The Hunt of the Frail Stag: Analysis, Conservation, and Display of Five Medieval Tapestry Fragments

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These five tapestry fragments were a bequest of Adele Lehman to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1965. They were woven around the end of the 15th century in the Southern Netherlands. The tapestry fragments depict the story of The Hunt of the Frail Stag with allegorical characters. The fragments were originally part of one tapestry, a choir hanging. The frail stag represents human life during all of its stages:

- Youth (94 cm x 88 cm)
- Adolescence (94 cm x 90 cm)
- Old Age (99.4 cm x 88.5 cm)
- Sickness and Death (95 cm x 89 cm)
- The Epilogue of the Poet (93.5 cm x 91 cm)

The fifth fragments shows the Guy de Baudreuil's coat of arms (fig.1), an important clue linking these tapestry fragments to Saint Martin Aux Bois Abbey (fig.2, 3), near Beauvais, in France. The tapestry fragments were commissioned by Guy de Baudreuil who served as abbot from 1492 to 1531.

In 1923 Arthur and Adele Lehman acquired the five medieval fragments from the New York dealer, French & Company. The Lehman's had the fragments mounted in gothic style frames for display in their Manhattan home (fig.4).

In 1952 the tapestry fragments were restored and remounted in their gothic style frames on behalf of French & Co. and loaned from the Lehman's to an exhibition at The Cloisters Museum, New York (fig.5).

In 1966, one year after the Lehman bequest to the MMA, the fragments were conserved at the Museum. They were wet cleaned and sewn onto a brown cotton support cloth. Then they were stitch mounted on a white flannel fabric that covered a peg board (fig.9).

October 2008-August 2009:
1) The tapestry fragments were removed from their frames and then from the brown cotton support cloth.
2) A graphic color report was performed from the reverse of each fragment, allowing us to document the original tapestry positions and any previous repairs (fig.10).
3) Each scene was reconstructed by adding the missing design elements (fig.11).
4) Reconstruction of the entire tapestry as a CHORUS TAPESTRY with the two missing scenes of the historical sequence. Estimated total dimensions: 152 x 715 cm.

Drawings in an illustrated medieval French manuscript of the Chasse Du Frappe Coq. (14th century. Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris)

5) Conservation, and display:
   a) humidification
   b) The fragment in process of being put on a hard wood rep support
   c) conservation of loose warp and weft
   d) All of the inserts along the proper right side of the third fragment were removed. By allowing the small remains of the original base column to be visible (fig.13), it was possible to mount the two fragments close to each other. The distance between the two fragments was calculated in proportion to the estimated total width of the entire tapestry (fig.14).

The complete tapestry, as a choir tapestry, fits exactly into the north choir stall in The Saint Martin Aux Bois Abbey.