The Hunt of the Unicorn: Tapestry Copies Made for Stirling Castle, Scotland

by

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ABSTRACT

THE HUNT OF THE UNICORN: TAPESTRY COPIES MADE FOR STIRLING CASTLE, SCOTLAND

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In 2014 the West Dean Tapestry Studio in England completed a commission for Historic Scotland, an agency of the Scottish government, to reproduce the late fifteenth-century *Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestry series on permanent display at the Cloisters Museum in New York City. The purpose of Historic Scotland’s reproductions is to heighten the tourist’s experience of authenticity in the Renaissance apartments at Stirling Castle, Scotland. This thesis explores Historic Scotland’s decision to reproduce *The Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestries for the renovation of Stirling Castle’s royal apartments, and how this representation of Scottish heritage and identity challenges traditional boundaries of authorship and authenticity. Applying the concept of the *simulacrum*, specifically through the writing of Jean Baudrillard and Gilles Deleuze, the *Unicorn* tapestries are analyzed based on the contexts and authorities that inform perceptions of their status as either copies or originals, revealing authenticity to be a perceived construction.
## Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Illustrations</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Project</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theories of the Copy</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: The Unicorn</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prophets and Lovers</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Use are Horns?</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Tapestry</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From the Beginning</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The History of the Original <em>Hunt of the Unicorn</em> Tapestries</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Objects</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Reproductions</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New <em>Hunt of the Unicorn</em> Tapestry Project</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish Tapestry</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish Reproductions</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Simulacrum / Conclusion</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Summary</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So What <em>are</em> They?</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity and Context</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity and Authority</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity and History</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Finale</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrations</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Illustrations

Fig. 1. Weaving “The Mystic Hunt” at Stirling Castle, September 28, 2014.

Fig. 2. Jean Duvet, A King Pursued by a Unicorn, ca. 1555, Engraving, 23 x 37.6 cm, The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, Reproduced from http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/.

Fig. 3. A and E initials on “The Unicorn Leaps the Stream” tapestry, The Cloisters Museum, New York City.

Fig. 4. Byzantine psalter, 1066, reproduced from Lavers, The Natural History of the Unicorn, 74.

Fig. 5. Tapestry altar frontal (detail), middle Rhenish, about 1500, Gelnhausen, Marienkirche, reproduced from Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 49.

Fig. 6. “Wild Woman” with Unicorn, Strasbourg, ca. 1500/1510, tapestry: wool, linen, cotton, silk, metallic thread, 75 cm x 63 cm, Historisches Museum Basel, reproduced from http://www.hmb.ch/en/sammlung/textilkunst.

Fig. 7. Medal of Cecilia Gonzaga (obverse and reverse), 1447, bronze, 8.7 cm diameter, National Gallery of Art Washington, reproduced from http://www.wga.hu/html_m/p/pisanell/2medals/cecilia.html.

Fig. 8. Dish with and allegory of Chastity and the arms of Matthias Corvinus and Beatrice of Aragon, 1476 –ca. 1490, tin-glazed earthenware, 47.9 cm diameter, reproduced from http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/46.85.30.

Fig. 9 Emblem of Chastity, c. 1465-1480, engraving on paper, 153 milimetres diameter, The British Museum, reproduced from Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 52.

Fig. 10. Arabian Oryx, reproduced from http://animal-kid.com/arabian-oryx-fighting.html (accessed April 27, 2015).


Fig. 13. Border Illumination, Bible of Borso d’Este, 1455-1462, Modena, Biblioteca Estense, reproduced from Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 60.
Fig. 14. A Mon Seul Desire, tapestry in series of six, ca. 1484-1500, Musée de Cluny
Musée national du Moyen Âge, Paris,

Fig. 15. Unicorn merchandise at The Cloisters’ Museum gift shop, March 6, 2014.

Fig. 16. Velazquez Hilanderas, The Fable of Arachne (Las Hilanderas), c. 1657 Oil on canvas, 220 x 289 cm Museo del Prado, Madrid, reproduced from

Fig. 17. The Brussels mark, from Helen Churchill Candee, The Tapestry Book (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1912), 217, a Project Gutenberg e-book,

Fig. 18. Janni Rost’s “signature” from Helen Churchill Candee, The Tapestry Book (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1912), 224, a Project Gutenberg e-book,

Fig. 19. The Hunters Enter the Woods (from the Unicorn Tapestries), 1495-1505, tapestry: wool warp, wool, silk, silver, and gilt wefts, 145 cm x 315 cm, The Cloisters Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, accession number: 37.80.1.

Fig. 20. The Unicorn is Found (from the Unicorn Tapestries), 1495-1505, tapestry: wool warp, wool, silk, silver, and gilt wefts, 368.3 cm x 378.5 cm, The Cloisters Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, accession number: 37.80.2.

Fig. 21. The Unicorn is Attacked (from the Unicorn Tapestries), 1495-1505, tapestry: wool warp, wool, silk, silver, and gilt wefts, 368.3 cm x 426.7 cm, The Cloisters Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, accession number: 37.80.3.

Fig. 22. The Unicorn Defends Itself (from the Unicorn Tapestries), 1495-1505, tapestry: wool warp, wool, silk, silver, and gilt wefts, 368.3 cm x 401.3 cm, The Cloisters Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, accession number: 37.80.4.

Fig. 23a. The Mystic Capture of the Unicorn (fragment from the Unicorn Tapestries), 1495-1505, tapestry: wool warp, wool, silk, silver, and gilt wefts, 168.9 cm x 64.8 cm, The Cloisters Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, accession number: 39.51.1.

Fig. 23b. The Mystic Capture of the Unicorn (fragment from the Unicorn Tapestries), 1495-1505, tapestry: wool warp, wool, silk, silver, and gilt wefts, 198.1 cm x 64.8 cm, The Cloisters Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, accession number: 38.51.2.

Fig. 24. The Unicorn is Killed and Brought to the Castle (from the Unicorn Tapestries), 1495-1505, tapestry: wool warp, wool, silk, silver, and gilt wefts, 368.3 cm x 388.6 cm, The Cloisters Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, accession number: 37.80.5.
Fig. 25. The Unicorn in Captivity (from the Unicorn Tapestries), 1495-1505, tapestry: wool warp, wool, silk, silver, and gilt wefts, 368 cm x 251.5 cm, The Cloisters Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, accession number: 37.80.6.

Fig. 26. The Stirling Heads, ceiling of the King’s Hall of Stirling Palace, Stirling, Scotland, September 28, 2015.

Fig. 27. The Original Stirling Heads in the Gallery at Stirling Palace, Stirling, Scotland, reproduced from http://www.stirlingcastle.gov.uk/stirlingheadsgallery.htm (accessed May 4, 2015).

Fig. 28. The Queen’s Inner Hall, Stirling Palace, Stirling, Scotland, September 28, 2014.

Fig. 29. The Palace Kitchens, Stirling Castle, Stirling, Scotland, September 28, 2014.

Fig. 30. Scotland’s Royal Arms.

Fig. 31. ‘Unicorn’ of James IV of Scotland (r 1488-1513), gold coin, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, accession number: 2002.399.1.

Fig. 32. The Meeting of Hero and Leander at the Temple of Venus, Sestos (from series of six tapestries), 1660-1670, tapestry: wool and silk, 286 cm x 311 cm, Lady Lever Art Gallery, Liverpool, England, accession number: LL5464.

Fig. 33. Comparison of dog collars from “The Unicorn Leaps Out of the Stream” original and reproduction tapestries.

Fig. 34. Tapestry studio at Stirling Castle, Stirling, Scotland, September 28, 2014.

Fig. 35. Cartoon for the new “Mystic Hunt of the Unicorn” tapestry at Stirling Castle tapestry studio, Stirling, Scotland, September 28, 2014.

Fig. 36. Location for completed new “Mystic Hunt of the Unicorn” tapestry at Stirling Palace, Stirling, Scotland, September 28, 2014.

Fig. 37. Logo for Stirling Castle, reproduced from http://www.stirlingcastle.gov.uk/ (accessed January 15, 2015).

Fig. 38. Unicorn Café Menu, Stirling Castle, Stirling, Scotland, reproduced from http://www.stirlingcastle.gov.uk/ (accessed January 15, 2015).
Introduction

“One of the axioms of magical belief everywhere in the world is that an object bearing a close resemblance to another object has the “virtue” or “property” of that other”\(^1\)

Fantasy and reality, truth and fiction, original and copy. These are the binaries that divide us and define us. Peter S. Beagle’s novel *The Last Unicorn* describes a “Midnight Carnival” overseen by an old witch named Mommy Fortuna. The Midnight Carnival is a menagerie of fantastical animals such as a manticore, a dragon, a harpy and a unicorn. The manticore and the dragon are fake, a toothless lion and a crocodile disguised by spells cast by Mommy Fortuna, but the harpy and the unicorn are real. The novel is of course a fantasy, but the blurring of lines between reality and myth in the Midnight Carnival reveals how the divisions and binaries we construct can be deceptive.

The terms ‘authentic’ and ‘real’ are often used interchangeably, referring to an object or experience that seems positively connected to a pre-conceived ideal of truth. Engaging first with the legend and history of the unicorn, and then with the nature and history of tapestry, this thesis explores the processes of ‘reproduction’ that were involved in the creation of two sets of *The Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestries. Investigating the role of the tapestries in historic reconstruction and their relative status as both copies AND originals we must ask, what does it mean to authenticate the past through the use of copies?

Before examining theories of authenticity and critiques of the copy, it is useful to examine the details of the *Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestry project and what it has been received so far.

The Project

The reproductions of the *Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestries series, currently displayed in Stirling Castle, were commissioned in 2002 by the Historic Scotland Foundation, and woven by the West Dean Tapestry Studio and weavers at Stirling Castle’s tapestry studio. The process of recreation has taken 12 years, and the ‘copies’ were woven using mostly the same methods and materials employed to create the original sixteenth-century tapestries. By analysing both the original tapestries, and the recent reproductions of the *Hunt of the Unicorn* series, this thesis will focus on concepts and theories of copying and authenticity, asking what has been created, a copy or something new?

Historic Scotland is an agency of the Scottish government, the mandate of which is to designate, preserve, restore, and promote the country’s heritage monuments. The unicorn tapestry project began in 2001 and is estimated to cost a total of 2 million GBP, funded mostly by a donation from the Quinque Foundation of Rhode Island, USA. The tapestries were commissioned as part of a large renovation project on Stirling Castle, one of Heritage Scotland’s most important properties, refurbishing the six apartments in the castle to make them appear as they may have in the middle of the sixteenth century. About the renovations, Stirling Castle’s website declares:

“Years of research were carried out by archaeologists, historians and other scholars to ensure that every detail – from the magnificent four-poster beds to the heraldic decorations on the walls and ceilings – is as authentic as possible. Costumed performers in the role of nobles, guards, ladies in waiting, and Mary of Guise herself, will help bring the experience to life.”

The intention behind the project was clearly to recapture, through renovation, some sense of historical authenticity. The larger question behind any sort of historical reconstruction is, of course, the precise nature of this ‘authenticity’ given that it can only exist somewhere between deconstructed and reconstructed realities.

The tapestries themselves occupy an ambiguous space within the larger reconstruction project, since the justification for their original placement in the castle is based on fragmentary evidence. The decision to commission the unicorn tapestries was based on an inventory of the tapestry collection of James V (1513-1542), one time King of Scotland and resident of Stirling Castle. According to this inventory, James’ holdings included a series of tapestries, now lost, called “The Historie of the Unicorne”. Because Historic Scotland wanted to replicate the experience of life in Stirling Castle during the 1540’s, they approached the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York with a request to recreate the surviving set of sixteenth-century tapestries, known as The Hunt of the Unicorn, that are on display at the Cloisters. In an interview published December 7, 2013, Ruth Jones, an Associate Tapestry Weaver for Stirling Castle’s Hunt of the Unicorn project, described the collaboration as achieving a “happy mutual goal.”

Whatever insights into the Unicorn tapestries the Metropolitan Museum gained from West Dean

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6 Thomas Thompson, A Collection of Inventories and Other Records of the Royal Wardrobe and Jewellhouse; and of the Artillery and Munition in Some of the Royal Castles M.CCCC.LXXXVIII. – M.DC.VI. (Edinburgh, 1815), 50.
and Historic Scotland’s reproductions, they have yet to publish any conclusions or even to publicly acknowledge the project.

