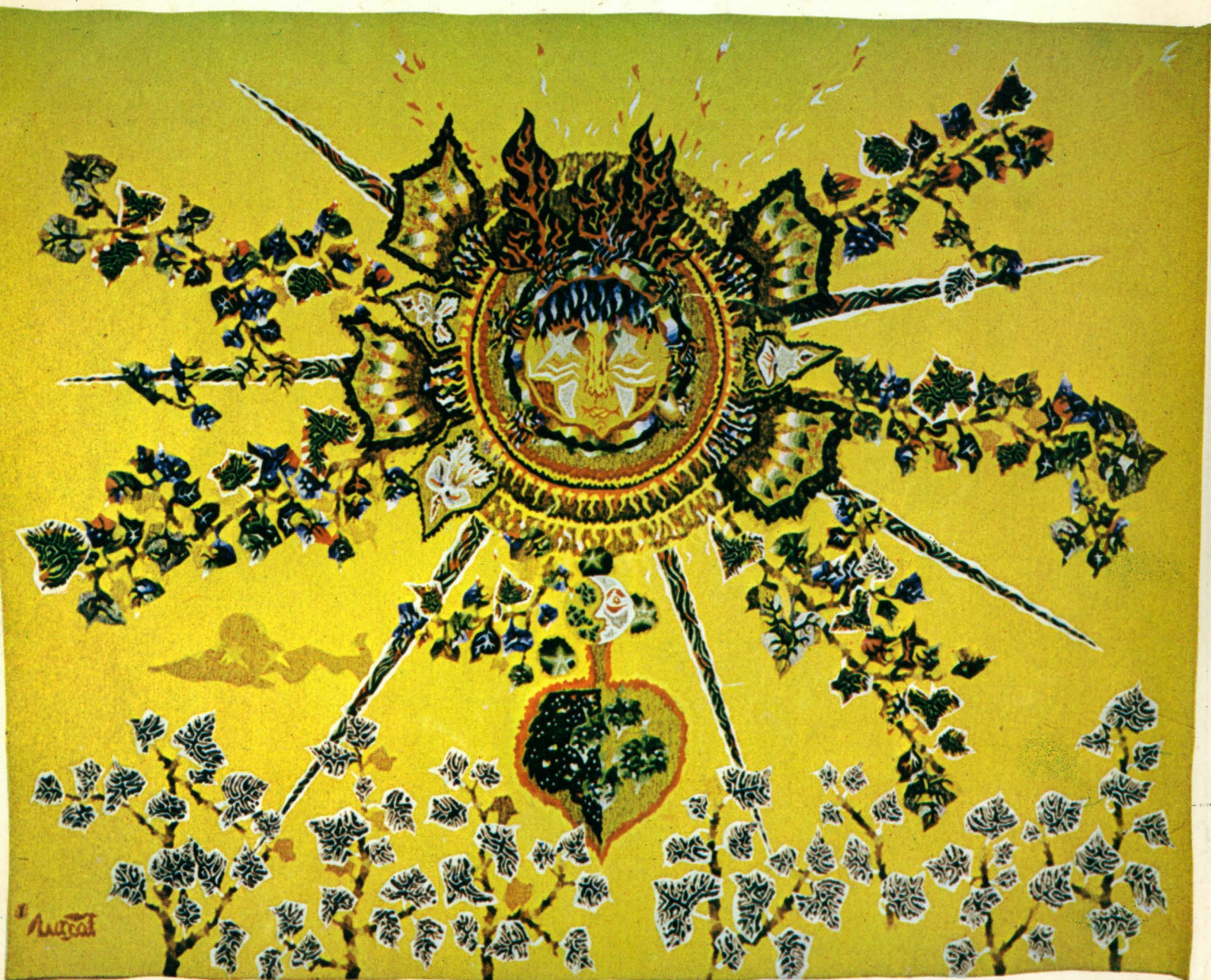


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CONTEMPORARY FRENCH TAPESTRIES

A PETER STUYVESANT FOUNDATION COLLECTION



CONTEMPORARY FRENCH TAPESTRIES

This collection has been brought into New Zealand by the Peter Stuyvesant Foundation and the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand. Arrangements for the exhibition's New Zealand tour have been carried out by the Auckland City Art Gallery.

All measurements given in inches, height before width.

Borderie

1 PASSAGE 1961 62 x 52

Wogensky

2 FIERY TREE 1963 83 x 56

Jullien

3 SPRING SNOW 1963 78 x 76

Lagrange

4 THE HOOPNET 1946 79 x 111

Le Corbusier

5 STILL-LIFE 1954 89 x 91

Matègot

6 NIGHT FLIGHT 1954 71 x 116

Picart le Doux

7 AUTUMN AND WINTER 1965 59 x 79

Prassinis

8 THE TEMPEST 1962 44 x 115

Dom Robert

9 THE LAMB 1960 79 x 108

Dom Robert

10 THE SIREN'S GARDEN 1961 77 x 112

Dom Robert

11 A THOUSAND WILDFLOWERS 1961 86 x 114

Dom Robert

12 WESTERN 1965 77 x 85

Tourliere

13 SAND AND CLAM 1959 55 x 66

Singier

14 CASTLE IN PROVENCE 1959 54 x 78

Lurçat

15 I SPEAK OF A GARDEN 1965 95 x 72

Picart le Doux

16 HOMAGE TO GARCIA LORCA 1964 65 x 113

Dom Robert

17 OMBELLES 1963 81 x 115

Coutaud

18 THE MAGIC HAND 1947 112 x 130

Lurçat

19 RED MOON 1944 63 x 122

Lurçat

20 LEAVES AND FIRE 1963 94 x 122

Lurçat

21 HOMAGE TO GARCIA LORCA 1953 101 x 82

Dom Robert

22 COMPANIONS OF MARJOLAINE 1963 65 x 72

Picart le Doux

23 ORANGE SUN 1964 59 x 106

Gilioli

24 GALILEE 1965 59 x 79

Wogensky

25 SOLSTICE 1963 69 x 67

Saint-Saens

26 MOONLIGHT 1964 56 x 73

Lurçat

27 LE CORTON 1947 57 x 78

Lurçat

28 TOROPEGASE 1964 59 x 79

'Tapestry should not be expected to conform to orthodox rules for here artistic licence is all important; tapestry is a decorative two-dimensional art working with flat surfaces, little concerned with depth and perspective; a shadowless painting in which the interplay of pure colours and the pleasure they give the onlooker are the main precepts.'

