



The Hunters Enter the Woods (from the Unicorn Tapestries)

Date:	1495–1505
Culture:	South Netherlandish
Medium:	Wool warp, wool, silk, silver, and gilt wefts
Dimensions:	Overall: 145 x 124in. (368.3 x 315cm)
Classification:	Textiles-Tapestries
Credit Line:	Gift of John D. Rockefeller Jr., 1937
Accession Number:	37.80.1

 On view at The Met Cloisters in **[Gallery 17](#)**

This tapestry is one of seven hangings at The Cloisters that depict the hunt of the unicorn, a mythical creature first mentioned by the Greek physician Ctesias in the fourth century B.C. In the Middle Ages the animal was best known for its supposed invincibility and for the therapeutic property of its horn. So strong was the belief in the horn's miraculous cures that by the twelfth century the tusks of male narwhals, a small whale native to the Arctic, came to be regarded as "unicorn horns."

The Unicorn Tapestries, as the group of seven is known, were probably designed in Paris but woven in Brussels. They are first documented in 1680, when they hung in the Paris home of François VI de La Rochefoucauld. By 1728 five of them decorated a bedroom at the family's château in Verteuil, in western France. The tapestries were looted during the French Revolution but were recovered in the 1850s; by 1856 they had been restored and rehung in the château's salon. No documentation sheds light on the early history of the tapestries, including either their commission or sequence of hanging. Striking differences in dimension and composition have prompted scholars to question whether the hangings constitute one set or are, in fact, from multiple sets.

The Hunters Enter the Woods, like The Unicorn in Captivity, is set against a millefleurs background: a field of dark green spangled with blossoming trees and flowers. Of the 101 species of plants represented, 85 have been identified, including the prominent cherry tree

behind the hunters and lush date palm in front of the sniffing hound. The cipher "AE" that is woven into each of the Unicorn Tapestries—and repeated here five times—alludes to their original owners, who remain unknown.

Audio

#63. The Hunters Enter the Woods (from the Unicorn Tapestries)



00:00

For Audio Guide tours and information, visit metmuseum.org/audioguide.

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Signatures, Inscriptions, and Markings

Inscription: (on each corner and center): AE

(on dog collar; twice): AE

(on dog collar bearing arms; twice): A

Marking: Arms (on dog collar on right): Quarterly, 1 and 4, barry of six or and azure, the first two bars debriused by three roses gules, seeded proper; 2 and 3, or, three escutcheons gules.

Provenance

Comtes de La Rochefoucauld, France ; François VI de La Rochefoucauld, Paris (in 1680) ; François VIII de La Rochefoucauld, château de Verteuil, Charente (in 1728) ; Château de Verteuil, Charente (said to have been looted in 1793) ; Comtes de La Rochefoucauld, château de Verteuil, Charente (in 1856) ; Comte Aimery de La Rochefoucauld, château de Verteuil, Charente (until 1923) ; Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller Jr. (in 1923 through Edouard Larcade–until 1937)

Exhibition History

New York. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. "Masterpieces of Tapestry from the 14th to the 16th century," February 7, 1974–April 19, 1974.

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Timeline of Art History

Timelines

[Low Countries, 1400-1600 A.D.](#)

MetPublications

The Unicorn Tapestries in The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The Unicorn Tapestries

The Robert Lehman Collection. Vol. 14, European Textiles

Medieval Tapestries in The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Masterpieces of Tapestry from the Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century.

"The Identification of a Plant in the Unicorn Tapestries": Metropolitan Museum Journal, v. 17 (1982).

"Creating the Cloisters": The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin, v. 70, no. 4 (Spring, 2013).

The Cloisters: Medieval Art and Architecture

The Cloisters: Medieval Art and Architecture

Department

The Cloisters (2,340)

Object Type / Material

Gilt (9,204)

Metal (70,275)

Silk (33,513)

Silver (15,295)

Tapestries (2,245)

Textiles (33,804)

Wool (9,558)

Geographic Location

Europe (167,665)

Netherlands (9,385)

Date / Era

A.D. 1400–1600 (26,366)

Related Objects

The Unicorn is Attacked (from the Unicorn Tapestries)

Artist: Date: 1495–1505

Accession Number: 37.80.3

Date: 1495–1505

Medium: Wool warp with wool, silk, silver, and gilt wefts

Accession: 37.80.3

On view in: Gallery 17

The Unicorn Defends Itself (from the Unicorn Tapestries)

Artist: Date: 1495–1505

Accession Number: 37.80.4

Date: 1495–1505

Medium: Wool warp with wool, silk, silver, and gilt wefts

Accession: 37.80.4

On view in: Gallery 17

The Unicorn is Killed and Brought to the Castle (from the Unicorn Tapestries)

Artist: Date: 1495–1505

Accession Number: 37.80.5

Date: 1495–1505

Medium: Wool warp with wool, silk, silver, and gilt wefts

Accession: 37.80.5

On view in: Gallery 17

The Unicorn is Found (from the Unicorn Tapestries)

Artist: Date: 1495–1505

Accession Number: 37.80.2

Date: 1495–1505

Medium: Wool warp with wool, silk, silver, and gilt wefts

Accession: 37.80.2

On view in: Gallery 17

The Unicorn in Captivity (from the Unicorn Tapestries)

Artist: Date: 1495–1505

Accession Number: 37.80.6

Date: 1495–1505

Medium: Wool warp with wool, silk, silver, and gilt wefts

Accession: 37.80.6

On view in: Gallery 17

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