The new set of tapestries is officially described as “contemporary interpretations”\(^8\), a classification that seems deliberately designed to avoid the connotations and controversies attached to terms like ‘copy’ and ‘reproduction’, although those labels have also been applied by some journalists to describe the project. The weavers working on the new tapestries work from a black and white full scale cartoon drawn by Katherine Swailes, who created the design using both computer generated and hand drawn imagery, A4 transparencies, and digital images of the fronts and backs of the tapestries that were supplied in large part by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Inspiration for the re-imagined Mystic Hunt tapestry, compiled from two tapestry fragments, was also drawn from tapestries in the National Galleries of London and Edinburgh, the Cluny Museum in Paris, and from research and cartoons found in digital archives\(^9\).

There are particular material differences to be noted between the original tapestries and the reproductions. The most important is that the new series have been woven at four warps per centimeter as opposed to the originals, which were produced at eight warps per centimeter. In her interview, weaver Ruth Jones indicates that the difference in warp was one of the crucial factors convincing the Metropolitan Museum of Art to approve the project. Jones states, “this has turned the new tapestries into more than copies, more like a musical variation on a theme.”\(^10\) Other differences include the chemicals used to dye the yarns and the use of gold wrapped threads instead of silver, decisions that Jones asserts were made in consideration of aesthetic and historic conservation values. One last interesting difference in terms of the production of the new tapestries is that the weavers at Stirling Castle work from the front of the tapestry to the back, instead of the standard method of back to front. Because the studio is open to the public, weaving from front to back allows visitors to see the image created as it will appear when finally mounted in the castle apartments. Watching the weaving is considered to be an exciting part of the tourist experience at Stirling Castle (fig. 1).\(^11\)

‘Living history’ performances are a popular means of engaging and educating visitors at museums and historic sites, such as Stirling Castle, but have also become a means for communities to curate and showcase their individual heritage and identity. The term ‘living history’ encompasses a wide range of activities including costumed tour guides, re-enactments, participation in ‘historical’ practices or the use of material artifacts from the past. Living history aims to “recreate the past authentically, both tangibly through costume and material culture and

\(^8\) Geraldine Sim and Fiona Wain, “First year visit to Stirling Castle’s Tapestry Studio,” last modified March 20, 2014 http://textileconservation.academicblogs.co.uk/first-year-visit-to-stirling-castles-tapestry-studio/
\(^9\) Katharine Swailes, e-mail message to the author, January 21, 2014.
\(^10\) Mirzaghitoa, “The Hunt of the Unicorn: Interview with Ruth Jones.”
\(^11\) Sim and Wain, “First year visit to Stirling Castle’s Tapestry Studio,” last modified March 20, 2014 http://textileconservation.academicblogs.co.uk/first-year-visit-to-stirling-castles-tapestry-studio/
intangibly through language, behavior and social customs.” Criticism has focused on the potential for living history performances to convince viewers that the history portrayed is a true and accurate depiction of the real past, instead of a theatrical version of what has past. Research into the perceptions of tourists and re-enactment participants conducted by Ceri Jones, as well as Elizabeth Carnegie and Scott McCabe, indicate that prior knowledge and experience of historical facts influence the reception of living history portrayals. While the aim of this thesis is to analyse the unicorn tapestry project specifically, understanding the concept of ‘living history’ provides a frame for the challenges raised by the context for which the reproduction tapestries were created.

As a master weaver and the former Studio Director for the unicorn tapestry project at the West Dean Tapestry studio, Caron Penney has special insight into the nature and process of tapestry weaving. In her paper “Rediscovering the Unicorn tapestries”, published in the anthology “Authenticity and Replication, The Real Thing in Art and Conservation,” Penney asserts that the tapestries created for Stirling Castle are not copies. Detailing differences between medieval and contemporary weaving, the paper suggests that it is impossible for weavers today to re-create an “authentic” medieval tapestry because, although the process has remained relatively unchanged for 500 years, the knowledge and circumstances of the weavers have transformed radically. Due to the changes in warp described previously, Penney states that the new tapestries are visually “bolder” and emphasizes that the role of modern weavers is that of an “interpreter” of fine art. It is impossible to know who the weavers of the original unicorn tapestries were, let alone how they felt about their work, but is this chasm of time and space between creators enough to assert that the new tapestries are unequivocally unique from their medieval predecessors?

Theories of the Copy

In light of the great technological advances of the last century and a half, the concept of the original or authentic work of art has been subverted and a ‘new’ real has emerged in the forms of photography, film, and other digital reproductions. Despite the incredible ability of these technologies to accurately record and save images indefinitely, and what may be called a revolution in how we save and reproduce everyday images, the practice of copying art is still...

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13 Jones, “Bringing the past to life? Exploring the role of authenticity in developing young people’s historical understanding,” 132.
hotly debated. Art history has a time and seeks origins, which often leads to problems of elitism, authentication, and cannon. Economically, we must consider the value of the original and how copying it will affect that value; we have to consult all the parties with a vested interest in the image to deliberate how copying it may change its meaning; and finally ask, does copying a famous work of art help to conserve it for the future or distort its representation of the past?

Today most discussions of the problem of the copy concern images that have been reproduced digitally. Although there has been some discussion pertaining to the translation of the unicorn tapestries into books and movies during the last fifty years, the project under discussion here is unique because the product of the reproduction of the unicorn tapestries is not a photographic, cinematic or digital image; it is a material thing that has been painstakingly created using mostly the same methods as the originals. To my knowledge, there is so far no significant literature about the practices of copying and the implications of the reproduction and re-contextualization of the Hunt of the Unicorn tapestries, allowing me the remarkable freedom to forge a path less burdened by preconception. Therefore I have decided that the theoretical base for this study will be built on the idea of the simulacrum, specifically in the opposing approaches of Jean Baudrillard and Gilles Deleuze, not because their ideas all apply neatly to the tapestries, but because their arguments appear to form the foundations of my own internal debate on the nature and value of authenticity in art.

Michel Camille begins his essay “Simulacrum” with the assertion that, since at least the time of Plato, visual art has been concerned with the binary division of ‘real’ vs. ‘copy’. Tracing the Latin root of the word, simulacrum has been translated to mean “phantasm”, which is likely one of the reasons theorists like Nicholas Mirzoeff continue to make use of the ‘ghost’ in their discussions of representation in art and visual culture today. The example used most often to illustrate the concept of the simulacrum is that man was made in the image of God, but when he sinned and fell from grace, though he still resembled God, he was no longer a representation of God; in other words, it may look like a duck and quack like a duck, but there really is no duck. Camille, however, likens the simulacrum to a statue that is purposely created to be physically out of proportion so as to appear to be in correct proportion when the viewer looks at it from a particular vantage point. He suggests that Plato’s concern regarding the simulacrum stemmed from the subjectivity of the viewer: “from the beginning, then, the simulacrum involved not just image makers but also their viewers.” The difference between the two examples seems to me to be the implication of intent. So the simulacrum may be a ‘ghost’ that is ethereal, intermediary, and benign, or it may be a sinister deception.

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Camille argues that the simulacrum challenges the work of art in two ways; first, it ignores the hierarchy of the relationship between the original and copy, and second, it erases the binary opposition of reality versus representation. According to Camille, the interpretation of Gilles Deleuze displaces the emphasis on point of view, illustrating how the simulacrum erases distinctions and differences in what Deleuze calls “reverse Platonism.” Deleuze criticises Plato’s simulacrum for its intent to draw differences; he laments that Plato’s version internalizes difference and in this way is deceptive, a false claimant that retains the image of what it represents, but has lost some moral or spiritual essence, not unlike the loss of “aura” in Walter Benjamin’s exploration of mechanical reproductions. Deleuze himself prefers to characterize the simulacrum as a “positive power which negates both original and copy, both model and reproduction”. He reasons that the false claimant of Plato’s simulacrum cannot actually be false if it does not represent truth to begin with. Furthermore, if there is no distinction between true and false, original and copy, then the hierarchy of power is subverted and replaced by a chaotic sort of freedom.

Deleuze’s reverence for chaos, and his eagerness to subvert the divisions and hierarchies of the traditional distinctions between model/copy, or original/representation, apply nicely to the investigation of the Hunt of the Unicorn tapestries. Because the creation of a tapestry already involves the re-creation of an image or cartoon into something else, it can be argued that tapestry itself is simultaneously an original and a copy, complicating traditional distinctions and structures of power. Camille’s interpretation, involving the participation of the viewer in an intentional deception, also provides an important theoretical approach, albeit one with more negative connotations. In many ways the tapestry is a perfect simulacrum as it is neither the original nor the copy… so then what does that make the reproduction of the tapestry?

Jean Baudrillard supposes that the real not only can, but already has been subverted into the simulacrum; the real has become an uncanny space that deceives us into believing that images are still representations of original ideas. According to Baudrillard, today’s images are only hiding that there is nothing there. At once recognizable and yet plasticised, mass media and visual technologies have permeated all means of communication and transformed all interactions into a series of signs, a process Baudrillard calls the “phases of the image.” These phases progress from a reflection of a basic reality, to an image that masks and perverts a basic reality, and finally to the simulacrum that “masks the absence of a basic reality, it bears no relation to any reality whatever.”

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Criticised for his negative views of mass-media and the ideological control it exerts in our everyday lives, Baudrillard’s simulacrum and theory of “hyperreality” pertain to the grandness of quotidian life itself, and is in some ways too broad in scope to be applied to this particular case study. After all, I am not looking to analyse the nature of reality itself, but the concepts of authenticity and reproduction as they pertain to a particular set of objects. The “oversignification of art” described by Baudrillard – the turning of ordinary objects into aesthetic works to be analysed – is not necessarily productive for this study either. Although the tapestry did have its practical purpose as a form of insulation in draughty castles at the time it was created, it remained an opulent luxury item reserved only for those wealthy enough to possess an actual castle.

Where my study makes the best use of Baudrillard’s theories is in his discussion of ethnography in “The Precession of Simulacra”. Baudrillard’s anecdote about the repatriation of the Cloister of St-Michel de Cuxa from the Cloisters Museum in New York City to its original site, critiques the “museumification” of historical objects through their re-contextualization. In the anecdote, the return of the artifact that was appropriated by the Cloisters Museum (coincidentally the exact same institution that is currently home to the original unicorn tapestries) only increased its artificiality by pretending the intervention could be erased and its authenticity reinstated. This process in many ways mirrors the motivation behind the re-creation of the unicorn tapestries and Historic Scotland’s desire to return Stirling Castle to a former glory. Whether this glory is, or even can be, an accurate representation of times past is the lingering elephant, or unicorn in the room.

Contrary to Walter Benjamin’s mid-twentieth century theories, Hellen Roberts and Julie Codell claim that reproductions can obtain their own aura because people form emotional attachments to the reproductions they have experience with. In his book on the myths and symbolism in the unicorn tapestries, John Williamson analyses the evolution and incorporation of pre-Christian/pagan icons into the Christian religions of Western Europe. Evocative of Caron Penney’s musings on environmental influence and the linearity of artistic inspiration, Williamson argues that in order to understand medieval tapestries the viewer must first understand the complex cultural and historical context in which they were created. Focusing on the botanical and animal iconography, Williamson portrays the Hunt of the Unicorn tapestries as a doorway into medieval society, concluding that the mythology of early Indo-European religions and

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28 Hyperreality for Jean Baudrillard is the creation of reality from models, Jean Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation, 1.
29 Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation, 75.
30 Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation, 11.
31 Museumification - the transference of a material object from its original cultural context to the ordered structures of history and science. Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation, 11.
cultures was important in constructing the religious and cultural iconography of Western European medieval art. It is undeniable that the legend of the unicorn has been a source of fascination and inspiration throughout history and across cultures, so much so that it may be impossible to untangle how much history is conveyed by the tapestry from the various ways in which present beliefs and understandings are being imposed upon it.

