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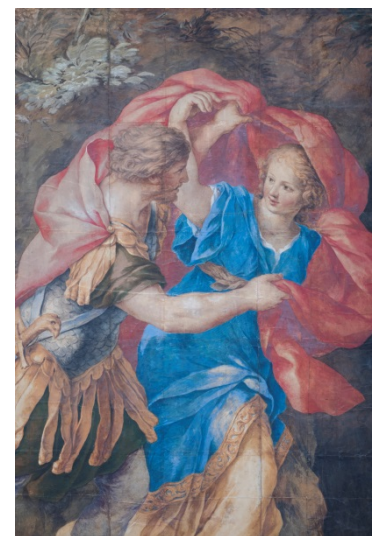
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Once Upon a Tapestry: Woven Tales of Helen and Dido

Dec. 7, 2018 – May 27, 2019

Pasadena, CA—The Norton Simon Museum presents *Once Upon a Tapestry: Woven Tales of Helen and Dido*, an exhibition of exquisite tapestries and rare cartoons (full-size preparatory drawings) that illustrate two iconic love stories found in the classical epic poems the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*. Helen and her contested romance with Prince Paris of Troy, as described in Homer's *Iliad*, is represented in four sumptuous Flemish tapestries from around 1500; and Queen Dido of Carthage and her passionate affair with Virgil's hero Aeneas is represented in a rare set of six cartoons, and one related tapestry from the early 17th century. Seen together, these monumental works of art demonstrate the appeal of these female-centric narratives in early modern Europe, the power of tapestry to tell such stories, and the inventiveness and skill employed to produce these splendid objects, made for only the wealthiest and most distinguished patrons.



Giovanni Francesco Romanelli (Italian, 1610-1662), *Royal Hunt and Storm* (detail), c. 1630-35, gouache and black chalk on paper, laid down on linen, 109-5/8 x 138 in., The Norton Simon Foundation

Homer's epic poem of the Trojan War, the *Iliad*, from the 8th century BCE, is the source for the story of Helen of Troy. Medieval poets updated the ancient tale and freely added commentary connecting the European nobles to their Trojan counterparts. In the visual arts, the primary focus of *Le Roman de Troie* (*The Romance of Troy*) was the conflict, and battle scenes were well suited to the large-scale, multi-paneled character of tapestry. It is notable then that Helen, an icon of beauty whose abduction provoked the Trojan War, figures so prominently in four of the weavings exhibited. They chronicle Helen's fate from her arrival in Troy and marriage to Paris, to her return to Sparta and her reconciliation with her first husband, Menelaus. Rich with detail, these fabulous silk and wool tableaux introduce us to contemporary court attire and to medieval stagecraft where the jewel encrusted architectural framework calls attention to the principal subjects.

Whereas the beautiful Helen functions mainly as a catalyst for conflict, the story of Dido, derived from Book IV of Virgil's epic poem the *Aeneid*, 29–19 BCE, is considerably more personal and nuanced. The ill-starred lovers—Queen Dido of Carthage and the Trojan prince Aeneas—are both ambitious, accomplished leaders. With great imagination and verve, the Italian Baroque artist Giovanni Francesco Romanelli (1610–1662) conceived of Dido as the central protagonist of each dramatic scene in a cycle that once numbered eight full-scale tapestry cartoons. From the banquet Dido hosts to welcome her guests from Troy—when her love for the warrior is kindled—to the prince's abandonment of Dido as he leaves Carthage at the gods' behest, the cycle revolves around her destiny. And Romanelli's grand and sympathetic interpretation of this popular subject arouses compassion for her undoing.

The subject was immensely popular during the 17th century and inspired Romanelli's design of eight full-scale cartoons to tell it. Six cartoons survive, fashioned in gouache and watercolor on paper. Inherently fragile, they are infrequently on view. That they exist at all is a testimony to the value accorded to them from the moment of their making. The Museum possesses one tapestry from the last episode of the lovers' narrative. Recently restored, *Death of Dido* offers opportunity to comprehend the design process, compare the weaving with its cartoon prototype, and appreciate the unique character of each medium. In the weaving, the narrative appears in reverse, the result of its production on a low-warp loom. Surrounded by a faux frame, the tapestry's composition is presented as a "woven picture," bordered by the architectural motif of two Solomonic columns ornamented with garlands, and linked by an entablature at the center of which are ligatured letters that identify the Swedish aristocratic couple who commissioned the tapestry set: Count Gustav Otto Stenbock (1614–1685) and Christina Catharina De la Gardie (1632–1704). The tapestry set to which the *Death of Dido* belonged may date to the 1670s.

The tapestries derived from Romanelli's cartoons were the masterpieces of Michel Wauters' Antwerp studio during the 17th century. At least 8 sets of these tapestries were woven for royal and aristocratic patrons from Italy to Sweden; only three complete editions survive to the present day along with individual weavings.

