

Women Hunting the Fox



Object Title	Women Hunting the Fox
Creation Place	Europe, Belgium (Flanders)
Artist	Unidentified designers and cartoonists
Date	c. 1650
Medium	Wool, silk; tapestry weave
Classification	Textiles, Tapestry
Dimensions	159 1/2" x 150 3/4"
Accession #	33.23.2
Gallery	G257

Questions and activities:

- This is a tapestry woven in 1650 in Flanders, current day Belgium. What's going on in this tapestry? What do you see that makes you say this?
- Tapestries have been referred to as the frescos of the north. In the south of Europe, especially Italy, the walls of buildings were decorated with frescos, paintings done directly on the walls. How does this

tapestry compare to a painting? What do you see that makes you say that?

- In their heyday (1400-1800), tapestries covered the walls of churches, palaces, and the homes of aristocracy. The most popular images were Biblical stories, myths, allegories, battles, and contemporary scenes of daily life. While scholars don't know exactly who originally owned this tapestry, he is believed to be a member of the aristocracy or upper class. Why do you suppose he would have chosen a hunting scene?
- If you were to cover the walls of your family room with tapestries, what scenes would you choose?

Historical/Social Context:

The religious conflicts which had begun in the Renaissance with the Reformation and Counter-Reformation continued well into the 17th century. The battle between Catholics and Protestants resulted in the separation of the Netherlands into Catholic Flanders (modern day Belgium) and Protestant Holland in 1648. (Note that this piece was created in Flanders.) After being sacked by Spanish troops in 1576, Antwerp, the leading port of Flanders, lost half its population. Although Brussels was the seat of government, Antwerp gradually regained its position as Flanders' commercial and artistic capital. As part of the Treaty of Munster, however, the Scheldt River leading to Antwerp's harbor was closed to shipping, thereby crippling trade for the next two centuries. Because Flanders continued to be ruled by Spanish regents, who viewed themselves as the defenders of the true faith, its artists relied on commissions from Church and State, although the aristocracy and wealthy merchants were also important patrons.

As part of the Counter-Reformation, the Church used art to encourage piety among the faithful and to persuade those it regarded as heretics to return to the fold.

Patronage of the arts was also spurred by economic growth that helped to support not only the aristocracy but also a rapidly growing, affluent middle class eager to build and furnish fine houses and palaces. Included in these patrons were rich merchants who made their fortunes in the expanding world of exploration and trade, including Holland's vast trading empire.

This time period also saw a large number of rising European capitals, such as Amsterdam and London, which resulted in increased activity in architecture and its decoration. Buildings ranged from magnificent churches and palaces to stage sets for plays and ballets.

Scientific advances abounded during this time period.

- The philosophers Francis Bacon (1561-1626) of England and Rene Descartes (1596-1650) of France established a new scientific method of studying the world by insisting on scrupulous objective and logical reasoning. Bacon proposed that facts be established by observation and tested by controlled experiments. Descartes argues for the deductive method of reasoning.
- In 1543 Nicolaus Copernicus contradicted long-held views by arguing that the earth and other planets revolve around the sun, and Johannes Kepler and Galileo Galilei confirmed and advanced this finding; the Church prohibited teaching this theory and Galileo was tried for heresy.
- Dutch lens maker and amateur scientist Antoni van Leeuwenhoek (1632-1723) invented the microscope, enabling the study of the inner workings of plants, animals, and microorganisms.

Art History Context:

Baroque refers to a period in art history lasting from the end of the 16th century into the 18th century, including the period (1650) during which this object was created.

Baroque style is characterized by an emotional rather than intellectual response to a work of art and by an interest in exploiting the dramatic movement through choice of subject and style. While Baroque art introduced a new dynamic, theatrical quality to art, it continued the classicism of the Renaissance. Baroque art is actually a conflict of the reason of classicism with passion.

Seventeenth century artists explored a range of subject matter, from grand religious themes to everyday scenes and portraits reflecting the lives of prosperous middle-class families.