Julie Codell, in her summary of Helen Roberts’ arguments that reproductions stand in as “surrogate images” for our experience of art, concludes that Baudrillard’s simulacrum has occurred just as he predicted. Our first experiences with a work of art, Roberts argues, are usually mediated through their reproductions, second-hand. In Robert’s argument it is the first experience that leaves the strongest impression, an impression that we always refer to and compare with other objects and images, including the original, a form of “cultural capital.” According to Roberts and Codell, as well as other theorists including Kent Drummond in his analysis of Caravaggio’s work from a marketing perspective, the more a work of art is reproduced or quoted, the more known and important it appears and the higher its cultural value becomes. Margaret Freeman’s research discovered that cartoons, once delivered to the weavers, became the property of the master of the workshop, and were often used to make duplicate sets of tapestries. Raising further questions as to whether the Hunt of the Unicorn tapestries in the possession of the Metropolitan Museum of Art at the Cloisters could themselves be reproductions, Freeman’s description of the craft and business of tapestry weaving in medieval Europe insists we consider the possibility that our notions of authenticity are, as Roberts suggests, somewhat arbitrary and emotionally charged.

Catharine Soussloff claimed that each repetition of an anecdote about an artist or work of art “gives the interpretation the air of “reality”.” Although Soussloff’s analysis focuses on the rhetorical device of the anecdote, demonstrating how the myth of the artist is preserved in art history, her argument that authority and authenticity can be awarded to an object based only on the words of other ‘authorities’ resonates like a warning in the background of this study and the discipline of art history as a whole. The reproduction, like the biographical anecdote, can be seen as both an advantage and a detriment to historical investigation. The unicorn tapestries woven for Stirling Castle are meant to invoke the feeling of sixteenth-century Scotland, and while there is no doubt that the process of weaving them yielded a great deal more knowledge about the production of the originals, they will never be from the sixteenth century.

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37 Kent Drummond, “The migration of art from museum to market: Consuming Caravaggio,” 91.
38 Margaret Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1976), 207.
40 Soussloff, The Absolute Artist, 151.
Let’s take Walter Benjamin’s seminal essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” as another example; it has not only been quoted and discussed ad infinitum since its publication in the golden era of propaganda (this paper included, perpetuating the cycle), but has been re-invented in various works as time and technology itself moves forward. Works such as “Art in the Age of Digital Reproduction”41 and “Art in the Age of Biocybernetic Reproduction”42 reference Benjamin’s original concepts but only to lend authority to their own arguments. Benjamin’s composition explores what happens when a work of art becomes reproducible and is subsequently reproduced by a technology not employed in the creation of the original work. According to Benjamin, the transformation that occurs as a result of this type of reproduction emancipates the image from its “ritual” or “cult” value.43 Douglas Davis’ “Evolving Thesis”, while highlighting Benjamin’s main points about the fate of the aura and originality, reads more like a modernized version of Baudrillard’s simulacrum. Davis theorizes that the boundaries between the original and the reproduction have dissolved and merged, so that the artist and the viewer perform together;44 a convenient hypothesis supporting the legitimacy of artistic appropriation.

As highlighted by Gilles Deleuze, Jean Baurillard, and Michael Camille, debates have been raging for centuries concerning the earnest collectors and researchers who are deceived by fakes and forgeries, or who perpetuate false claims to value based on expert opinions or mass consensus. Critiques such as L’Inganno, a dialogue written by Guiseppe Orologi in Venice, published in 1562, have addressed the deception of art45 and as discussed in Sharon Gregory and Sally Anne Hickson’s book “Inganno The Art of Deception”, imitation in art can be a form of deceit that creates and reinforces exclusions and hierarchies of power.46 These debates form the base of contemporary criticism of the traditional Western cannon in Art History and are particularly relevant in discourses regarding authorship.

The concept of authorship will prove difficult to apply to The Hunt of the Unicorn tapestries in particular, precisely because of their lack of a discernible ‘author’. As discussed by various medieval and renaissance scholars, the creation of art, from painting and sculpture to architecture, was a complex yet fluid series of arrangements between various different specialists. Anthony Hughes’ analysis of artistic practices challenges the common notion that the evolution of artistic creation was a clear linear path from medieval workshop to Renaissance artist’s studio. Using the analogy of the cave and the stithy (blacksmith shop), Hughes illustrates

the perceived difference between the solo artist’s studio and interdisciplinary workshop enterprise – the coming together of various artisans, students, and labourers to produce artifacts in the masters’ ‘style’ – as a boundary constructed by individuals and institutions to exert power over others.47

Hughes argues that “studio work should not be regarded as ‘inauthentic’”48 because no object is free from its forerunners, or immune to future re-contextualization. Hughes does not mention tapestry work in his paper, and it has been widely noted that there is little information describing how cartoons were used in tapestry-weaving studios of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Margaret Freeman points to records of weavers in Brussels around 1575 designing their own cartoons. This caused friction with the painters’ guild and it was agreed in 1476 that weavers be allowed to draw certain aspects and to correct cartoons themselves using charcoal, chalk or pen, but otherwise had to employ professional painters or be fined.49 Other mediums subvert the hierarchy of power between original and copy in a similar manner to tapestry, such as the process of printmaking, which uses a template to produce multiple reproductions. The difference in printmaking is, once the plate is created, the prints themselves can be produced with relative speed and ease, whereas the weaving of a tapestry will still require significant work and expense after the cartoon has been drawn.

Soussloff’s examination of the nature of the anecdote traces its etymological origins to notions of secrecy, ultimately making the argument that “Secretiveness lies in the form itself, for even as the content of the anecdote appears to give the reader access to a heightened level of realism or actuality – to firsthand account – the form itself resists revelation”.50 In this manner we can perceive the anecdote used in artists’ biographies as a kind of simulacrum, a representation of an artist who does not exist. Unfortunately, the identities of most medieval tapestry designers and weavers, including those of the unicorn tapestries, are not known today.51 Tapestry weaving through time has most consistently been a process of translating an image created by an artist from paper, or a similar medium, to the loom, by a weaver.52 This distinction between the work of the artist as creator and that of the weaver as interpreter reinforces a traditional power structure while challenging the idea that authorship is a clear and simple path to authenticity.

Research conducted by Margaret Freeman concluded that no other work of art other than The Hunt of the Unicorn tapestries, and one sequence of prints by Jean Duvett (fig. 2), has combined the legend of the unicorn with the theme of the medieval hunt,53 and to this day there

49 Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 208-209.
50 Soussloff, The Absolute Artist, 155.
51 Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 193.
53 Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 176.
are no traces of the original owner or creators of the *unicorn* tapestries. There is no evidence of their existence before a listing in the 1680 inventory of Francois VI de La Rochefoucauld’s Paris residence, and no duplicate weavings, cartoons or designs have ever been recorded or found. The tapestries have been dated by both the style of their designs as compared to woodcut prints, as well as by the costumes worn by the figures represented, to sometime between the years 1490 – 1505.\(^{54}\) The narrative of the tapestries, a mysterious anecdote allegedly unique in time, continues to fascinate while giving nothing away.

On an interesting side note, although all of the documents and portraits belonging to the Rochefoucauld family at the Chateau of Verteuil were burned during the French Revolution, a letter kept by the Societe Populaire dated Dec. 2, 1793, encouraged the people of Verteuil to “Examine the old tapestries. Spare them because they do not show any signs of royalty; they contain histories.”\(^ {55}\)

Confounding historians since the tapestries’ rediscovery in the 1850’s,\(^ {56}\) a potential clue to indicate who they might have been made for is the repetition of the letters “A” and “E”, woven and tied with a cord in a bowknot, which appear on each tapestry (fig. 3). The “A” and “E” are also shown without the cord on a dog collar in the first tapestry. James Rorimer originally argued that the letters stood for Anne of Brittany,\(^ {57}\) but that theory has been widely refuted as there is not enough evidence or examples to back up the claim. Freeman also makes a strong case against this proposal by citing differences in the attire of a figure who Rorimer wrote is supposed to represent Anne of Brittany’s husband, as well as the use of the “cordeleire”,\(^ {58}\) so without any proof to the contrary many believe that the tapestries have always belonged to the Rochefoucauld family. However, there have been no members of the Rochefoucauld family or Rochefoucauld marriages within the appropriate timeframe that would result in any combination of the initials “A” and “E”.\(^ {59}\)

Other propositions for the identity represented by the initials include that they were woven for Jean and Margeurite La Rochefoucauld, however the date of Jean’s death (1471) predates the style of the tapestries themselves. Margaret Freeman points to evidence in the tapestries that could support the claim that the tapestries were commissioned by Margeurite and her second husband Hardouin IX de Maille based on drawings of other tapestries possessed by Marguerite,\(^ {60}\) even though their names do not match the initials in any conceivable configuration. There is also the matter of the letters F and R that have been cut out, possibly from another

\(^{54}\) Freeman, *The Unicorn Tapestries*, 206-207.

\(^{55}\) Freeman, *The Unicorn Tapestries*, 163.


\(^{58}\) Freeman, *The Unicorn Tapestries*, 157.

\(^{59}\) Freeman, *The Unicorn Tapestries*, 165.

\(^{60}\) Freeman, *The Unicorn Tapestries*, 163.
tapestry, and sewn onto the sky of the third tapestry.61 These are much more likely to represent the Rochefoucauld family, most probably in relation to Francois (died 1541), the son of Jean de la Rochefoucauld and Marguerite de Barbezieux.62 There is also a single coat of arms shown on a dog collar in the “Start of the Hunt,” but it has yet to be identified.63

Identifying symbols, such as initials or arms, are not only a mark of ownership, but are frequently reproduced in tapestries to establish a relationship between specific stories, values or ideas, with the owner of the tapestry.64 For Julie Codell, reproductions form a part of our social and cultural identity, and they are often studied in order to understand the values of both historical and contemporary cultures.65 According to Hellen Roberts, reproductions can tell us how artists and their works were received and interpreted by their contemporaries and throughout history, and points out that as material objects, they also become a part of history in their own right.66 For Roberts and Codell, reproductions provide a window into the world, a means by which we can see and understand cultural identity. This approach, while identifying with Baudrillard’s application of the simulacrum to the status of today’s visual culture, provides what many of Baudrillard’s critics found lacking in his original assessment. Roberts and Codell approach the reproduction from the ‘new’ visual culture stance, using the reproduction as a method of communication, transforming it into a new medium and, like Deleuze, a means of subverting the hierarchies, structures and distinctions that they perceive are limiting art history studies.

However, like the post-colonial approach of Timothy Mitchell and the feminist work of Rey Chow, there are also challenges inherent in abandoning the idea of distinctions or divisions altogether. For Mitchell, it is the Western desire to view the world-as-exhibition, a cultural need for people to distance themselves from their environment in order to picture it objectively.67 In Chow’s “Postmodern Automotons”, the attempt to dissolve structures of inclusion and exclusion within artistic and historical institutions only causes the further erasure of marginal identities.68 And in the chaos of Deleuze’s simulacrum, art history’s problem of authenticity is not solved or erased, it is simply ignored. The concern for origins, the search for beginnings and creators, is an undeniable drive in the human psyche. Why else would we study history?

61 Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 156.
62 Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 170.
63 Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 171.
64 Marina Belozerskaya provides many examples, my favorite is that of Cosimo de Medici’s very expensive weaving of Joseph Fleeing for the Wife of Potiphar to convey his rigorous moral standards, Marina Belozerskaya, Luxury Arts of the Renaissance (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005), 109.
The re-creation of *The Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestries is the perfect example of our desire not just to know, but to *experience* history, and I would argue that this desire is an effort to reconcile ourselves with the political and cultural identities of the present. The ultimate purpose of the commission to reproduce the unicorn tapestries for Stirling Castle was not for the conservation of their images or to better understand medieval / renaissance tapestry weaving, although those were noble bi-products of the endeavor. The purpose was to re-enforce ideals of Scottish identity and pride. Particularly important for a country that considers itself culturally distinct, but politically dependent, the appropriation of imagery that has already been imprinted on imaginations around the world but is not yet attached to any particular story/author/geography of origin provides an ideal foundation on which to build a new public understanding of historic Scottish culture.

Chapter 1

The Unicorn

To understand the historical significance of the Unicorn tapestries, as well as their enduring cultural influence, I will first look at the myth and representation of the unicorn itself through time. Admittedly, I have been seduced by the tremendous volume of lore, imagery and scholarship about the unicorn, and what began as a brief historical sketch of a common myth has evolved into a fascinating exploration of a global legend.

