A GREAT GIFT OF TAPESTRIES

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In 1938, with the opening of The Cloisters, the Metropolitan Museum placed on view, as the gift of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., the famous Unicorn tapestries. Since then many thousands of visitors annually have derived immeasurable pleasure from this rare and thrilling set of mediaeval hangings. A second great gift of tapestries from Mr. Rockefeller, this time of the eighteenth century and from the celebrated Gobelins Manufactory, will be hung in the Main Entrance Hall of the Museum early in January. There are ten of them in all, superbly woven in silk and wool after a sixteenth-century Flemish series known as the Months of Lucas. The other two tapestries of the set, those representing February and June, were last recorded as being the property of the French Government.

According to tradition the Months of Lucas derived their name from the Dutch artist Lucas van Leyden (1494-1533), to whom their designs were long attributed. Within recent years, however, it has been pointed out that the designer may rather have been another Dutch artist, Lucas Cornelisz., who was active about the same time. But whoever may have been responsible for them, the designs have such charm and distinction that it is easy to understand why they were used at the Gobelins on a number of occasions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in preference to contemporary cartoons. Mr. Rockefeller's series was woven under the direction of Michel Audran, one of the most accomplished master weavers at the Gobelins, whose name occurs on four of the hangings. The set was executed for Louis Alexandre de Bourbon, Count of Toulouse, the favorite son of Louis XIV and Madame de Montespan. His arms, encircled with the collars of the Orders of Saint-Michel, the Saint-Esprit, and the Golden Fleece, occur in the center of the top border of each tapestry. Beneath may be seen the Anchor of the Grand Admiral of France, and in the four corners the initial A. In the center of the lower border of each tapestry is the zodiacal sign of the month of the year represented by the scene above. Audran became master weaver at the Gobelins in 1732; the Count of Toulouse died in 1737. The tapestries were therefore ordered and probably delivered between these dates.

For well over a century the Months of Lucas remained in the family of the Count of Toulouse. They were inherited by his son, the Duke of Penthièvre, and are mentioned in 1787 by Thierry (Guide des amateurs et des étrangers voyageurs à Paris, vol. i, p. 306) in his detailed description of the magnificent apartments of the hôtel de Toulouse, which since 1812 has been the Paris headquarters of the Bank of France. On Penthièvre's death the tapestries descended to his daughter, Louise Marie Adélaïde de Bourbon, wife of Philippe (Égalité), Duke of Orléans, and after her death to their son, who, from 1830 to 1848, reigned as King Louis Philippe of France. In 1852 they were sold among Louis Philippe's
January: New Year’s Day. One of a series of Gobelin’s tapestries representing the months of the year given to the Metropolitan Museum by John D. Rockefeller, Jr.

effects and somewhat later found their way into Eastnor Castle, the Herefordshire seat of the third Earl Somers. There they remained until shortly before 1920, when Mr. Rockefeller acquired them for his town house at number ten West Fifty-fourth Street.

The Museum and the public may well congratulate themselves on the gift of these remarkable tapestries, for no finer examples of Gobelin’s craftsmanship exist in America.
October: The Vintage. This tapestry and three others in the series, those illustrating the months of March, April, and September, bear the signature of the celebrated master weaver Michel Audran, who was active at the Gobelins Manufactory from 1732 to 1771.
May: Archery. In the middle distance, a number of archers are gathered around a pole, on top of which a popinjay serves as a target. In the right foreground, ladies and gentlemen on horseback are judging the contest. Musicians mingle with the spectators.
November: The Sowers. In the foreground, the grain is being handed out to the sowers and food and wine are being brought for the midday meal. At the left, the farmer and his family are looking on. In the distance, other activities of the fall planting are taking place. Hunting scenes are usually associated with the month of November, the fall planting with September.
March: Gardening and Fishing. In the foreground, a lady is directing the planting of her garden, from the center of which rises a timbered shelter. In the stream at the left men are catching fish in nets.
December: Skating. The four hangings in Mr. Rockefeller’s gift not illustrated represent April (The Concert), July (Hawking), August (Paying the Harvesters), and September (The Stag Hunt). The tapestries representing February (Games) and June (Shearing the Sheep) are last recorded as belonging to the French Government.