

Magnificence and Splendour

Textiles play a special role in the representation of power, wealth and authority throughout history. When commissioned by powerful families, their decorative function intentionally projects magnificence.

In the past, money spent on art was money well spent. Generous expenditure on textiles was a good indication of honor and a way to gauge the affluence of an individual. The quality and splendor of a textile is emblematic of prosperity.

Extravagant styles reflect upper-class taste, asserting ideals they wished to be associated with whilst upholding hierarchical structures. Through them, we can learn about the role of politics and class in the making and displaying of textiles, and the significance of production, technique, and colour. The relationship between various cultures, regimes, and royal customs are put on display.

Tapestry Room from Croome Court

This was a room in the center of Croome, an estate owned by a British aristocratic family. It was commissioned and inhabited by the 6th Earl of Coventry. He was an 18th-century trend-setter who collaborated with the best talent of the time to create a grand house.

These tapestries were commissioned from Paris, the centre of fashion during the 18th century. Important guests were hosted in this room meaning it had to be impressive. The tapestries show illusory mythical scenes, understood only by an educated audience, surrounded by trophies of fruits, flowers, and exotic birds. The ornamentation on the edge of the tapestries was requested and paid by the number of details. This shows how expensive such a commission would be, highlighting the Earl's wealth.

The Tapestry Room gives an idea of how textiles were used to communicate magnificence. Textiles are not neutral in this context; they demonstrate exceptional wealth reinforcing the Earl's status in society.



Allegory of Water (Neptune Rescuing Amymone) designed 1758–67, woven 1764–71. General conception Jacques Germain Soufflot.



DATE: 1763-71

ARTIST: Room designed by Robert Adams. Tapestries designed by François Boucher.

ORIGIN: Worcestershire, England

CREDIT LINE: Samuel H. Kress Foundation

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*Chimneypiece from the Tapestry Room from Croome Court
Allegories of Air (Cephalus and Aurora) and Earth (Vertumnus and Pomona) designed 1758–67, woven 1764–71.
General conception Jacques Germain Soufflot.*

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The Emperor Sailing, from The Story of the Emperor of China

DATE: C. 1716–1722

MEDIUM: Wool, silk, and silvered- and-gilt-metal-strip-wrapped silk, slit and double interlocking tapestry weave with some areas of 2:2 plain interlacings of silvered-and-gilt-metal wefts

ARTIST: Guy-Louis Vernansal (1648-1729) was a French painter. He studied under Charles Le Brun and produced tapestry designs for the Gobelins and Beauvais manufactories.

ORIGIN: Beauvais

DIMENSIONS: 385.8 × 355 cm (151 3/4 × 139 3/4 in.)

CREDIT LINE: Mr. and Mrs. Charles H. Worcester Fund

REF.NO : 2007.22

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The Emperor Sailing originally formed part of a suite called ‘The Story of the Emperor of China’ in the French court. The tapestry signifies the friendship between the French king and the Qing dynasty. The series was produced in response to the French court’s growing mania for all things Asian. The purpose of these tapestries was to satisfy the French’s idealistic vision of the Qing Dynasty at the time whilst reinforcing an image of power and magnificence due to its extravagant qualities and expensive cost.



Banners (Set of Four)

DATE: C. Made 1750–1775

MEDIUM: Silk and gold-leaf-over-lacquered-paper-strip-wrapped silk, slit tapestry weave with eccentric and interlaced outlining wefts; painted details; lined with silk, 4:1 sat in damask weave; metal fittings

ARTIST: unknown

ORIGIN: China

DIMENSIONS: a: 176 × 22 cm (69 1/4 × 8 5/8 in.) b: 176.8 × 22.1 cm (69 5/8 × 8 5/8 in.) c: 176.2 × 22.1 cm (69 3/8 × 8 5/8 in.) d: 177.1 × 22 cm (69 3/4 × 8 5/8 in.)

CREDIT LINE: Bequest of Russell Tyson

REF.NO: 1964.1048a-d

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INSCRIPTION:

'A: From all directions the smoke of the solar eclipse is dissipated as light dawns again, Like frozen candles the Eastern Emperor's full shining transport is crystallized into the Three Asterisms [sun, moon and stars]; Auspicious clouds gather around Mount Song, boundless felicitations!; b: Glorious flower-red candles emit blue-green smoke, As we gaze upon the strung pearls of the Northern Dipper; Shadows flicker, the zhu dragon shakes its head, As we worship the nine layers of the heavens on high.; c: The kingfisher-green of orchid and tea plants becomes luxuriant in season, How luminous! How full! their radiance is everywhere, Filling the hills of cypress and pine.; d: The light of spring reveals the radiance of the elements [three fives]; Looking at the fire of this year's cassia and the smoke of this year's orchids, They are still no match for the radiance which soars to the jade throne.'

During the reign of the Qing Dynasty, on the 13th day of the 8th month of the Lunar calendar, *Wanshou* (Vast Longevity Festival) WAS celebrated in The Forbidden City. The nationwide festival marked the birthday of the Emperor, providing a platform to show off achievements in government, as well as expressing their happiness with the public, and demonstrating the dynasty's power.

People would pray for the Emperor and for blessings echoing the prayers on the banners. As part of the ceremony four lamps are set up at Qianqing Palace. Two life lamps and two skylights are lit from a tree pole in front of the Palace and surrounded by the Sixteen Life Treasures banners. These *Banners* were part of these Sixteen Life Treasures and, through their purpose, communicate how textiles were used politically to assert magnificence.



Scroll Cover for Imperial Calligraphy



DATE: Qing dynasty (1644–1911),
Qianlong period (1736–95)

MEDIUM: Silk and metallic thread
tapestry (kesi)

ORIGIN: China

DIMENSIONS: Overall: 15 x 13
1/2 in. (38.1 x 34.3 cm)

CREDIT LINE: Fletcher Fund,
1941

REF.NO: n/a

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Museum of Art.

Scroll Cover for Imperial Calligraphy conveys the significance of the dragon, as well as the symbolic meaning of colour, in China. Originally, a three or four clawed dragon symbolised people with great status. The Emperor then created the symbol of a five clawed dragon which he used to represent himself, as seen in this scroll cover. This transformed the meaning of a four clawed dragon, to signify officials, and the three clawed dragon, to signify the civilian.



The royal family shows its wealth and authority through colour. Eye catching complementary colours were difficult to obtain. They were stylish and therefore expensive. Colour also signifies something deeper; yellow represented the Earth, the most essential element, and so was reserved for the Emperor. This scroll cover demonstrates how power was demonstrated through visual elements and material things.



*Tapestry (Bear
Hunt
and Falconry
from a Hunts
Series)*



DATE: Made 1515–1535

MEDIUM: Wool and silk, silt and single and double dovetailed tapestry weave

ORIGIN: Belgium

DIMENSIONS: 259.8 × 337.5 cm (102 5/16 × 132 7/8 in.)

CREDIT LINE: Purchased with funds provided by Mrs. Charles H. Scheppe through the Needlework and Textile Guild

REF.NO: n/a

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This tapestry shows a hunting scene during the 16th century. Hunting was a passion among rulers and nobles in the Middle Ages, playing a major part in courtly life. They mostly hunted on foot, but some were mounted on horses and accompanied by hunting dogs, as shown in this tapestry.

Hunting was a social activity and was a popular activity among the European aristocracy. Tapestries representing this popular activity, such as this one, were common of the time. Hunting was not only a diversion for the wealthy, and it was an essential part of a nobleman's education since it made evident his intellectual and athletic capabilities to onlookers.