The unicorn is both the product and the progenitor of legends from many different cultures around the world; In China there is the *ch’i-lin*,\(^69\) in Africa there is the *kardunn*,\(^70\) and even Julius Caesar wrote in the first century AD that there were unicorns and other fantastic animals then living in the deep woods of Germany.\(^71\) While the variations between these creatures sometimes makes us question whether they are related at all, there are three key similarities: first, they were all an animal that was at one time believed to be real, but that turned out not to exist. Second, they embody all of the virtues held in the highest esteem by the culture/religion that believed in them. And third, they all had one horn. For this study I will focus primarily on the aspects of the unicorn myth that are most relevant to the cultural and religious context of the fifteenth-century *Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestries, setting aside origins and traditions not commonly represented in medieval Europe at the time of the tapestries’ production. It is important, however, to keep in mind the global context of the unicorn legend in order to grasp the strange international/intercultural condition in which the tapestries are now embroiled.


\(^{71}\) Cavallo, *The Unicorn Tapestries at The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 19.
The stories of a horn purifying water, and a virgin maiden capture may have been drawn from a number of non-Christian, non-Western sources, incorporating deeply held values and beliefs into an evolving European identity. Although these connections are important in interpreting the iconography of the tapestries, when they are applied to the unicorn narratives as a whole, their relevance vanishes. Odell Shepard articulated the problem well:

“We delve into the myth of Diana the virgin huntress and ponder her connection with horned moon which has had control over poisons since the beginning of superstition. In all this rather aimless beating up and down one may learn much about the mental habits out of which the virgin-capture story arose, but the actual source of it eludes one.”

Like all good stories, the legend of the unicorn draws its history from here and there, from the hopes and fears and experiences of our collective species. Extending before recorded time the tales cannot be traced to their origins so, despite my best efforts, the limitations of this study dictate that I must take up the unicorn’s trail in the middle of its journey, sometimes questioning, but mostly leaving its true origins to the fog of human imagination.

The seven tapestries in the *Hunt of the Unicorn* series combine both secular and religious themes common to unicorn legends throughout the world, weaving a simple yet richly iconographic narrative. The two most prominent secular narratives of the unicorn are based upon the unicorn’s ability to purify water or cure poison, and its capture by a virgin woman. In Christian depictions the unicorn is most often seen to be a representation of Christ, and much of the iconography in the Unicorn tapestries can be interpreted through this lens, but these portrayals follow the secular narratives as well, using their familiar plot points as allegorical sketches of Christ’s life.

Although it is now common knowledge that the unicorn does not and has never existed, for many centuries people believed it to be a real creature that roamed faraway lands; it was distant and elusive, but very much alive. Most of our Western legend has been traced back to Ctesias of Cnidus, writing in Greece in the fourth century BC. Ctesias describes in great detail “certain wild asses” that live in India and have one large horn on their forehead. Similar descriptions to those written by Ctesias are later found in Aristotle’s “History of Animals” (b. 384 BC), Pliny the Elder’s “Natural History” (23-79 AD) and Aelian’s “On the Nature of Animals” (170-235 AD). Where Ctesias acquired his information, considering he was a fastidious physician scholar who never personally ventured to the wilds of India, can only be guessed at. Unlike the pure white stallion of the tapestries, the unicorn described by Ctesias had a

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72 John Williamson appears to find many connections between ancient pagan myths and what the unicorn came to represent in legend, art and most specifically, in the *Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestries. John Williamson, *The Oak King, the Holly King, and the Unicorn: The Myths and Symbolism of the Unicorn Tapestries* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1986).


dark red head, white body and dark blue eyes. Pliny the Elder’s report gives the unicorn the body
of a horse, the head of a stag and the feet of an elephant, while Aelian adds “the tail of a pig”.77
All three writers report that the unicorn is extremely strong and fierce. According to many
scholars it is this narrative lineage that accounts for the widely accepted theory that it was the
Indian Rhinoceros, its depiction altered and perhaps confused with tales of other foreign beasts
that first inspired the myth of the unicorn.78

One of the most pivotal moments in the story of the unicorn came during the translation
of the Septuagint from Hebrew to Greek around 300-200 BC in Alexandria, Egypt.79 During the
translation there was confusion over an animal called “Re’em”, believed to be an extinct type of
bull that was referenced in Hebrew but was unfamiliar to the translators. In the context of the
passages in which it was used, the Re’em was presented as a fierce, noble and pure animal.
Whatever their reason (and there has been ample speculation), the translators chose to replace the
characters for Re’em with those that would signify Unicorn.80 This Greek version of the Old
Testament, supplying us with such expressions as “God brought them out of Egypt; he hath as it
were the strength of the unicorn”,81 would later evolve with the Christian faith to be included in
the King James Version of the Bible. Thus with one mistranslation the existence of the unicorn
would be undeniable for centuries and written indelibly into the most influential narrative in the
world; if God has the strength of a unicorn, so the faithful should believe in unicorns.

Christian appropriation of the unicorn may for the most part be credited to the Septuagint,
but as is argued by John Williamson, the role of other Indo-European religions and cultures in
constructing the religious and cultural iconography of Western European medieval art cannot be
overlooked. The next most important text identified in the dissemination of the myth of the
unicorn throughout the world is the Physiologus, a collection of articles originally written in
Greek between the second and fourth centuries AD by several unknown authors (often presumed
to be early Christians from Alexandria). The Physiologus combines pre-Christian allegory and
moral fables with observations on the natural world and was one of the most popular books in
medieval Europe.82 If the Septuagint reasserted the unicorn’s authenticity, then the Physiologus
had the privilege of documenting important characteristics of the beast for the faithful not lucky
enough to have encountered one. Nothing original remains of the first Greek Physiologus
manuscript, but it was so popular that it was not only translated several times in Latin, but into
many other languages including Arabic, Ethiopic, Icelandic, Old and Middle English, Russian.83
Over time, passages from the Physiologus were embellished or abandoned to become medieval

77 Lavers, The Natural History of Unicorns, 32.
78 Lavers, The Natural History of Unicorns, 7.
79 Cavallo, The Unicorn Tapestries at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 21.
80 Lavers, The Natural History of the Unicorn, 50-56., Shepard, The Lore of the Unicorn, 42-44.
81 Shepard, Lore of the Unicorn, 41.
82 Shepard, Lore of the Unicorn, 46.
83 Lavers, The Natural History of Unicorns, 65.
bestiaries, prized illustrated manuscripts offering practical and moral explanations of the nature and purpose of the real and mythical animals of the known world.

Prophets and Lovers

It is through the bestiaries that one distinct unicorn legend became particularly fashionable. By all accounts, secular and religious, the unicorn is characterized as the fiercest of all Earthly creatures and can only be captured by a virgin maiden. Although details differ from one bestiary to another, all confirm that a woman must wait in a location the unicorn is known to frequent, and when it sees the woman the fierce animal becomes docile and falls asleep. Only then can a hunter capture or kill the unicorn and bring him to the King or Queen. It remains a mystery as to why and how this strange hunting story became attached to the unicorn but by about the twelfth century AD it is deeply entrenched as a popular artistic subject throughout Europe. The theme is often referred to as the “Mystic Hunt of the Unicorn” and has two dominant interpretations, one religious and one secular.84

In a Byzantine psalter from 1066 AD an elegant woman appears to bless a goat-like unicorn with a curved horn in an image meant to symbolize the Incarnation (fig. 4).85 As Christian allegory, the unicorn is a symbol for Jesus Christ and the maiden represents the Virgin Mary who draws the unicorn to/ through her womb and into the mortal world. In earlier illustrations like the one in this psalter there are no hunters, but over the next two centuries varying numbers of male figures are introduced who lead the maiden to the appropriate location, lie in wait for the unicorn, and then attack him once he has been subdued. The hunters are written about in most versions of the Physiologus and in Christian allegory they are interpreted as either the enemies of Jesus who will deceive him, or as the Holy Spirit conducting God’s will by dispatching the unicorn (Jesus) to the King (God). The hunters are often illustrated in a series or a combination of an illustration of the Incarnation and the Passion.86 A tapestry altar frontal in Gelnhausen from about 1500 (Fig. 5) adds an interesting twist. In this scene the hunter represents the angel Gabriel who is trumpeting “Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee” as the Virgin Mary holds onto the horn of Jesus the unicorn. Instead of the Incarnation this version is meant to represent the Annunciation.87

Laying aside the scripture and the parables, it is easy to imagine how a story about a maiden subduing (seducing?) a fierce beast who wields a large, magical horn on its forehead, might also become an allegory of… love. I mentioned that certain details differed from one bestiary to another, and the most interesting variations are the methods by which the maiden

84 Shepard, *Lore of the Unicorn*, 47.
87 Freeman, *The Unicorn Tapestries*, 50.
attracts her prey. In a Syriac translation of the Physiologus the capture of the unicorn is described as follows:

“They lead forth a young virgin, pure and chaste, to whom, when the animal sees her, he approaches, throwing himself upon her. Then the girl offers him her breasts, and the animal begins to suck the breasts of the maiden and to conduct himself familiarly with her. Then the girl, while sitting quietly, reaches forth her hand and grasps the horn on the animal’s brow, and at this point the huntsmen come up and take the beast and go away with him to the king.”

There are also translations in which the maiden must be naked, and some which require the lady only to be beautiful, saying nothing about her chastity. Both Odell Shepard and Margaret Freeman note quite bluntly that, regardless of her state of dress, the maiden’s clear deception of the unicorn is not the behaviour that would normally be equated with the pure Virgin Mother. This odd contradiction did not appear to bother anyone at the time and visual depictions of the Mystic Hunt vary greatly by geographic region. There are in fact several works of art from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that appear to follow the more visceral version, two such examples are the tapestry “Wild Woman with Unicorn” (Strassburg, about 1500, fig. 6) and a medal for Cecilia Gonzaga of Mantua (Pisanello, early fifteenth century, fig. 7).

With the rise in popularity of the less pious interpretations of The Mystic Hunt of the Unicorn, a growing interest in the ideals of courtly love, and a declining belief in their actual existence, the unicorn began its most radical transformation from a rare and authentic living being, to a popular myth. In Richard de Fournival’s Bestiaire d’Amour, from the thirteenth century, the hunter comes to symbolize ‘Love’, the maiden becomes the beloved and the unicorn is the lover. The fifteenth century saw the production of French jewel boxes bringing together the symbolism of the unicorn with romantic images from the stories of Sir Lancelot or Tristan and Iseult, as well as marriage gifts, such as a fifteenth-century majolica dish made for the marriage of Matthias Corvinus (1440–1490), king of Hungary, and Beatrix of Aragon (fig. 8), and a Florentine engraving Marietta (1465-80) in which the maiden is preparing to buckle a collar to the neck of the blissful unicorn (fig. 9). These objects were created alongside romantic and sometimes erotic poetry that was meant to emphasize the chastity of the maiden and the fidelity of the unicorn to the maiden, his love.

88 Lavers, The Natural History of Unicorns, 71.
89 Lavers, The Natural History of Unicorns, 84.
90 Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 21, Odell, The Lore of the Unicorn, 49.
91 Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 45-46
92 Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 46
94 Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 52.
What Use Are Horns?

The most important physical feature of the unicorn is, of course, the singular magical horn in the middle of its forehead. But descriptions of the horn itself have varied greatly with regard to size, colour and texture. According to Ctesias, unicorn horns were pure white at the base, black in the middle, and “vivid crimson” at the tip. Aelian, however, describes them as completely black with natural spirals. Both are at odds with the pure white spiraled horn favoured in Europe from the late Middle Ages, and with which we are most familiar today. The differences in the interpretations of the horn may be the result of contemporary regional trade, as the chroniclers themselves were presented with animal horns by enterprising hunters and traders who proclaimed them to be from a real unicorn. Descriptions of the unicorn horn often correlate to the natural habitats and historical trade routes of other known horned animals such as the Arabian oryx (black with spiraled ridges) (fig. 10), and the narwhal (a white tooth with spiraled ridges) (fig. 11). 95

In late Medieval and early Renaissance courts across Europe unicorn horns were given to or acquired by the wealthiest royals, and rumours circulated that buyers were willing to pay ten times its weight in gold for one ‘authentic’ unicorn horn. 96 So convinced and dependant was European society on the value and legitimacy of trade in unicorn horns that even after Ole Wurm, Regius Professor of Denmark, expressed undeniably in the 1630’s that the horns recognized at the time as belonging to a unicorn were actually narwhal teeth, that it took another hundred years or so for their commercial trade to die out. 97 Records show that King Charles I paid 10,000 pounds for his unicorn horn, 98 and today many historic houses and museums still display the horns and vessels that were once prized as the relics of the rarest of creatures. Noting the obvious impossibility of providing proof that a particular horn came from a real unicorn, it is curious why anyone would pay such a high price for what appears to be a relatively useless and dull object. Unless, of course, the object was said to impart some magical power to its owner.

