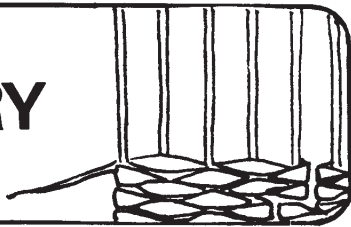


ON TAPESTRY



Editor's Note

Beginning with this first issue of the Minnesota Weaver's seventh year, LOTUS STACK, associate curator of textiles for the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, will share with us her knowledge of the Museum's tapestry collection.

Ms. Stack oversees the Institute's collection of more than 3,000 pieces which span more than a thousand years.

Karen Searle has arranged with Ms. Stack to write this column for the Weaver. With a bachelor's degree from San Francisco State University and graduate work at Minnesota, Ms. Stack served as textile Coordinator from 1976 until 1980. Before that time, she served as a volunteer researcher, cataloging and helping to organize the collection. She has been a Guild instructor for seven years and organized textile seminars which were a joint Institute-Guild undertaking. We're grateful to Lotus Stack for sharing her knowledge with us and to Karen Searle for making the arrangements for the column.

The Minneapolis Institute of Arts has an internationally known collection of European tapestries. During the next few months, the Minnesota Weaver will include notes on individual pieces in the museum's collection.

Tapestries were frequently designed in series to tell a story or represent a theme. Popular topics included events from the lives of well-known individuals, allegorical and biblical tales and the twelve months of the year. It is in this last thematic group that one of the Institute's finest tapestries belongs.

Entitled "The Month of September," it was woven from a cartoon (full-scale drawing) created from one of twelve designs which are tentatively attributed to the 16th century Flemish painter Van Orley. Tapestry design and cartoon creation was a long and costly process, and therefore, they were frequently re-used to create several editions of the same tapestry.

The Rijksmuseum in Holland and the Doria Collection in Rome, as well as the Dunbarton Oaks, the Metropolitan Museum and the Chicago Art Institute in this country have tapestries woven from the same cartoons as the Minneapolis Institute of Arts September tapestry. From these related pieces we can see that the set of the twelve months was woven at least three times. Although all of the tapestries are based on the same cartoons, there are small differences, such as changes in the shape of the center medallion and treatment of fur on the various animals depicted, which indicate individual interpretation by the weavers of each separate set of twelve tapestries.

The September tapestry, as well as the others woven from the original designs, have an elaborate border of fruit and flowers enclosing a rectangular field upon which is imposed an oval surrounded by the twelve signs of the zodiac alternating with pairs of female figures each holding an hour glass (a total of 24 to represent the hours of the day). In the Institute's tapestry, the month of September is symbolized by scenes related to the harvesting and processing of grapes. Appropriately, this activity is overseen by Bacchus, the Roman god of wine. In the upper corners, outside the oval frame, can be seen Bacchus' parents, Jupiter on the right and Semele on the left.

This Brussels tapestry was woven about 1525-1528, which was a period of transition between the Gothic and Renaissance styles of art. The tapestry shows the influence of both views of artistic expression. The cupid-like children, costumes and elaborate border designs reflect the influence of the Italian Renaissance, but the abundance of detail throughout the entire composition and the typical Flemish facial types are indicative of the older Gothic tapestries.

Weavers who study the structural aspects of the design interpretation will find inspiration for their own work and a deep feeling of respect for the craftpersons who had such amazing technical control of their medium. The fiber is primarily wool, with some silk used for highlights. The medium weight warp is set at 19 ends per inch with a fine weft of approximately 80 picks per inch. This combination allows for the rendition of



THE SEPTEMBER TAPESTRY

fine detail, and yet the end product is a very sturdy textile. There are no distended wefts to create curves or undulating lines, and no warp or weft interlock is used. The color palette is somewhat limited with shading and subtle color changes frequently achieved by combining yarns in one shed as well as by hatching.

The September tapestry is currently on view in the Tapestry Gallery of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. Also of interest to weavers is the exhibition, "A Look Behind Closed Doors," which is on view in the Cowles Gallery. This exhibition gives the museum visitor the unusual opportunity of viewing the various steps of tapestry conservation.