

Art Bulletin of Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, is published with generous support from the Friends of the Nationalmuseum.

Nationalmuseum collaborates with Svenska Dagbladet and Grand Hôtel Stockholm. We would also like to thank FCB Fältman & Malmén

Cover Illustrations

Domenico Fetti (1588/89–1623), *David with the Head of Goliath*, c. 1617/20. Oil on canvas, 161 x 99.5 cm. Purchase: The Wiros Fund. Nationalmuseum, NM 7280.

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BIGG

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Translation and Language Editing

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Publishing

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Art Bulletin of Nationalmuseum is published annually and contains articles on the history and theory of art relating to the collections of the Nationalmuseum.

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NATIONALMUSEUM @

A French Tapestry with a Swedish Provenance

Anders Bengtsson Curator, Applied Art and Design



Master of Les Mois de Lucas (Months of Lucas), October: Produced by the Manufacture Nationale des Gobelins, workshop of Jean Souet, 1712–15. Basse-lisse, wool, silk, H. 287 cm. Purchase: Axel and Nora Lundgren Fund. Nationalmuseum, NMK 54/2014.

THE NATIONALMUSEUM'S collection of tapestries was augmented in 2014 by the acquisition of a Gobelins tapestry representing an allegory of the month of October. Originally part of a set of twelve depicting the months of the year – *Les Mois de Lucas* (Months of Lucas) – it was commissioned by Louis XIV from the royal factory of the Gobelins in Paris in 1712. The set was given by his great-grandson Louis XV to the Swedish diplomat and field marshal, Count Eric Sparre (1665–1726), at the end of his term as ambassador in Paris in 1717.

The subject of the tapestry goes back to a series of twelve woven in Brussels around 1535, the designs for which were erroneously attributed to the artist Lucas van Leyden (1494-1533), hence the name Les Mois de Lucas. The original series, belonging to the collections of Louis XIV, was probably woven to designs by someone in the circle of Bernaert van Orley (d. 1542).1 The decision to make new tapestries from designs almost two hundred years old may seem surprising, given that the king had a host of contemporary artists at his disposal, producing designs for the royal workshops. The Months of Lucas were clearly very popular, and would be rewoven several times at the Gobelins from the 1680s down to the French Revolution, when the original series was burnt.2 This was a fate many old tapestries suffered when the value of the silver and gold threads incorporated in them exceeded that of the tapestries themselves. The set from which the tapestry now acquired by the Nationalmuseum originates copied the originals in terms of their subject matter, size and borders.3 Many of the subsequent series woven during the 18th century were modernised, with new borders and a wider format. For several of the tapestries, new cartoons were made in the course of the century, owing to the popularity of the designs.

The original set given to Count Eric Sparre – probably the fifth woven at the Gobelins – was produced in Jean Souet's workshop there in 1712–15. It is woven *basse-lisse*, i.e. on a low-warp loom. The designs are oriented in the same direction as the now lost originals. Today, seven of the original twelve tapestries are known. ⁴ Before the Nationalmuseum's recent acquisition, only one of them remained in Sweden. ⁵ The tapestry now purchased left Sweden when parts of the collections of Carl Robert Lamm (1856–1938) were sold in New York in 1923. ⁶ Lamm had in turn acquired it around 1900 from a Swedish private individual, who claimed that it had belonged to Sweden's royal collections, although it has not been possible to verify this.

In the foreground of the central panel of this almost square-shaped tapestry, a party of aristocrats are being offered wine and autumn fruit. In the background is a landscape with figures bringing in the harvest. The border is decorated with lavish festoons of flowers and fruit, along with medallions containing portraits in profile. This well-preserved Gobelins tapestry, whose colours still retain much of their original lustre, was purchased with the assistance of the Axel and Nora Lundgren Fund. It is an important addition to the Nationalmuse-um's collection of old tapestries.

Notes

- Edith Appleton Standen, European Post-Medieval Tapestries and Related Hangings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Volume I, New York, 1985, pp. 335 ff.
- 2. Edith Appleton Standen, "The Comte de Toulouse's Months of Lucas Gobelins Tapestries: Sixteenth-Century Designs with Eighteenth-Century Additions", in *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, 31, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996, p. 61.
- 3. Standen 1985, p. 353.
- 4. Standen 1985, pp. 333 ff. January: in 1928, in the possession of Countess Eva Trolle-Bonde. May: collection of Charles Menier, sold at Galerie Jean Charpentier, Paris, 1936, ill. 107. July: collection of Charles Menier, sold at Galerie Jean Charpentier, Paris, 1936, ill. 109. August: collection of Charles Menier, sold at Galerie Jean Charpentier, Paris, 1936, ill. 110. October: see present article. November: said to have been owned by a Paris dealer by the name of Achille Leclerq. December: exhibited in San Francisco in 1922, subsequently owned by Wildenstein & Co.

A replica of the October tapestry given to Sparre is in the Museum of Decorative Arts and Design in Oslo, signed "IS" (Jean Souet). A complete series was sold in the 1970s from Mentmore Towers in Buckinghamshire, and a set of ten tapestries can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (the missing two owned by the French state). 5. John Böttiger, *Tapisseries à figures des XVIe et XVIIe siècles appartenant à des collections privées de la Suède*, Stockholm, 1928, cat. no. 97, pp. 115–117. In 1928, this tapestry, *January*, was in the possession of Countess Eva Trolle-Bonde, and according to an oral communication from Bukowskis it is still privately owned in Sweden.

6. Sale catalogue, The Lamm Collection, 21-24 February 1923, New York. The catalogue entry claims that, via Sparre, the tapestry series came into the possession of Queen Lovisa Ulrika, which is not possible as Sparre was dead when she arrived in Sweden. The tapestry could possibly have got into Lovisa Ulrika's hands through Sparre's son-in-law, Carl Gustaf Tessin. In the same source, it is incorrectly stated that "Böttiger, the Curator of the Royal Swedish Collections, describes this beautiful Gobelins tapestry in his extensive work, Woven Tapestries of the Royal Collections"; no such book exists. Böttiger did publish, in 1895-96, Svenska Statens samling af Väfda Tapeter, but there no mention is made of this tapestry. Again according to the catalogue entry, Carl Robert Lamm acquired the tapestry around 1900 through "Mme Colonel Thekla Boy", presumably a reference to Tekla Milow (born in London on 6 June 1848 to the merchant Johan Fredrik Milow and Mary Lindgren). She was married first, in 1869, to Baron Sten Miles Sture (1806-1875), the last of the male line of his family, and second, in 1881, to Fritiof Boy (1823-1893), in his third marriage. Boy had been attached to the Swedish court as a gentleman of the bedchamber, aide-de-camp and crown equerry to Charles XV as crown prince and king. He could possibly have acquired the tapestry, by purchase or by gift, if it had been inherited by the Bernadotte family through Charles XIII or Sofia Albertina.