Most tales, though not all 99, indicate that unicorn horns hold special properties. The horns that were alleged to be from a unicorn were, in cultures from Ireland to China, often made into drinking vessels because it was believed that those who drank from them would be immune to poison. 100 As the unicorn horn trade proved more and more lucrative, powdered versions appeared and were sold as cure-alls to anyone who could pay. Although now extinct in China, archeological evidence suggests that the rhinoceros was once quite common there and ancient books on Chinese medicine proclaim powdered rhinoceros horn to be effective in reducing

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96 Lavers, *The Natural History of Unicorns*, 94.
98 Shepard, *The Lore of the Unicorn*, 113.
99 “The abbess Hildegard recommends the use of various parts of the unicorn’s body for medicinal purposes but does not mention the horn.” Margaret Freeman, *The Unicorn Tapestries*, 27.
Rhino horns continue today to be prized for their curative properties for various ailments in China and much of Asia, and are allegedly a means of detecting alkaloid poisons as well. Again, important aspects of the unicorn legend appear to originate from the rhinoceros, a real and well-known animal. But do these connections offer true insight into the unicorn myth or is the centuries-old illusion still just leading us down the garden path?

By recounting another metaphor-laden story, the Greek Physiologus offers further explanation of the unicorn’s poison neutralizing abilities. The story here tells of a snake that poisons a watering hole so that no animal can drink from it, but then the unicorn dips its horn into the water and the water is made pure again. Combining ancient Eastern medicine with the imagery of a treacherous snake and the singular noble beast purifying the life-giving lake, this particular narrative is conspicuously well structured to insinuate that the unicorn is a representation of Jesus Christ but, strangely, it never became a popular subject for visual or literary endeavors. A few religious interpretations exist, such as an altarpiece by Hieronymus Bosch (fig. 12) from the early sixteenth century showing the Garden of Eden, with the unicorn purifying the water in the background. For the most part, the water purifying virtue of the unicorn is subordinate to his admiration of young women.

As previously discussed, the seventeenth century saw the beginning of the demise of trade in unicorn horns due to the revelation that horns being sold were from a sea creature and not a terrestrial unicorn. Aside from the undesirable commercial repercussions, the impact of the rather embarrassing revelation was slow to take hold, because there was a common Christian belief at the time that every animal in the sea had a counter-part on land. Traded in different forms throughout the world, so-called unicorn horns eventually became a collectable item, something to possess and wonder at. Pontbriand states, “the unicorn horn as collected by those in early modern Europe was viewed as an authentic object and part of a larger myriad collection of naturalia and artificialia while the unicorn as collected today is recognized as inauthentic and is often part of a collection of analogous objects.” The separation of the unicorn from its horn emphasizes how the strength of the object’s authenticity is often connected to its materiality.

Though I will return to the subject in a more focused capacity later in my study, the use of unicorns in European heraldry marks another milestone that is undervalued in the history of

103 Lavers, The Natural History of Unicorns, 234.
104 Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 56.
106 Lavers, The Natural History of Unicorns, 100.
the unicorn. The unicorn has been used in heraldry mostly in Western Europe from around the beginning of the fifteenth century, however there is no certainty as to why. Both Shepard and Freeman make a tenuous connection between the unicorn’s alleged ability to neutralize poison and the supposedly common use of poison in medieval Europe which, to me, is a completely unsatisfying response. To start with, it was not, as we have seen, the purifying legend that most captured the imaginations of artists and image-makers. Yes, unicorn horns could be absurdly expensive, but I would argue that it was as much their status in relation to the image of the virgin-loving unicorn as their so-called medicinal properties that made them valuable. The unicorn also represented all of the chivalric attributes; he was strong and fierce, yet devoted and gentle toward beautiful women. Freeman uses the device of Borso d’Este (1413-71) (fig. 13) as her only example of the use of the poison-repelling unicorn, but even here the imagery is confusing. The animals appear to be conducting their usual business even as the angry-looking unicorn dips his horn into the water to purify it, leading the viewer to wonder that the unicorn may be the villain of this story.

Margaret Freeman argues that the unicorn presented in the other famous set of unicorn tapestries, The Lady and the Unicorn, are used as a heraldic device, a mere support for the banner of the Le Viste family. The series of six medieval tapestries have been a part of the permanent collection of the Musee National du Moyen Age, formerly called the Musee de Cluny in Paris since 1882, and are believed to have been woven in the late 1400s for the French Le Viste family because all of the tapestries bear their family shield (fig. 14). These tapestries do not bear any resemblance to the Hunt of the Unicorn tapestries visually or narratively; five of the Lady tapestries are believed to be allegories of the five senses and the sixth is woven with the inscription “A Mon Seul Desir” or “to my only desire.” The unicorn is placed opposite the lion in each of these tapestries and is never focus of the piece, but appears as a companion to the Lady who is literally at the centre and is the largest figure of every tapestry in the series. Although the exact origins of this tapestry series is also a mystery, the most common presumption is that they were commissioned for a marriage.

No documented explanation has been discovered for the use of unicorns in heraldry and there seemed to be little interest in this line of research. The use of the unicorn as a heraldic device disconnects him from previous unicorn conventions; he is no longer a sacred image of Christ, but an animal, the equal to a mortal lion. Becoming further detached from its religious

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108 Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 61.
109 Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 60.
110 These tapestries are often mistaken for the Hunt of the Unicorn tapestries and vice-versa. Both sets appeared in the Harry Potter movies (www.harrypotterplaces.com) and a fictional account of the weaving of the Lady and the Unicorn tapestries written by famed art historical fiction writer Tracy Chevalier was released in 2004. Tracy Chevalier, The Lady and the Unicorn (Penguin Publishing Group, 2004).
111 Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 63.
113 Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 65.
114 Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 65.
iconographical importance, the image of the unicorn can be manipulated to project whatever quality is desired, purity, strength, love. Although heraldic conventions ensured the dignity and relative uniformity of the unicorn’s appearance, still, there is something unsettling about the removal of the unicorn from its traditional narrative trappings.

Nearing the end of the nineteenth century there were still those who searched, protesting that unicorns did, in fact, exist in the world. They were not the Christian faithful or the lovesick courtiers of earlier times, but explorers and scientists seeking knowledge and fame, men who wanted to know where the legend came from.115 Africa was considered the last uncharted wilderness in the world and so if a unicorn was going to be found, it was assumed it would be found there. Of course, no unicorns were found in Africa, then or since, but as the cradle of human civilization it is pleasing to think that the search may have indeed returned us to the origins of the unicorn myth.

Arguing against a long-held belief in the scientific community about the structure and development of the skulls and horns of cattle, in 1933 an American biologist named Franklin Dove created a unicorn. Dove’s simple but delicate operation on a one-day old Ayrshire bull resulted in the animal growing one large horn in the middle of its forehead, thus bringing a mythical creature to life.116 But what if Dove was not the first to have performed such an experiment? Research conducted by Dove himself, quoted by Lavers who then discovered further descriptions, told of a rural African practice of manipulating the horns of oxen to produce various unnatural arrangements including the creation of one large horn in the middle of the forehead.117 Could this have been the animal that started it all? Is the authentic unicorn in fact an ox? Although it is highly unlikely, the idea mirrors the more probable reality that the unicorn, passed down and reproduced through legend and myth, was created by generations of human dreams and mistranslations.

In her thesis “Unicornucopia”, Deirdre Pontbriand draws attention to the continuing fascination with the image of the unicorn today.118 Although in popular culture the unicorn is now often illustrated as a fantastical creature, coloured pink or purple and accompanied by rainbows, its popularity remains evident. Even in the gift shop of the Cloisters Museum (The Hunt of the Unicorn Tapestries are considered its most popular exhibit), the merchandise is predominantly related to anything unicorn – as represented in the tapestries as well as the kitsch version of Saturday morning cartoons (fig. 15). Were it not for the unicorn tapestries’ mythical subject, would the tapestries themselves, though admittedly of extraordinary quality, be just one among many hunting tapestries? The uniqueness of the narrative, as well as the scale and quality of the actual tapestries, are a part of why the Unicorn tapestries are so popular, but I would argue that it is the awe and mystery of the unicorn itself that continues to demand our attention.

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115 Lavers, The Natural History of Unicorns, 206.
116 Lavers, The Natural History of Unicorns, 197.
117 Lavers, The Natural History of Unicorns, 204.
The wonderful/horrible thing about a myth is its uncanny ability to resist classification. People from vastly different cultures, and socio-economic backgrounds from around the world could today all identify a unicorn, presented as a one-horned, horse-like creature. And yet, not one of these individuals could attest that their recognition of the animal was based on a real-life encounter with the magical beast. From ancient Chinese texts on justice, to Greek and Roman philosophy, medieval bestiaries, and the Bible, so convincing and pervasive has the myth of the unicorn been throughout history that it was not until the twentieth century when, after ‘discovering’ every corner of the Earth, most of mankind determined that unicorns do not exist in our natural world. Explorers, scientists, and scholars of various disciplines have sought to unravel the history of the myth and legend of the unicorn by defining which ‘real’ animal might have been its inspiration, but as Odell Shepard so elegantly puts it, “Whether there is or is not an actual unicorn … he cannot possibly be so fascinating or so important as the things men have dreamed and thought and written about him”.

In Peter S. Beagle’s novel *The Last Unicorn*, Mommy Fortuna captures the last unicorn in the world to put her on display in her “Midnight Carnival”. In the novel, only those who believe in a real unicorn can see a real unicorn, and so Mommy Fortuna must use a spell to create a fake horn on the “white mare” that everyone can see. Mommy Fortuna then lectures the unicorn, “Did you really think that those gogglers knew you for yourself without any help from me? No, I had to give you an aspect they could understand, and a horn they could see. These days, it takes a cheap carnival witch to make folk recognize a real unicorn.” There is an old adage that says “seeing is believing”, but in the history of the unicorn it is the believing that comes first.

In the next chapter I will turn towards the history of tapestry weaving and then more specifically to the Hunt of the Unicorn tapestries. The creation, history and treatment of both the original and reproduction tapestries will link the myth of the unicorn with the material reality of reproductions today.

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121 Beagle, *The Last Unicorn*, 22.
Chapter 2

Tapestry

Tapestry is the weaving by hand of weft threads, made of various materials and colours, onto a loom of warp thread, to produce a patterned textile. There are two primary types of tapestry; high warp tapestry is woven on a vertical loom, and low warp tapestry is created on a horizontal loom. In this paper I will focus on the methods and history of the high warp loom because that is the process by which the reproduction Hunt of the Unicorn tapestries were created. The European high warp loom uses two wooden rollers that are arranged horizontally, one at the top and one at the bottom, which are supported by two uprights. The sturdy warp threads, usually of wool or linen, are then wound onto and fixed to the rollers, and the warp is divided into separate sheets or series by positioning alternating warp threads further back than the others. The weaver then passes the weft, the coloured thread that will create the image, between the front and back warp threads. The back alternate warp threads are attached to a heddle rod, which enables the weaver to then pull the entire back series of threads to the front and to weave the weft threads over and under the warp threads in the opposite direction. To ensure the warp threads are covered, the weaver will use the pointed end of the bobbin, or a comb, pushing the weft threads down on the finished work. The weaver works from the back to the front, usually with several weavers working on the same tapestry at once.