The sizable production of the leading tapestry centers in the South Netherlands (Flanders) during the first two-thirds of the sixteenth century was severely impacted by the religious persecution and civil war that roiled the region in the 1560s–70s. During the last third of the century, many skilled weavers and cartoonists migrated to centers in the North Netherlands (such as Delft and Middelburg) or further afield, to England, France, and the Germanic states, where they established new workshops or strengthened existing ones.

The Flanders industry gradually recovered during the early 1600s, stimulated in part by support from the archdukes, Albert and Isabella, who placed commissions with the leading workshops and introduced legislation to discourage further emigration by skilled weavers. Many workshops continued to produce design series conceived during the second third of the sixteenth century, but from the 1610s to the 1630s, new variety was provided by designs created by Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), Jacob Jordaens (1593–1678), and their pupils. These artists introduced the vocabulary of Baroque style to tapestry design, depicting large figures with billowing drapery engaged in dramatic action, within elaborate architectural borders. Rubens made few concessions to the particular aesthetics of tapestry painting—indeed, he painted most of his tapestry designs in oil on panel—but during the second third of the century, artists such as Antoine Sallaerts (ca. 1590–1650), Justus van Egmont (1601–1674), and Jan van den Hoecke (1611–1651) took a more considered approach to the requirements of the tapestry medium, providing designs that combined narrative and decorative qualities.

Brussels remained the principle center of high-quality production in Flanders, with a sizable volume of lower-quality tapestries being produced in centers like Antwerp and Audenaarde. These products were exported all over Europe, but the Flanders workshops now encountered growing competition from other European centers. The greatest challenge came from Paris, which had a longstanding tradition of tapestry production. The English king established a tapestry workshop in the village of Mortlake (southwest of London) in 1619, staffed with weavers from Flanders.

The Object:

This tapestry, *Women Hunting the Fox*, is one of a set of four entitled *The Hunt*. The central subjects of the tapestries are four outdoor scenes related to the hunt.

The landscape scenes and figures in the tapestries were inspired from the *Hunts of Maximilian*, now in the Louvre and woven after the cartoons of Bernard Van Orley, also preserved in the Louvre.

In a hilly, sparsely wooded landscape a rider brandishing a spear and a young dog handler on foot with a spear on his shoulder follow two hounds who are chasing an animal to the left. In the foreground a woman hunter dressed in a red robe and blue petticoat sits at the base of a broken tree trunk and blows her horn. Her spear is decorated with a red bow near the point. The traditional title of this tapestry, *Hunting the Deer*, appears to be incorrect. The animal fleeing to the left is about the same size as the dogs pursuing it, seems doglike in physiognomy and has a long, bushy tail. It could be a wolf but more likely is a fox, given the light equipment of its hunters.

Despite the bow on her spear, it has never been noted that the horn blower is a woman. The rider, whose headband is flapping in the breeze, may also be a woman. Since most women rode sidesaddle at this time, instead of astride, as here, and certainly few blew hunting horns, this may be a humorous variation on the hunt theme, showing two sportive ladies imitating men.

All four tapestries are enclosed by nearly identical borders that simulate carved-stone architectural surrounds animated with garlands and putti. In the top borders two winged putti, flanked by fruit-and-flower garlands, hold up a curling rectangular cartouche illustrating a landscape; these miniature landscapes are the only border elements that vary in design from tapestry to tapestry. In the upper

corners, blue bosses with carved decoration support the top garlands and also the flower garlands falling down each side toward a winged putto. Each putto holds a swag of fruit in one hand and stands on a plinth decorated with fruit garlands held in the mouths of carved rams' heads. The lower borders are also ornamented with fruit-and-flower garlands, which are supported at the center by another ram's head.

The design of this piece is not derived from 16th century models but, rather, follows 17th century style, both in the hilly landscape and in the clothing of the hunters.

Technique and condition: The weavers used more tweeding of colors here (by working with mixed-color weft yarn) than in the others of the set. The leaves of the forest trees are rendered with abundant lazy holes. Use of eccentric weft is sparse.

Warp: undyed wool, 7.5-8 ends per cm.

