elefante*

*Mascarade à l'éléphant, 390 x 539 cm (12' 10" x 17' 6")*

Manufactured in Brussels, unidentified atelier, c. 1575, Galleria degli Uffizi



Figure 1 *Combattimento alla sbarra*

*Combat à la barrière*, 386 x 328 cm (12' 7" x 10' 9")

Manufactured in Brussels, unidentified atelier, c. 1575, Galleria degli Uffizi



***Festa per gli ambasciatori polacchi***

*Fête aux Tuileries en l'honneur des ambassadeurs polonais, 399 x 383 cm (13' x 12'6")*

Manufactured in Brussels, unidentified atelier, c. 1575, Galleria degli Uffizi



***Festa sull'acqua***

*Attaque de l'île devant le château de Fontainebleau, 403 x 339 cm (13' 2" x 11' 1")*  
Manufactured in Brussels, unidentified atelier, c. 1575, Galleria degli Uffizi



### **Il gioco della quintana**

*Jeu de la quintaine*, 400 x 387 cm (13' 1" x 12' 7")

Manufactured in Brussels, unidentified atelier, c. 1575, Galleria degli Uffizi



### *Torneo*

*Carrousel des chevaliers Bretons et irlandais à Bayonne, 393 x 608 cm (12' 10" x 20')*  
Manufactured in Brussels, unidentified atelier, c. 1575, Galleria degli Uffizi



Figure 2 *Viaggio di corte*  
*Départ de la cour du château d'Anet*, 390 x 543 cm (12' 8" x 17' 10")  
Manufactured in Brussels, unidentified atelier, c. 1575, Galleria degli Uffizi