



Press Release

Lausanne, August 2004

Flemish Tapestries of the 16th to 18th Centuries from the Fondation Toms Pauli

Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Palais de Rumine, Lausanne, Switzerland
24 September 2004 – 9 January 2005

Private view: 23 September at 06:00 p.m.

Brief information

The exhibition

Prestige objects and symbols of wealth, tapestries enjoyed the esteem of the greatest patrons. Not well known today, they deserve to be re-evaluated. Thus, for its first presentation in Lausanne, the Toms Pauli Foundation, organiser of the exhibition, has selected from its collection works that are still largely unpublished in order to reveal them to a wider audience.

Flemish manufactories dominated the world of tapestry for centuries and elevated it into a major art form. Inspired by mythology, ancient history or the Bible, the subjects depicted on tapestries testify to their great variety. The Flemish workshops were known for the technical skill which permitted them to transpose into wool and silk the complexity of the drawings and the immense range of colours conceived by painters. Rarely designed in isolation as individual pieces, the tapestries formed sets, series of hangings recounting different episodes of a story. This exhibition will permit visitors to examine a number of subjects belonging to the same series, side by side. The presence of works of very large format will demonstrate the monumental aspect of this art, as well as its importance as wall decoration.

The Toms collection

The English architect and property developer Reginald Toms (1892–1978) made his fortune through property. He began by collecting period furniture, *objets d'art* and oriental carpets. After settling in French-speaking Switzerland, at the chateau of Coinsins, in 1958, he discovered a passion for antique tapestry. He and his wife Mary acquired around a hundred tapestries representative of leading European manufactories dating from the 16th to the 19th century. Although Brussels is the best represented production centre, the highly varied group is characterised by its geographical, chronological and thematic diversity. It also turned out to be one of Europe's most important private collections. On her death in 1993, Mary Toms bequeathed the chateau – sold the following year – and its contents to the State of Vaud.

Visual materials

Illustrations are available on request. Please call +41 (0)21 329 06 86 (Foundation) or +41 (0)21 316 34 45 (Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts).

Contacts

Giselle Eberhard Cotton, curator of the Fondation Toms Pauli

T +41 (0)21 329 06 86 – toms-pauli@bluewin.ch

Florence Pittet, in charge of press liaison for the Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts,

T +41 (0)21 316 34 48 – florence.pittet@serac.vd.ch

Further details...

... about the exhibition

This event is exceptional on more than one account. It permits rediscovery of an art whose glory lasted for several centuries. The complexity of the work and the price of the materials made the cost of producing tapestries very high. Considered objects of great luxury, their ownership was consequently restricted to the higher classes of society: nobles, prelates and wealthy merchants.

It is rare nowadays to see antique tapestries in temporary exhibitions, since their dimensions demand such huge hanging surfaces that few museums are in a position to accommodate them. The works owned by the Fondation Toms Pauli are usually kept in storage. The invitation from the Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne, will therefore provide a marvellous opportunity for the general public to examine works, still largely unpublished, which have all been restored recently. The conservation campaign which ended in 2003 has resulted in the reappearance of bright colours as well as the re-emergence of some unsuspected details.

For this first presentation in Lausanne, the Foundation has chosen to place the emphasis on Flemish pieces, in which its collections are very rich. Up until the 18th century it was the southern Low Countries which furnished all the great courts of Europe with these luxurious creations. The jewel of this region's artistic output, this industry provided a living for more than a quarter of the population of Brussels (i.e. around 15,000 people) in 1550.

Hanging the pieces according to century will permit visitors to gain an insight into the thematic and stylistic diversity of Flemish production over 300 years. From floral motifs to architectural frames or *trompe-l'oeil* effects, the evolution of the borders – an integral element of a tapestry – can be observed. Whereas the earliest work on display (*Perseus*, ca. 1530) still favours juxtaposition of different episodes of a story within one and the same piece, the Renaissance brought more unity as well as lavish architectural decor (for example, in the set *Vertumnus and Pomona*, ca. 1600). The Baroque period is lavishly illustrated by works whose vigorous composition is further accentuated by the monumentality of the formats (the largest tapestry measures 5 m high by 8.5 m wide). In the 17th century a number of major Flemish painters, such as Pierre Paul Rubens (*The Consequences of War*, ca. 1660) and his pupil Jacob Jordaens (*The Creation of the Horse*, ca. 1675), gave new impetus to this already centuries-old art. And in the 18th century, when the influence of French painting and decorative arts was making itself felt all across Europe, Brussels continued to produce new works full of elegance and lightness (*The Triumph of Bacchus*, 1717–1734).

... about the Toms Pauli Foundation

In 1997 the Canton of Vaud was offered another collection to add to Mary Toms' bequest; the Pierre Pauli Association decided to make a donation of its contemporary textile works of art. In 2000 the Canton united the antique and the modern by creating the Fondation Toms Pauli, to which it gave the task of managing its collections. The Foundation also inherited the archives of CITAM, which had organised international tapestry Biennales in Lausanne from 1962 to 1995, following its dissolution.

Established in Lausanne, the Fondation Toms Pauli does not yet have space for a permanent display. The works can nevertheless be seen at temporary exhibitions in Switzerland and abroad. Several richly illustrated publications documenting the pieces through scientific study have been produced. In 1997 a selection from the Toms collection was presented at the abbey-church of Payerne (Vaud), and in 2000 around forty pieces of contemporary textile art were displayed at the Espace Arlaud, Lausanne. Museums in Angers and Issoudun, France, have likewise approached the Foundation with the aim of organising exhibitions.

Publication

Collection Toms. De fils et de couleurs: tapisseries du XVI^e au XVIII^e siècle

Texts by G. Delmarcel, Ph. Lüscher, N. de Reyniès and D. Weidmann

French/German edition, 1997

Price: CHF 25.- / Euros 16.-