It is unimaginable that the large and complex tapestry works we so admire would be created without a kind of template, and thus full scale cartoons were employed for the weavers to copy from. Margaret Freeman writes, “There are no descriptions of exactly how the fifteenth-century weavers employed the cartoons in copying the designs,” but goes on to speculate that the cartoon was likely hung behind the weavers who would turn their heads to refer to it. Madeleine Jarry explains how the outlines of the image from the cartoon were transferred onto the warp threads directly and the cartoon itself was mounted behind the weavers, who used mirrors the check the work as they progressed. And then Phyllis Ackerman and Dr. G.T. Van Ysselsteyn further confuse us by stating that the cartoons were mounted behind the loom so the weavers would be looking directly at it as they worked, this method was allegedly used for

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123 Jarry, World Tapestry, 343.
124 Although most tapestries of the time in Brussels were created on the vertical loom, it is uncertain whether the original unicorn tapestries were created on the vertical or horizontal loom. Adolfo Cavallo believes that they were created on the horizontal loom, Cavallo, The Hunt of the Unicorn Tapestries, 79.
126 Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 207.
low warp weaving, but it is also the method currently being used on the high warp loom by the weavers at Stirling Castle to complete the reproduction tapestries. I believe that it is possible, even probable, that the process of translating the image from the cartoon to the loom was influenced by the preferences of the weavers, the conditions in which they were working and the resources at their disposal.

The cartoons themselves, created by artists and not weavers (though here too there are exceptions), do not seem to be of any standard form. Some were drawn on paper, but those deteriorated quickly. Documents reveal that some artists, such as Rubens, provided conventional paintings of tempora and later, oil on canvas, that were not produced with specific consideration of the challenges of the tapestry medium. These oil sketches would have to be transcribed or re-interpreted. On the other hand, Aldolfo Cavallo writes that painters would sometimes paint onto “a fabric with a pronounced horizontal rib to suggest the ribbed texture that is characteristic of true tapestry weave”. Such painted hangings were often used in place of the real tapestry, until special occasions, in order to reduce wear on the expensive woven artifact. While painted replicas may have implications for forgery, it would be difficult not to notice the difference between a woven image and a painted one, no matter how skilfully done. Furthermore, as popular tapestry cartoons were often re-used, it would be the interpretation of the weaver who would lend the image its final character. Since both weavers and cartoon artists remain largely anonymous, the craftsmanship, materials and imagery must speak for the tapestry’s authenticity.

Although tapestry can be employed for many different purposes, to create useful items like clothing and blankets; the medium is chiefly associated with grand wall-hangings of the late Medieval and early Renaissance periods. It is true that Medieval and Renaissance tapestries could perform the practical function of insulation in a drafty castle, however, the delicacy and expense of the materials as well as the extraordinary craftsmanship used to produce what we can confidently describe as works of art, all but overrules the pragmatics of their use. Easily transported, versatile and very expensive, these tapestries were the ultimate status symbol, uniquely tailored to represent the owner’s vision, not the artist’s.

From the Beginning

Like the unicorn, the origins of the art of weaving extend beyond our documented history. There is evidence of weaving practices around 2000 BC in Egypt, by the ancient Greeks, in Pre-Colombian Peru and in China the k’o-ssu tapestry, woven in silk, was developed from

129 Freeman, *The Unicorn Tapestries*, 207.
130 Freeman, *The Unicorn Tapestries*, 176.
about the eighth century. Unfortunately, because of the delicate nature of textiles and the wear and tear of their regular use, little or nothing remains of the earliest examples from most parts of the world, except for some woven fabrics from Egyptian and Peruvian tombs that have been well preserved due to the extremely dry conditions. We are aware, however, of the importance of weaving from various myths, epic poetry, and painted depictions of weavers and looms. Phyllis Ackerman aptly writes, “Weaving was devised so far back in the history of humanity that almost every people has attributed its invention to a goddess who remained the utmost mistress and patron of the art, but its earliest history can be only glimpsed at long intervals, darkly.”

One of the most well-known stories is that of Minerva and Arachne, found in book six of Ovid’s Metamorphoses, written around the beginning of the first century AD in Rome, which tells of a challenge between the goddess Minerva and the mortal Arachne, who dared to brag that she was more skilled than the goddess. Here the loom is described in great detail:

“Immediately they both position themselves, in separate places, and stretch out the fine threads, for the warp, over twin frames. The frame is fastened to the cross-beam; the threads of warp separated with the reed; the thread of the weft is inserted between, in the pointed shuttles that their fingers have readied; and, drawn through the warp, the threads of weft are beaten into place, struck by the comb’s notched teeth.”

The specifics here are uncannily similar to the later European high warp loom, and further research would no doubt uncover more about the translation as well as possible correlations of the myth with popular medieval ideas about tapestry. What most interests me is the portrayal of the weaver as a skilled artist (fig. 16). Luther Hooper argues that the Greeks and Romans tended to romanticise weaving as a feminine domestic skill, but that the Romans regularly used slave labour for producing their textiles.

Whether high warp tapestry was performed in Europe before the time of the first crusades we do not know, but it is theorized that the discovery of dazzling textiles woven with silks from the Persians seemed to inspire those who returned from their holy journeys. Like the trajectory taken by the legend of the unicorn, so far as we can discern, the practice of modern high warp tapestry weaving moved from East to West around the ninth century of the Christian era. Again, no tapestries remain from this early period and primary sources are wanting, though it is probable that weaving was practiced at least on a domestic scale. It is not until the fourteenth

135 Jarry, World Tapestry, 9.
136 Jarry, World Tapestry, 16.
138 Ackerman, Tapestry The Mirror of Civilization, 1.
140 Hooper, “The Technique of Greek and Roman Weaving,” 278.
141 Van Ysselsteyn, Tapestry The Most Expensive Industry of the XVth and XVIth Centuries, 10., Jarry, World Tapestry, 25
century that tapestry begins to appear as a commercial art, and with it, the challenges of large-scale productions.

Not unlike the painter’s studios of Renaissance Italy, the tapestry studio became an early kind of ‘mass’ manufacturing, generating a lucrative economy for the dyers, the traders, the artists and various other specialized and general laborers. Paris was an early centre for textile production and documents reveal that in 1302 regular tapestry weavers, or *haute lisseurs* belonged to the guild of Tapisseries Sarrazinois. The original meaning of the term *tapisserie sarrazinoise* is still unclear, but Phyllis Ackerman assures us that the guild statutes forbid pregnant woman from working as *tapisserie sarrazinoise* lest they injure themselves, which she believes is more likely when using the horizontal, or low warp loom.\(^{142}\) Highlighting the difficulty of establishing a clear history of tapestry weaving in Europe, Madeleine Jarry, whose book “World Tapestry” was published in 1968, writes that the earliest known ordinance regulating tapestry is from Tournai in 1398,\(^ {143}\) while in her book “Tapestry: The Mirror of Civilization” (1933) Phyllis Ackerman states that the first Tournai law for tapestry on record regarding tapestry dates from 1377.\(^ {144}\) Whether we attribute the discrepancies in re-counting the facts to flawed academics or conflicting evidence, it reinforces the uncertainty with which we interpret the past.

For a tapestry studio to be productive it needed access to both materials and patrons. One of the earliest successful studios, after Paris, was built in Arras, Northern France, as it was already a wealthy trade city and artistic centre.\(^ {145}\) At Arras, many of the most precious threads, such as silk, would have been imported\(^ {146}\) and without the investments of the wealthy the studio would not last long as it was the manufacturer who paid the costs up front, not those who placed the orders.\(^ {147}\) As a result of the seemingly constant warfare, religious reformations and persecutions, and altering royal alliances of the fourteenth century, skilled weavers were soon seeking greener pastures in centres such as Lille, Mantua and even Rome. Other centres such as Ghent, Tournai and Brussels rose to prominence by the end of the fifteenth century.\(^ {148}\)

As to be expected in such a highly skilled, luxury trade, the rise of guilds with codes of conduct and laws governing the industry became more and more complicated. Around the year 1448 (again there are inconsistencies in the dates\(^ {149}\) ), tapestry weavers in Brussels formed their own corporation and in 1451 their statutes are recorded. It seems in Brussels there were strict rules governing not only who could be a master weaver, but also the working hours and how

\(^{142}\) Ackerman, *Tapestry The Mirror of Civilization*, 312.
\(^{143}\) Jarry, *World Tapestry*, 54.
\(^{144}\) Ackerman, *Tapestry The Mirror of Civilization*, 313.
\(^{146}\) Ackerman, *Tapestry The Mirror of Civilization*, 13.
\(^{147}\) Ackerman, *Tapestry The Mirror of Civilization*, 14.
\(^{149}\) Jarry, *World Tapestry*, 97.
many apprentices a master could employ. Late in the fifteenth century the weavers of Brussels were in a dispute with the cartoon designers as the weavers had begun to design their own cartoons. Documents indicate that it was finally agreed that the weavers would be allowed to draw “textiles, trees, boats, animals, and grasses for their verdures” and that they could complete or correct the cartoons themselves “with charcoal, chalk, or pen”. This would prove to be only the beginning of concerns regarding artistic authority and ownership.

As the fame and price of the Brussels tapestries grew, so did the formalization of the work hierarchy and of the studio’s need for protection against fraud. Guilds dictated not only the rights and responsibilities of the master and apprentice weavers, but the rates of pay for different aspects of the work. There is some evidence that weaving flesh and faces were more highly paid tasks than work done on landscape and costume as it was considered more delicate work. As the previously discussed agreement between weavers and cartoon designers in Brussels subtly implied, there was certainly some animosity between the two professions. By all accounts it was standard practice that the cartoons became the property of the weavers or manufacturer upon delivery, and workshops would re-use cartoons often for popular works and even sell them to other workshops or wealthy collectors. In 1528 a new regulation was enacted in Brussels requiring each tapestry produced there to include the Brussels Brabant, a red shield between two letter B’s, in the borders of their tapestries (fig. 17).

The inclusion of a tapestry studio or weaver’s mark became required on all tapestries produced in the Low Countries after an edict issued by King Charles V in 1544. These ‘logos’ became symbols of quality and status, not unlike the high-end fashion brands we see today. In her book “Luxury Arts of the Renaissance”, Maria Belozerskaya discusses various ways in which a weaver could make their mark on a tapestry, including “Janni Rost, the Fleming employed first by Ercole d’Este and then Cosimo i de’Medici, “signed” his tapestries with a roast on a spit” (fig. 18), a practice she says was common at the time and provided the dual functions of authenticating and advertising a weaver’s work. No doubt much of the reasoning behind the standardized labelling was to thwart potential forgeries, to protect the quality reputation of the workshop and the resulting monetary value of their tapestries. Although a few scholars make brief mention of an incident involving “unscrupulous” weavers in Antwerp in the sixteenth century, I have not found any verifiable facts on the matter. With such known identifiers it is

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150 Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 218.
151 Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 208.
152 Jarry, World Tapestry, 142.
154 Jarry, World Tapestry, 139.. Margaret Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 218.
155 Jarry, World Tapestry, 140.
156 Belozerskaya, Luxury Arts of the Renaissance, 128.
reasonable to question why the origins of so many of the tapestries left to us today remain a mystery.

Tapestries were a fantastic medium for the rich and powerful to define their spaces and express themselves. They adorned not only the grand castles and houses of the time but also travelled with their owners to celebrations and wars, reinforcing pertinent ideologies and messages. Documents prove that Charles of Burgundy, for example, brought a tapestry titled *Triumph of Caesar* to war in 1476–1477 (fig. 22). But the narrative and iconography presented in the tapestries were only a part of the statement, and these could be easily reproduced by recycling the cartoons. The size, materials, technique and workmanship all communicated the wealth and status of a tapestry’s owner - even in medieval times, the medium could be the message. A work woven in silks with silver and gold threads might only be brought out for specific occasions or festivals, or to honour a special guest, while the wool cartoon or another lesser valued tapestry stood in for regular use. Not only did this practice minimize wear on the expensive materials it also gave the tapestry an aura of power. Today we are used to being able to see objects located anywhere in the world whenever we want with the click of a mouse or the tap of a screen, so it is difficult (if not impossible) to understand what it would have felt like to see one of these magnificent tapestries for the first time. Imagine the impact of such an experience and the influence of the individual in possession of that power.

While it is important to study the well documented commissions designed by famous painters for kings and queens, it is short-sighted to assume that the vast quantity of tapestries recorded in the inventories of wealthy fifteenth and sixteenth century households were all unique, personally commissioned works. Making the point that luxury tapestries were first and foremost artifacts of social and political influence Belozerskaya demonstrates that tapestries, both new and used, were also readily available at markets, like the gallery she describes in Antwerp that was specially built to display large hangings. Examples of the personalization of non-commissioned tapestries can be seen in some of the remaining hangings we have today; “The arms of Bohier and his wife have been rewoven into the finished body of the tapestry: an indication of a premade hanging personalized after purchase, a common practice at the time.” Just like today, ‘uniqueness’ was valued so far as it maintained or increased the power and influence of the object or owner but was readily discarded when financially or politically advantageous. In short, tapestries were the perfect branding tool; the owner could exert full control over the size and substance of the audience as well as the reproduction of the image/message itself.