Weft: dyed wool and silk, 24-28 ends per cm.

The original owners of these tapestries and for whom their cartoons were painted is unknown. Given the popularity of the subject, even the weaver or a tapestry merchant may have commissioned the cartoons in order to have in stock a hunt series in the latest style. The tapestries, like most of their genre, apparently have no special symbolism; rather, they were meant to entertain the viewer during the cold, wet, dark winter months by brightening the room and opening its walls out into verdant vistas enhanced with scenes of a favorite pastime.

Design, Attribution, and Dating

The anonymous designers of these tapestries appear to have been active in the mid-17th century, contemporary with the tapestries' weaving. It is possible, therefore, that teams of painters executed the cartoons. At this time artists who specialized in landscape, a prominent element of these tapestries, often collaborated with figure painters, and especially in 3 of the tapestries the figures are quite different in style from their backdrop.

The artists, whoever they were, attempted to create a contemporary-style series reminiscent of the grand tradition of Flemish hunt tapestries. It is often noted that the main scenes are inspired by the tapestries call *The Hunts of Maximilian* now in the Musée du Louvre, Paris, designed by Bernard van Orley in the mid-1520s and woven in Brussels. There even has been some doubt whether the cartoons for the central scenes of the Minneapolis tapestries were made at the time of their weaving or were reused from a 16th-century set. Both the general relationship of figures to landscape and some of the poses and clothing of the figures are certainly inspired by van Orley's Hunts. The costumes, however, are inconsistent: some are copied from van Orley's designs, others reflect different 16th-century types, and the women are dressed in fanciful 17th-century garb. Even the freedom of the landscapes points to a 17th-century conception.

The border designs imitate Brussels models of the mid-17th century. The organization, with putti standing on plinths at the sides, is already foreshadowed by Brussels borders of the mid-1630s. It appears to be an established formula by about mid-century. Their rich Baroque realization, reminiscent of the generation after Rubens, suggests that the cartoon was painted and the tapestries woven in the middle of the century or just slightly later.

The creation of the Minneapolis tapestries probably was related to a revival of interest in the van Orley Hunts. Because their border design follows Brussels models, it has previously been assumed that they were woven there, too. However, close examination questions this assumption. The choice and balancing of colors are unlike Brussels work, with its unmistakable blues and reds; nor do they resemble the work of Antwerp or other Flemish centers.

Hunting Theme

The theme of the hunt, one of the earliest to be represented in art, has been a perennial favorite in all media. Representations in tapestry have survived from Coptic times and can be traced in inventories of European collections from the Middle Ages on.

Hunting was a sport for royalty and the aristocracy and was more than a pastime. The elaborate rituals of the hunt were an integral part of court etiquette, and skill in hunting was regarded as the peacetime equivalent of prowess in chivalric wars. The supply of game was essential to ensure the variety of dishes necessary for the tables of the nobility.

Wild boars were pursued for both sport and meat. Their size, strength and sharp tusks made them a dangerous quarry. Nobles lavished large sums of money on packs of specially bred hounds. Bears were hunted for sport only; like boars, they were dangerous. The subject of this tapestry would bring color to the interior in which it hung and remind people of more pleasant months ahead.

The Artist:

Bernard van Orley (Brussels, between 1487 and 1491 – Brussels, 6 January 1541), was a significant Flemish Northern Renaissance painter and draughtsman and a leading designer of tapestries and stained glass.

He likely was initially taught in the workshop of his father, an obscure painter whose name appears as "master" in the registers of the Guild of St. Luke of Antwerp.

In his early paintings he continued the traditions of Jan van Eyck and Roger van der Weyden. He gradually began integrating the Italianate motifs of the Renaissance and representing figure types and the spatial relationship such as found in the works of Raphael.

His early signed work included triptych altarpieces for churches. From 1515 on, he and his workshop received many orders for portraits, including from the royal family and from people connected to the court. In 1516 he painted seven portraits of Charles, who had just become King of Spain, and portraits of his brother Ferdinand, the later King of Hungary, and his four sisters (destined for the King of Denmark).