Once Upon a Tapestry: Woven Tales of Helen and Dido is organized by Curator Gloria Williams. A series of lectures, performances and educational programs, plus a special musical audio tour narrated by LA Opera's Music Director James Conlon, will be offered in conjunction with the exhibition, including:

LECTURE

Love at First Sight: Romanelli's Dido and Aeneas Tapestry Suite

Gloria Williams Sander, Curator, Norton Simon Museum

Saturday, January 12, 4:00–5:00 p.m.

Virgil's tale of Dido and Aeneas, from books 1 and 4 of the *Aeneid*, tells of the Queen of Carthage, a complex figure noted for her strength and character. She meets the shipwrecked Aeneas and the two fall in love, a union that could not survive Aeneas's destiny to leave Carthage and found Rome. This tragic love story found fertile ground in the medium of tapestry, and Giovanni Francesco Romanelli designed what is perhaps the most famous suite to retell it. In the context of 17th-century Europe, the figure of Dido became a paradigm for dutiful leadership and the perils that accompanied it, especially with regard to female rulers. This lecture considers the popularity of the Romanelli-designed tapestries and how wealthy aristocrats acquired them as a means to message their authority. New discoveries about the history of the Museum's *Death of Dido* tapestry and the suite to which it belonged will be presented for the first time.

A NIGHT IN FOCUS

Titian, Tapestries and the Italian Renaissance

Saturday, February 23, 5:00–7:30 p.m.

Join us for a lively evening program focused on the loan of Titian's *Lady in White* and the exhibition *Once Upon a Tapestry: Woven Tales of Helen and Dido*. Throughout the evening, enjoy live music in the galleries, art-making activities for visitors of all ages, Italian-themed food and wine for sale in the café and more.

DANCE PERFORMANCE

Fate and the Heroine: Dido, Queen of Carthage

Nancy Evans Dance Theatre

Saturday, March 16, 6:00–7:00 p.m.

Nancy Evans Dance Theatre explores through dance, music, art and text the tragic love story between Dido, Queen of Carthage, and Prince Aeneas of Troy from Virgil's epic poem *The Aeneid*. Branching off from Virgil's tale, this powerful performance tells the tale of Dido from her perspective. Following the performance, audience members enjoy a question-and-answer period with the choreographer and dancers.

MUSICAL PERFORMANCE

If These Walls Could Sing: Baroque Music and Romanelli's Art

Jamie Chamberlin (soprano), Melissa Treinkman (mezzo-soprano), Orson Van Gay II (tenor), and pianist Tali Tadmor of the LA Opera

Saturday, April 27, 5:00–6:00 p.m.

Like the misshapen pearls or "barroco," which provided a descriptive name for so much of the art and architecture of the 17th and 18th centuries, baroque music is lustrous, complex and glittering. Join LA Opera artists Jamie Chamberlin (soprano), Melissa Treinkman (mezzo-soprano), Orson Van Gay II

(tenor), and pianist Tali Tadmor for a musical salon exploring the baroque operatic repertoire. Highlights include extensive selections from *Dido and Aeneas* by Henry Purcell (1659-1695).

AUDIO TOUR

Just as the complexity and humanity of Dido and Aeneas' love story inspired visual artists like Romanelli, composers too were seduced by the tragedy's great emotional resonance. Mozart, Purcell and Berlioz are but a few who wrote music inspired by this legend. The Museum is pleased to offer a musical audio tour led by Los Angeles Opera's James Conlon and featuring commentary by mezzo-soprano opera star Susan Graham. Available for rent for \$3 (free for members) at our Information Desk.

About the Norton Simon Museum

The Norton Simon Museum is known around the world as one of the most remarkable private art collections ever assembled. Over a 30-year period, industrialist Norton Simon (1907–1993) amassed an astonishing collection of European art from the Renaissance to the 20th century, and a stellar collection of South and Southeast Asian art spanning 2,000 years. Modern and Contemporary Art from Europe and the United States, acquired by the former Pasadena Art Museum, also occupies an important place in the Museum's collections. The Museum houses more than 12,000 objects, roughly 1,000 of which are on view in the galleries and gardens. Two temporary exhibition spaces feature rotating installations of artworks not on permanent display.

Location: The Norton Simon Museum is located at 411 W. Colorado Blvd. at Orange Grove Boulevard in Pasadena, Calif., at the intersection of the Foothill (210) and Ventura (134) freeways. For general Museum information, please call (626) 449-6840 or visit www.nortonsimon.org. **Hours:** The Museum is open Monday, Wednesday and Thursday from noon to 5 p.m., Friday and Saturday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. It is closed on Tuesday. **Admission:** General admission is \$15 for adults and \$12 for seniors. Members, students with I.D., and patrons age 18 and under are admitted free of charge. Admission is free for everyone on the first Friday of every month from 5 to 8 p.m. All public programs, unless stated otherwise, are free with admission. The Museum is wheelchair accessible. **Parking:** Parking is free, and no reservations are necessary. **Public Transportation:** Pasadena Transit stops directly in front of the Museum. Please visit <http://pasadenatransit.net> for schedules. The MTA bus line #180/181 stops in front of the Museum. The Memorial Park Station on the MTA Gold Line, the closest Metro Rail station to the Museum, is located at 125 E. Holly St. at Arroyo Parkway. Please visit www.metro.net for schedules.

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