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Even if today we do not see cartoons as copies, the need for proprietary rights and their careful re-use proves that unique, made-to-order works were not the only or even perhaps the most profitable work for the tapestry studios of fifteenth and sixteenth century Europe. The practise of weaving identifying marks into the tapestries is a reminder to us that, in the end, it was the skill and responsibility of the weaver to translate the image from the cartoon to the loom. Without the cartoons to compare them against it is impossible to know how much artistic liberty was taken by the weaver in a particular tapestry, if it is a true copy or an imaginative interpretation.

The History of the Original Hunt of the Unicorn Tapestries

As discussed earlier, there are no known records concerning the commission, creation or original owner of the *Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestries now at the Cloisters. Based on the style and quality of the imagery, as well as the fashion of the figures and the plants, scholars have mostly agreed that they were created sometime between 1495 and 1505 in one of the major tapestry-weaving centres such as Paris or Brussels. The earliest mention we have of the tapestries is in an inventory made in March of 1680 detailing the contents of the Paris town house of the late Francois VI de La Rochefoucauld. The 1680 inventory, made shortly after the death of Francois VI, records a set of seven tapestries depicting a unicorn hunt, valued at 150 Livres, their measurements roughly matching with those of the tapestries exhibited at The Cloisters today. The tapestries appear again in 1728, in an inventory following the death of Francois VIII de La Rochefoucauld, at the family’s chateau in Verteuil. By 1728 the inventory describes the tapestries as half-worn out and ripped, five were displayed in a bedroom and the other two were in a storage room, and they were valued at only 45 Livres. The two inventories tell us that sometime between 1680 and 1728 the tapestries were moved and had suffered a good deal of damage.

Although the de La Rochefoucauld family escaped to England, and later the United States, the chateau Verteuil was looted during the Reign of Terror in 1793. Interestingly, documents reveal that the Committee of Public Safety advised its local counterpart to “Examine these old tapestries. Respect them because they show no signs of royalty; they contain stories,” and the unicorn tapestries were saved from complete destruction. In the 1850’s the de La Rochefoucaulds began searching for and purchasing back their lost property. By another stroke of luck, the unicorn tapestries were reported by a local woman whose husband had been using them to cover vegetables in their barn, and by 1856 the tapestries had been restored and placed in a salon of the chateau. Most of the incongruous elements of the original tapestries, such as the

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164 Freeman, *The Unicorn Tapestries*, 220.
166 Freeman, *The Unicorn Tapestries*, 223.
missing AE in the lower left corner of the seventh tapestry, are attributed to these restorations, though no records remain of exactly why and to what extent the tapestries were altered.167

During the nineteenth century a few privileged French writers recorded their impressions of the tapestries, always in glowing praise. Though the tapestries had been worn and repaired, they maintained, it seems, their ability to inspire awe and admiration. In 1888 historian Xavier Barbier de Montault wrote about the unicorn tapestries and specified that one was more worn than the rest and that one fragment had been “transformed into a portiere.”168 By 1912 the reports describe only six magnificent tapestries at the chateau Verteuil and do not mention any fragments.

In 1922 Comte Aimery de La Rochefoucauld allowed art dealer Edouard Larcade to exhibit the six tapestries at the Anderson Galleries in New York, where John D. Rockefeller Jr. viewed and purchased them. The tapestries hung in a specially designed room of Rockefeller’s New York City home from 1923 to 1937, when they were transferred to the newly built Cloisters Museum in Fort Tryon Park.169 An article in the New York Times published on April 4, 1935, announces Rockefeller’s donation of the six unicorn tapestries as “the most important individual addition ever made to the Cloisters collection.”170 Rockefeller not only donated the tapestries but also financed the entire construction of the new Cloisters Museum (previously located at 698 Fort Washington Avenue) and donated the four acres of land on which the new museum was built. According to a statement by George Blumenthal, then President of the Metropolitan museum, Rockefeller’s plans for the new museum had been in the works since 1931, and at least on his mind since 1930 when he reserved the four acres for that purpose from a fifty-six acre tract of land he donated to the city for use as a park.171

During construction of the new Cloisters Museum the curator of the Department of Medieval Art, William H. Forsyth, discovered from Comte Gabriel de La Rochefoucauld that fragments existed of another unicorn tapestry. These fragments were supposedly being used to plug crevices in the walls, although there are other varying accounts of their treatment.172 The fragments were purchased from the Comte and quickly prepared to be exhibited along with the other six tapestries in May, 1938.173 Although they are displayed as two fragments, The Mystic Hunt actually arrived at the Cloisters in three pieces, nailed to a backboard.174 On close

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167 Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 223.
168 Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 224.
169 Cavallo, The Unicorn Tapestries at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 17.
171 Linn, “Costly Museum Cloister To Be Built by Rockefeller.”
172 Kathrin Colburn, “Three Fragments of the Mystic Capture of the Unicorn Tapestry,” Metropolitan Museum Journal 45 (2010): 97., Margaret Freeman, however, states that Marquise de Amodio, the daughter of Count Gabriel, told her that she “recalled that the fragments had been in Paris, framed and under glass, as long as she could remember.” Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 227-28.
174 Colburn, “Three Fragments,” 103.
inspection it is possible to discern a seam on the fragment with the maiden and the unicorn that connects the sky and upper portion of the tree foliage above the maiden’s head to the rest. When they were initially exhibited a bottom portion of the maiden and unicorn fragment was hidden so that it was squared off with the other fragment, giving a more aesthetically pleasing, though decidedly deceptive, presentation.\footnote{Colburn, “Three Fragments,” 99.}

The original room designed and built in 1938 for the unicorn tapestries at the new Cloisters Museum was a long gallery that Mr. Rockefeller later admitted he felt was inadequate to display the true splendor of the artifacts. After the war, during which time the tapestries were hidden away outside of New York City, Margaret Freeman writes poetically, “I was requested by Mr. Rockefeller to do a “little thinking and dreaming” about the possibility of a different installation that would recapture the impression of colorful richness that the tapestries once gave him.”\footnote{Freeman, \textit{The Unicorn Tapestries}, 228.} The redesign of the room incorporated a very large fireplace from Alencon and a fifteenth century window from Cluny to give the visitor the impression of viewing the tapestries in a “medieval grand chamber.”\footnote{Freeman, \textit{The Unicorn Tapestries}, 228.}

In 1998, the room of the unicorn tapestries at the Cloisters again underwent renovation, and the tapestries were transported to a conservation room at the Metropolitan Museum of Art where textile conservator Katherin Colburn and her team began what would be one of the most pivotal restorations to date. The fabric backings protecting the tapestries were removed revealing the mirror image, only in the rich and bright colours of a work untouched by sunlight. Before a new backing of cotton sateen re-covered the reverse sides it was decided that both the front and backs of the tapestries should be photographed and stored digitally, a step closer to the Metropolitan’s goal of having a hi-resolution image of every object in the Museum’s collection.\footnote{Richard Preston, "Capturing the Unicorn - The New Yorker," \textit{The New Yorker}, April 11, 2005. Accessed March 30, 2014. http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/04/11/capturing-the-unicorn.} The files for the unicorn tapestry photographs had to be stored on more than two hundred CDs and unfortunately at the time, the technology available could not process the immense amount of data so the CDs were set aside.

It was not until 2003, when a serendipitous meeting between an art historian and a mathematician brought the photographs to brothers Gregory and David Chudnovsky. After three months of computations on the Chudnovsky’s homemade supercomputer, the digital tile photographs of \textit{The Unicorn in Captivity} were finally assembled into a flawless hi-resolution image. What was discovered during the process of photographing and storing the images of the original unicorn tapestries was not simply a mathematical process, but a quality of realness in the artifacts themselves. The challenge had been the result of the minute but constant shifting of the
tapestry threads even as they lay on the Metropolitan’s laboratory floor, Gregory quotes, “Tapestry is like water … Water has no permanent shape.”

Since their arrival at the Cloisters the unicorn tapestries have been cleaned, restored, and studied extensively. The repairs and restorations made to the original unicorn tapestries during their time there are well documented, and like any detailed historical account they are a fascinating study, revealing the effects of changes in technology and principles on the practice of art conservation over the better part of a century. The West Dean weavers researching for the reproductions began their work in 2002 and had access to all of the information from the Cloisters archives, and once complete, to the digital images as well.

The Objects

The original seven unicorn tapestries are all generally considered to be a part of the same series because our earliest recorded evidence describes them as such, because they are thematically compatible, and because the initials A and E bound together with a cord appear in the same manner on all of them. Despite the appearance of cohesiveness in their display at the Cloisters, there has always been a debate as to the proper sequencing of the original tapestries, or whether all seven were intended to be displayed as one unified set at all. While I will not be adding my own opinion to that discussion, the ambiguity attributed to the tapestries’ arrangement is worth further exploration as it must have an impact on how the reproductions are to be interpreted as well.

The superficially accepted sequence of the tapestries begins with “The Start of the Hunt” (fig. 19), and follows along a logical path with “The Unicorn is Found” (fig. 20), “The Unicorn Leaps Out of the Stream” (fig. 21), “The Unicorn at Bay” (fig. 22) with the action progressing in much the same manner as medieval stag hunt. It is at this point that the plot appears to switch from that of a medieval hunt to “The Mystic Hunt” in the two fragments of “The Mystic Capture of the Unicorn” (fig. 23a and 23b), where the sleeve that we imagine belongs to the arm of a virgin maiden can be seen laid on the neck of the unicorn who seems not to notice the two hounds tearing into the flesh of its back, a somewhat startling development. The “Mystic Capture” is then followed, just as incongruously, by “The Unicorn is Killed and Brought to the Castle” (fig. 24) where the entrancing maidens disappear and we become witness to both the fatal stabbing of the unicorn by three hunters as well as the transportation of its corpse to a castle. Finally, despite just being killed, the unicorn is shown confined but alive and at rest in “The Unicorn in Captivity” (fig. 25).

The common elements of the unicorn legends are present, the unicorn dips its horn into the stream of the second tapestry, presumably to purify the water, and the unicorn is captivated.

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179 Preston, “Capturing the Unicorn.”
180 Freeman, The Unicorn Tapestries, 101.
by a maiden in the fifth, but they seem to take more of a supporting role in the narrative, which focuses primarily on the actions of the noble hunters. According to Margaret Freeman the narrative stated above follows the accepted authority on medieval stag hunts, the *Livre de chasse* written by Gaston Phebus, comte de Foix in 1387. Helmut Nickel disagrees, arguing the “Unicorn at Bay” should precede “The Mystic Capture”, followed by “The Unicorn Leaps out of the Stream,” and “The Unicorn is Killed and Brought to the Castle.” Nickel applies his interpretation of successful medieval hunting strategy to the action portrayed in the tapestry, attempting to bolster his claims by noting that his sequencing would also result in a more symmetrical, and therefore more aesthetically pleasing arrangement. I should also note, for both accuracy and interest’s sake that the names given to the tapestries have varied over time and between the leading scholars. I have used the same names throughout this paper for clarity; the variations seem to be the result of the interpretation of the content of the individual tapestry, for example “The Unicorn Leaps out of the Stream” is also referred to as “The Unicorn Tries to Escape” by Helmut Nickel.

One of the most obvious problems facing art historians is that the first and last tapestries, “The Start of the Hunt” and “The Unicorn in Captivity,” are of a noticeably different style than the rest. The backgrounds of these two tapestries are covered entirely in small plants that all appear to be on one flat plane, a style that is commonly referred to as *millefleurs*. The backgrounds of the other five tapestries however, have distinct landscapes with trees, a stream, hills and castles that are all modeled to give a sense of depth. Adolfo Salvatore Cavallo argues that the original tapestries are not in fact one coherent series, but are combined from three different sets based on the following themes: *The Hunt of the Unicorn as Lover, The Hunt of the Unicorn as an Allegory of the Passion,* and *The Mystic Hunt of the Unicorn.* According to Cavallo the first and last tapestries are likely a part of a different series depicting the hunt of the unicorn as an allegory of love and marriage, the fragments of *The Mystic Hunt* were a part of a large, unrelated devotional tapestry, and the remaining four tapestries portrayed the Christian allegory of the Passion.