By 1517 he was recognized as a master in the Antwerp Guild of St. Luke.

On 23 May 1518 he was appointed as the official court painter to the Regent of the Netherlands Margarete of Austria, replacing Jacopo d'Barbari. In this position, he became the head of an important workshop, making him one of the first entrepreneurial artists in Northern Europe. With this workshop he produced paintings and, especially after 1525, became a leading designer of tapestry cartoons and stained glass windows. He held this position till 1527 when he, his family and several other artists, fell in disgrace because of their Protestant sympathies. The family van Orley fled Brussels and settled in Antwerp. Five years later, when he was reinstated by the new Regent of the Netherlands Maria of Austria, he returned to Brussels.

His portraits, such as those of Charles V and Margarete of Austria, were subdued and thoughtful. He usually represents his subjects in a seated static position, their expressionless faces without much psychological depth or feelings. His workshop produced several copies of these portraits, especially the portrait of Charles V. They were offered as gift to visitors or courtiers.

When Albrecht Dürer visited the Netherlands in 1520, he called Barend van Orley flatteringly "the Raphael of the Netherlands". Dürer had a profound influence on Van Orley who would in his later works try to find a synthesis between these two Renaissance brilliant artists Raphael and Dürer.

Together with Jan Gossaert and Quentin Matsys, Bernard van Orley is regarded as one of the leading innovators of the 16th century Flemish painting, by adopting the style and manner of the Italian

Renaissance. His paintings are executed with great care about minute details and stand out by their brilliant colors.

During this period, tapestries were held in much higher esteem than paintings and were more expensive. Bernard van Orley had already started designing tapestries in his youth, but after 1530 he seemed to have stopped painting altogether and applying himself solely to cartoons for tapestries and designs for stained-glass windows.

From the 1520s on, his tapestries began more to resemble woven paintings, more in line with the aesthetics of the Renaissance. The figures receive a dramatic weight through their large size and through their position in the foreground.

In his later years (1521–1530) he made the twelve small cartoons for his best-known tapestry series "The Hunts of Maximilian", one tapestry for each month ([Louvre](#), Paris). With those cartoons he set the example for his followers by opening up new paths in Italianism with his classic breadth and ease in transforming the rendering of landscapes, successfully integrating it into Netherlandish traditional modes. This dynamism would reach its peak in the Baroque style. The iconography of hunting parties would be greatly imitated by the tapestry workshops of the Leyniers family, the leading dyers and weavers in Brussels for over four hundred years.

At the end of his life he also started designing stained-glass windows, including windows of the St. Michael and Gudula Cathedral in Brussels and the St. Rumbolds Cathedral.

The Hunts of Maximilian:

In his later years (1521–1530) Bernard van Orley made the twelve small cartoons for his best-known tapestry series "The Hunts of Maximilian", one tapestry for each month (Louvre, Paris). They represent scenes from the hunting parties of Archduke Maximilian, the Habsburg duke of Brabant.

The image for The Month of September is attached. This tapestry illustrates an episode from a stag-hunt. In those tapestries rigidity of the composition makes way for a greater dynamism. He displayed his creative talent for depicting large-scale scenes of imaginary hunts within a realistic, picturesque, minutely detailed landscape. The buildings on the opposite bank locate this scene on the outskirts of Brussels: Groenendaal Priory and the nearby hunting lodge at Ravenstein were favorite stopping-places for the court.

Helpful resources:

Adelson, Candace J. *European Tapestry in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts*, ABRAMS, 1994. (Available at MIA Reference Library; detailed description of many MIA tapestries)

Stack, Lotus. *The Essential Thread: Tapestry on Wall and Body*, Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 1988. (Available at MIA Reference Library)

The Hunts of Maximilian: The Month of September



Source: http://www.louvre.fr/llv/oeuvres/detail_notice.jsp?CONTENT%3C%3Ecnt_id=10134198673226258&CURRENT_LLIV_NOTICE%3C%3Ecnt_id=10134198673226258&FOLDER%3C%3Efolder_id=9852723696500783&bmLocale=en