

Portraits of Power – Louis XIV

Tapestries

The Getty rearranges paintings and tapestries so I am not sure where these will be hanging. The first tapestry is the best to show Louis XIV's power. If you can't find it, use one of the others shown. Questions should apply to any of them.



Woven at the Gobelins Tapestry Manufactory; woven after a cartoon by Pierre-Josse Perrot, designer; woven under the direction of Étienne-Claude Le Blond, workshop director
French, Gobelins, about 1730 - 1740
Silk and wool
11 ft. 10 in. x 8 ft. 9 in.
85.DD.100

The arms of Louis XV, who came to the throne as a five-year-old in 1715, announce this tapestry's royal origin and purpose. Under the head of Apollo, from whom the sun's rays emanate, a large crown tops a simulated bronze cartouche. Within the cartouche, the three fleurs-de-lis symbolize the arms of France, hanging in the center of an ermine cloak flanked by two military trophies. Suspended medals hang below, in front of the crossed scepter and the "hand of justice," symbolizing the king's legal power. A royal ceremonial helmet at the bottom seems to rest upon another military trophy. The tapestry's color and design were new, but its celebratory purpose and the specific imagery harked back to the symbols of Louis XIV from the previous reign.

The Gobelins tapestry manufactory wove twenty-eight examples of this tapestry over a period of about fifteen years. One of these *portières* decorated the door of a salon at Versailles, others hung in several of the royal châteaux, and French ambassadors used several to decorate their embassies.



Executed by Etienne-Claude Le Blond, weaver; after cartoon by Guy-Louis Vernansal, designer; at Gobelins Tapestry Manufactory
French, Gobelins, about 1728 - 1730
Wool and silk
11 ft. 6 ³/₄ in. x 8 ft. 11 ³/₈ in.
65.DD.5

The French king Louis XV presented Germain-Louis Chauvelin, his Keeper of Seals, with this tapestry, originally one of a set of ten. Known as a *portière*, it would have hung across the door of a formal room to keep out drafts. Its prominent heraldic symbols would have clearly announced to visitors the importance of its owner and royal donor. Displayed under a gilded and tasseled canopy, the royal coat of

arms appears against an ermine-lined mantle. The arms rest upon a gilt metal box decorated with fleur-de-lis and L's, the king's initial, representing the casket for the royal seals. The tapestry's wide border contains crossed maces, attributes of the keeper of seals; Chauvelin's monogram of interlaced C's; and his coat of arms in the four corners.

Around 1680, Louis XIV began a tradition of presenting his chancellor or his keeper of seals with a set of tapestries from the Gobelins tapestry manufactory. A powerful figure in the 1600s and 1700s, the keeper of seals acted as minister of justice and was second in command to the chancellor of France. The chancellor represented the person of the king, interpreted the royal will, and headed the judicial system. Chauvelin accepted the tapestry set around 1730, at the height of his career.



Woven at the Gobelins Tapestry Manufactory; after cartoon by Charles Le Brun, designer
French, Paris, 1715 - 1716
Silk and wool
H: 11 ft. 4 1/2 in.; W: 8 ft. 9 1/4 in.
83.DD.20

Charles Le Brun designed this tapestry, known as the *Char de Triomphe* (Chariot of Triumph), to hang across the door of a formal interior to keep out drafts. Its royal heraldic symbols—the crown, the scales of justice, the Sun King's symbol, a ribbon with his now-faded motto, and a cartouche with the king's arms—would have clearly announced to visitors the importance of its owner, Louis XIV. The triumphal cart rolls over a serpent representing the king's enemies and alluding to his victories in war. Numerous fleur-de-lis, the symbol of the French royal family, adorn the border.

Although woven for Louis XIV, this tapestry and others from the same series hung in the royal palaces year-round long after his reign ended. Twenty-four hangings of this design decorated the Palace of Versailles in 1789. Part of this tapestry's original lining has survived, with an inscription and the royal inventory number. The number corresponds to an entry in the journal of the *Garde Meuble de la Couronne* (Royal Furniture Warehouse), which records the tapestry as one of four delivered to Versailles on October 27, 1717.

Cabinet and Stand



Attributed to André-Charles Boulle, ébéniste; and Jean Varin, medalist
French, Paris, about 1678 - 1680

Oak veneered with ebony, pewter, tortoiseshell, pewter, brass, ivory, horn, and various woods; with drawers of snake wood; painted and gilded wood figures; bronze mounts

77.DA.1

The decoration on this monumental cabinet refers to the French king Louis XIV's military victories. A panel of marquetry showing the cockerel of France standing triumphant over both the eagle of the Holy Roman Empire and the lion of Spain and the Spanish Netherlands decorates the central door. On the drawer above the door, gilt-bronze military trophies flank a medallion portrait of Louis XIV. In the Dutch Wars of 1672 - 1678, France fought simultaneously against the Dutch, Spanish, and Imperial armies, defeating them all. This cabinet celebrates the Treaty of Nijmegen, which concluded the war. Two large figures from Greek mythology, Hercules and Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, representatives of strength and bravery in war, appear to support the cabinet.

The fleurs-de-lis on the top two drawers indicate that the cabinet was made for Louis XIV. As it does not appear in inventories of his possessions, it may have served as a royal gift. The Sun King's portrait appears twice on this work. The bronze medallion above the central door was cast from a medal struck in 1661 which shows the king at the age of twenty-one. Another medallion inside shows him a few years later.

The pair to this cabinet still exists in Scotland. Both cabinets probably entered England in the early nineteenth century after the French Revolution caused the dispersal of so many French collections.

The Painting



Louis XIV

Workshop of **Hyacinthe Rigaud**
French, probably Paris, after 1701
Oil on canvas
114 x 62 5/8 in.
70.PA.1

Louis XIV's court adored Hyacinthe Rigaud, who helped to formulate what a state portrait should be. While Rigaud made a credible likeness of the king, his purpose was not to express Louis's character but to glorify the monarchy. His original *Portrait of Louis XIV* of 1701, now in the Louvre, was so popular that Rigaud had many copies made, both in full and half-length formats, often with the help of assistants.

In this portrait from Rigaud's workshop, Louis XIV's ceremonial robes, elegant stance, and haughty expression proclaim his exalted status. Despite the vast expanses of canvas he covered, Rigaud remained concerned with the particular, describing the king's costume in great detail, even down to his shoe buckles.

This is a "Must See." A similar painting is in most history books. It is fun to see the real painting and see how large it is. We certainly get an idea of the "Sun King's" image of himself. Encourage students to take pictures of themselves with Louis. Louis was especially proud of his legs and enjoyed showing them off at dances.