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Fine Art & Antiques



Aubusson Tapestry

A Near Pair Of Large Aubusson Tapestry Panels Depicting Fêtes Galantes

Circa: Circa 1880

285 x 180 cm (112¹/₄ x 70⁷/₈ inches)

Tapestry Giltwood

France

1880

A Near Pair Of Large Aubusson Tapestry Panels Depicting Fêtes Galantes, After Jean-Antoine Watteau and Jean-Honoré Fragonard.

These tapestries depict fêtes galantes, including a game of 'blind man's bluff' and a group of dancing figures, each in a parcel-gilt wood frame. These scenes take after the masters of Rococo painting: Jean-Antoine Watteau, and Jean-Honoré Fragonard with pastoral landscapes after his teacher Francois Boucher.

'Blind Man's Bluff' by Jean-Honoré Fragonard, now in the Toledo Museum of Art, USA, is an emblematic piece that "fulfils the eighteenth-century aristocratic French taste for romantic pastoral themes" (Bacigalupi, Don. Toledo Museum of Art Masterworks. Toledo Museum of Art: USA, 2009. p. 205). This painting dates to circa 1760 – when the artist embarked on a Grand Tour of Italy, executing numerous sketches of local scenery that would go on to become the delicate and romantic gardens of his art.

Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732-1806), French painter of the rococo age, was popular in the courts of Louis XV and Louis XVI for his delicately coloured scenes of romance, often in garden settings. Born in Grasse on April 5 1732, the son of a haberdasher's assistant his family moved to Paris around 1738, and in 1747 he was apprenticed to a lawyer, who noticed his talent for drawing and suggested that he study painting. François Boucher (1703-1770) accepted him as a pupil (c. 1748), and in 1752, he competed for the Prix de Rome to study under the court painter to Louis XV, Carle Van Loo and in 1756, he went to the French Academy at Rome. After returning to Paris, Fragonard exhibited some landscape paintings at the Salon, one of which was purchased for King Louis XV. Subsequently, he was commissioned to paint a companion piece, granted a studio in the Louvre Palace, and accepted as an Academician.

Jean-Antoine Watteau is credited with inventing the genre of the *fête galante* – and his painting 'Le Bal Champêtre' from circa 1714, perfectly encapsulates this genre. Depicting dancing figures accompanied by musicians and other guests, this painting is a fine example of the artist's engagement in movement, idyllic charm, and theatricality.

Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684-1721) was a French painter whose brief career had an immense impact in shifting the Baroque style to the more light-hearted, naturalistic Rococo style. Watteau was born in Valenciennes, the son of a roofer, and showed an interest in painting from an early age. He may have been apprenticed to local artist Jacques-Albert Gérin before moving to Paris in 1702, where he began by making copies of popular genre paintings in a workshop at Pont Notre-Dame. By 1705 he was an assistant to the painter Claude Gillot, and in 1712 he applied for the Prix de Rome after being rejected in 1709, and he was accepted as a full member of the Academy.

Artist description:

The small town of Aubusson, on the River Creuse in France, has a long history of producing elaborate and costly tapestries, famous throughout the world. Its origins were born with the arrival of weavers from Flanders, who took refuge in Aubusson around 1580.

Aubusson tapestries are known for their elegance and delicate colouring, often depicting romantic pastoral scenes derived from artists such as Boucher; historic scenes inspired by classical mythology; or more formalized architectural vistas. Aubusson was particularly noted for its finely balanced compositions of garlands and bouquets which became famous and sought after throughout Europe. Louis XIV was instrumental in the development of the French tapestry industry, He recognized that by taking over the leadership of tapestry art from the Flemish, France could project its power and its culture worldwide, as well as increase its wealth.

In the 1662 the tapestry workshop of the Gobelins was proclaimed a Manufacture Royale, followed by Beauvais and Savonnerie. Originally these factories wove to furnish the royal palace at Versailles exclusively.

The weavers of Aubusson were granted this title of 'Manufacture Royale' a couple of years later in 1665, recognising their place alongside these other leading tapestry makers. And at a time when the other Royal French tapestry producers could not supply outside the Royal Court Aubusson flourished amongst the aristocracy and upper classes of Europe. Their output has always been considered to be the finest in the world.

Louis the XV, Louis the XVI and Napoleon I later all commissioned work from Aubusson. The latter two ordering in the greatest quantities. A 1786 inventory lists more than one hundred Aubusson carpets at the palace of Versailles and a 1789 inventory of all royal palaces describes a great many more.

A downturn in fortunes came after the French revolution and the arrival of wallpaper. However, tapestry made something of a comeback during the 1930s, with artists such as Cocteau, Dufy, Dali, Braque, Calder and Picasso being invited to Aubusson to express themselves through the medium of wool.