Adolf Hoffmeister, Director of the History of Art, Prague.

Tapestry in France

The earliest French tapestries recorded were woven at Arras in the eighth century and weaving is known to have continued there through the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. At that time the subject matter had been ecclesiastical, mythological or else reflecting the glory of early kings and their courts. Throughout medieval times the weavers worked from a sketch on cloth touched up with colour.

The most important set of tapestries made in the following century was the **Apocalypse**, seven magnificent hangings measuring 472 feet in length and 18 feet in height, ordered by Louis, Duke of Anjou in 1375 for the chapel in his castle at Angers. These are now in the **Musee des Tapisseries**, in Angers, and have inspired tapestry designers and weavers ever since.

Among other monumental series made in France before the twentieth century, one of the most celebrated is the **Lady with the Unicorn**, a set of six tapestries made between 1509-1513. Thought to represent the five senses, the sixth tapestry is a dedication of the whole 'a mon **seule desir**'. The set marvellously conveys the atmosphere of medieval French chivalry, courtly love and culture.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, French and Flemish weavers became established under royal patronage at Gobelins and an edict proclaimed that it was 'from now on forbidden for anyone to bring into the kingdom from foreign countries any tapestry depicting figures, woodlands or foliage'. An early example of protecting home industry.

At this time the glories of the court of Louis XIV were reflected in a series of seventeen tapestries called **History of the King**, which were among the first to treat contemporary events in an heroic way. They are described as 'masterpieces of technical skill in a new, exacting style'. The weavers were allowed freedom as far as colour was concerned, but the designs had to be copied faithfully. The drawings, or cartoons as they are more correctly called, were prepared by teams of painters each specialising in his own subject - animals, domestic interiors, architecture, foliage, etc.

In the middle of the 18th century, during the era of romantic paintings depicting nymphs and shepherds cavorting in idyllic country settings, Francis Boucher designed many famous sets for the Beauvais looms. A change took place in tapestry making about 1785 when tapestry became more tightly bound to painting, and its themes were taken from events in France's history. During the Revolution, tapestry's mission was to extol the virtues of those who 'earned the gratitude of mankind through their example of liberty, patriotism, courage, benevolence, wisdom, kindly morality and in general of all the virtues'.

The nineteenth century and the early part of this century saw a decline in tapestry weaving and they were generally considered as being copies of paintings in wool and silk. As time went on there were people con-

cerned about this aspect of the craft believing it should not try to compete with easel painting and that only fadeless colours should be used. An example of the failure of chemical dyes at this time was the use made of brighter colours made from anthracene (obtained in the distillation of coal-tar) to match the colours in works by the Impressionist school of painters. These proved to be unstable and faded disastrously.

Round about 1920 the Aubusson workshops made copies of paintings supplied especially for the purpose by Picasso, Matisse, Roualt, Braque and other contemporary painters, but these were still copies of original paintings and, admirable as the results were, they were not truly artistic creations. The weavers, although many of them were descended from families with a two hundred year tradition in the craft, had become used to the role of copying exactly and had forgotten how the subtleties of colour shading were obtained.

At this point Jean Lurçat enters the story. Although trained as an artist, he had been interested in tapestry since 1916 when his mother spent several months working on his first design for tapestry. He realised that the time factor and the number of colours involved were uneconomic and set about resolving these difficulties by reducing the colour range to twenty or so colours and experimenting with increasing the size of the stitches. After some failures in the latter activity Lurçat conceded that the medieval craftsmen had discovered the secret of balance as far as density of weave was concerned. He also realised that broader, humanitarian themes must replace the light-weight designs of earlier works. His **Song of the World**, begun at Aubusson in 1957 is a series of cartoons for tapestries of which the complete series is planned to measure 375 feet in length.

His skill, success and enthusiasm have drawn other artists to study his work and methods and they have been encouraged by him to design for tapestry commissions. Work by several of these artists (J. P. Le Dux, Dom Robert - a Benedictine monk, and Mathieu Mategot) are included in the present exhibition.

During the 1950s, architects and designers realised the tremendous potential of tapestry for modern buildings as the large expanses of bare wall in many new public buildings displayed their cold, lifeless expanses. Tapestry was recognised as having the necessary physical and spiritual warmth to bring comfort to the many new concert halls, embassies, churches, commercial and industrial board rooms and assembly halls, etc. and commissions have been numerous enough to allow more than a thousand of Jean Lurçat's designs alone to have been woven. Many tapestries have been commissioned for private houses and in most cases the designers study the proposed environment before designing for the commission.

Since Jean Lurçat has been the spirit behind the modern renaissance of tapestry weaving, I think it appropriate to close with a quotation from Germain Bazin about Lurçat's work, '... that vast cosmogony of wool is governed by a central idea, the Apollinarian myth, which sets up the sun as the source of all life'.

Brenda Gamble

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Photograph : Jean Lurcat working on a cartoon in his chateau of Saint Cere.