Details regarding the accuracy of the plants, the expressions of the figures and the quality of the workmanship have inspired speculation that some of the tapestries were created by different weavers, in a different workshop, or may have even added to the series at a later date. Margaret Freeman theorized that there may have been more than one painter creating the designs and more than one cartoonist rendering those designs into the final cartoons. Unlike many

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181 Freeman, *The Unicorn Tapestries*, 92.
182 Helmut Nickel, “About the Sequence of the Tapestries in *The Hunt of the Unicorn* and *The Lady with the Unicorn,*” *The Metropolitan Museum Journal* 17 (1984): 11
183 Nickel, “About the Sequence of the Tapestries in *The Hunt of the Unicorn* and *The Lady with the Unicorn,*” 11.
184 Cavallo, “*The Unicorn Tapestries at The Metropolitan Museum of Art,*” 32-75.
185 Freeman posits that the set may have been designed for a bed chamber – accounting for the difference of the two mille feuilles tapestries, Freeman, *The Unicorn Tapestries*, 178.
186 Freeman, *The Unicorn Tapestries*, 177.
previous scholars Thomas Campbell proposes a more guarded approach, given the scant
information we have he urges caution in making assumptions regarding the inclusion and
exclusion of the first and last tapestries. Campbell writes, “We simply do not know enough about
late medieval workshop practices and the contemporary perception of uniformity and
consistency of style to assume that what strikes us as stylistic disjunction would necessarily have
appeared so to medieval viewers.” Whatever the interpretation, it is clear that without some
new miraculous discovery the mystery of the original tapestries will not soon be unravelled.

I have here given only the most basic observations of the tapestry world that will be
useful in my examination of the two sets of unicorn tapestries. Assuming that all things created
are tied to, or reflexive of, the context in which they are created, it is important to remember that
the golden years of tapestry creation were at a time of great economic, social and even
environmental turbulence. The intricacies of tapestry production, the acquisition of materials,
funding, and necessary administrative tasks required to support such an industry were further
complicated by ongoing wars, religious persecution and changing loyalties throughout Europe.
Completing their work without the benefits of electric lights, indoor plumbing or next day
shipping, the weavers created stunning artworks that continue to fascinate us.

How these circumstances affected the tapestries themselves is an important aspect of this
study. Caron Penney argues that the twenty-first century reproductions cannot be authentic
copies because the weavers of today can never fully step into the shoes of those who created the
originals. Authenticity, Penney says, “is in the experience of the people who have dedicated
their time to making these tapestries.” If this is the case, then how are we to feel about the
original tapestries, whose creators remain a complete mystery to us today, when juxtaposed with
the well-documented interpretations? I will next explore Stirling Castle’s renovations and the
new Hunt of the Unicorn tapestries in detail, discussing important deviations from the original
tapestries and their implications for the original unicorn tapestries.

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of Art, 2002), 78.
188 Penney, “Rediscovering the *Unicorn* Tapestries,” 154.
189 Penney, “Rediscovering the *Unicorn* Tapestries,” 158.
Chapter 3
Reproductions

Built at the top of a rocky crag overlooking the River Forth, Stirling Castle’s past extends beyond Scotland’s recorded history. Rumours claim that it originated as a British fort and as a fabled stronghold of King Arthur, but no credible evidence has been found to confirm either story. The first documented mention of Stirling Castle is from the reign of Alexander I, King of Scotland from 1107 to 1124, regarding the construction of a new chapel. Alexander I died at Stirling Castle and was succeeded by David I who made Stirling one of his primary residences. Overlooking the fields of Bannockburn, Stirling Castle became a popular seat for the Scottish royal court, due in no small part to its strategic location in what is known as the gateway to the highlands. Historic Scotland’s twenty-first century renovation of the Palace at Stirling Castle was meant to restore it to the grandeur achieved in the 1540s, during the first years of the life of Mary Queen of Scots. King James V began construction of the palace in the 1530s using the substantial dowries he received from both his first marriage to the frail Madeleine de Valois, who died within weeks of arriving in Scotland, and his second marriage to Marie de Guise. After James’ death in 1542, only a week after the birth of their daughter Mary, the widowed Marie de Guise continued the renovations at Stirling, her dower house, creating a royal residence “of astonishing grandeur and sophistication”.

Mary Queen of Scots, her son King James VI and his son Prince Henry all spent their first childhood years at Stirling, but the joining of the crowns of Scotland and England under James VI in 1603 left the castle without a court and signaled the beginning Stirling’s of a long decline. Although troops had been stationed there since the late-seventeenth century during various incidents of civil unrest, in the 1790s the castle was converted into an army barracks and from 1881 to 1964 it was officially designated a military depot. Nearly two hundred years of military occupation resulted in the disappearance or destruction of most of the castle’s luxurious furnishings and a good deal of its architectural heritage. In the 1990s, after conducting extensive documentary and archaeological research, Historic Scotland began work to restore Stirling Castle. Renovations of James IV’s Great Hall were completed in 1999 before Historic Scotland turned their attention to the Palace apartments undertaking a creative ‘modern’ approach to the preservation and presentation of this historic monument.

190 Eric Stair-Kerr, *Stirling Castle Its Place in Scottish History* (Glasgow : James Maclehose and Sons, 1913), 5.
Another significant reproduction project was carried out for Stirling Palace at the same time as the unicorn tapestries, but with a more authentic connection. Extensive research was conducted on the “Stirling Heads” a series of carved oak roundel portraits, which were described by visitors to Stirling in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is unknown how many carvings there were initially but thirty-four of the originals have survived to today, two were destroyed in a fire in 1940 and fragments remain of others. The carvings were in the ceiling of the King’s Inner Hall until around 1777 when one or more fell and it was decided to take the entire ceiling down to turn the room into another army barrack. The original heads were dispersed to various people, and some ended up in the Stirling Jail where they were discovered by Jane Ferrier who collected and created detailed sketches of each, which were then published in Lacunar Strevelinense in 1817. The Heads depict various real and mythical people, from King James IV to Hercules, Julius Caesar and the figure of a court jester, and Historic Scotland has taken the bold step of creating a unique portrait of its own inspired by one of the statues outside the palace. The reproductions of the Stirling Heads have been installed where the original carvings once were, in the ceiling of the renovated King’s Hall (fig. 26), and a special display has been constructed on the upper floor of the palace to exhibit the originals so that they incur no further damage (fig. 27).

The renovated Palace at Stirling has an uncanny feel to it. In some places, such as the hallway leading to the Outer Chambers, the old stone walls have been left bare as a reminder that it is in fact a 600 year old building. The Palace Apartments however, have been dramatically restored with elaborate murals made to look like curtains and trompe d’oeil painted ceilings (fig. 28). While the costumed guides are extremely knowledgeable and approachable, the fact of their costume does create an immediate barrier between them and the visitor, as if they were a part of the exhibit and somehow not connected to the present state of the Scottish landmark. The old castle kitchens have also been re-set to appear as a working kitchen from the sixteenth century with realistic, life-sized mannequins depicting the action (fig. 29). An Impact Case Study published by the Stirling Palace Academic Research Committee notes that Stirling Castle was named in the 2013 Lonely Planet guide book as one of Europe’s top 40 “amazing experiences,” and that “Visitor numbers increased by 17% and annual revenue by £1M in the year after the reopening of the Palace.”

Mary Stuart, who became the Queen of Scotland when only six days old, is one of the most popular symbols of Scotland and Scottish identity, her legend asserting the stateless

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195 Harrison, Rebirth of a Palace, 132.
196 Lacunar Strevelinense details the collection of heads, etched and engraved after the carved work which formerly decorated the roof of the king’s room in Stirling Castle. Jane Ferrier Grahame, Lacunar Strevelinense (Unknown Binding, 1817), 4-5.
198 Museum caption at Stirling Castle, visited September 27, 2014.
nation’s distinction and defiance from England. As the early childhood home of the famous Queen, Stirling Palace can claim a part of Scotland’s identity even though its use as a royal residence ended several hundred years ago. The Palace was founded by Mary’s father, James V, and completed by her mother, Marie de Guise. Published in 1835, “A New Description of the Town and Castle of Stirling” describes the palace as “a singular but superb style of architecture”, and even during its time as an army depot the castle was a popular draw for tourists. Scotland’s official tourism organization, Visit Scotland, advertises an itinerary called the “Mary Queen of Scots Trail.” In the description of this itinerary Visit Scotland states: “Mary Queen of Scots is the most famous, most intriguing and most studied of all Scottish monarchs,” and encourages tourists to “Follow this trail around some of Scotland's finest castles and ruins, to discover where Mary lived, hid and died.” New documentaries and the trendy television series Reign are evidence of the continuing interest in the late queen. It is clear that Historic Scotland chose to portray Stirling Palace during its artistic, economic and political height in the 1540s to entice visitors and to encourage them to see Scotland as an artistic, economic and political power for today.

Most of the research for the Heads, the tapestries and the interior furnishings for Stirling Palace was conducted by Dr. Sally Rush of the University of Glasgow. Dr. Rush is a Senior Lecturer in Art History at the University of Glasgow and her research interests are stated as “Decorative Arts of the 19th and 20th centuries, with special reference to stained glass” and “Stirling Palace Academic Research Consultancy.” Although her list of published works is consistent with the research interests and her work on Stirling Palace, Dr. Rush is also named as a Co-Investigator for the Staging and Representing the Scottish Renaissance Court project, completed in 2014. The project overview document made available on the project’s website describes the project thus:

“Staging and Representing the Scottish Renaissance Court’ was a two year, AHRC funded interdisciplinary research project which staged A Satire of the Three Estates as

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203 Reign is described as a “fantasy history” television program that revolves around the teenage and early adult life of Mary, Queen of Scots. Created by Stephanie SenGupta and Laurie McCarthy, airs on The CW and premiered as part of the 2013–14 American television season.
204 University of Glasgow, “Restoration of Stirling Castle Palace: Providing insight into life at the royal court,” 1.
part of a wider investigation of the Scottish Renaissance and Stewart court in relation to modern images of national identity, and the Scottish past.”

The overview goes on to say that academics from across the United Kingdom as well as interpreters from Historic Scotland participated in the three year-long venture that incorporated high definition video and an open access website to engage the Scottish community and reclaim the play “as living culture, relevant to contemporary Scottish lives.” The description of Staging as “living culture,” is also the perfect analogy for the visitor’s experience at Stirling Castle, and given the involvement of the same researchers and government agency there is a sound argument to be made that the same goals were pursued in the renovations of Stirling Palace.

The curation of culture, as is the occupation of any museum or historic site, is a mess of arguments for and against historical accuracy, economic and social value, conservation and practice that is constantly re-evaluated by scholars, governments and communities alike. In his book on the Scottish tourist industry, “Scotland – the Brand” David McCrone, Angela Morris and Richard Kiely illustrate the ways in which particularly glamorous or popular icons of Scottish identity, such as Nessie the Loch Ness Monster, have become symbols of Scottish heritage despite the fact that they do not offer any real insights into Scotland’s history or identity. McCrone, Morris and Kiely claim that authenticity has become an easily manufactured commodity, and that it “is conferred by interpretation, not the object per se.”

It is evident that Historic Scotland and those involved in the renovation of Stirling Palace considered the performance of history and culture of the utmost importance in realizing a sense of authenticity. With this insight we can look at Stirling’s new Hunt of the Unicorn tapestries as both objects and agents of authenticity, their significance reliant on the realization of the Castle as a whole.

The New Hunt of the Unicorn Tapestry Project

The new Hunt of the Unicorn tapestries for the Stirling Palace apartments were created in parallel with the Palace renovations but were researched and financed as a separate project. The tapestries were funded by donations from the public, and by a significant donation from the Quinque Foundation, a charitable organization founded by the Buchanan family of Rhode Island to support the preservation and conservation of historic monuments. Hellen Buchanan, founder of the Quinque Foundation, had both a passion for art conservation and for Stirling after

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208 An Evaluation of Lyndsay’s Theatrical Time Machine,” 3.
marrying and running a local Estate there. Once it was decided to restore the Palace to its historical fifteenth century state, inventories for the court and kings of that period were consulted to determine what kind of furnishings would be appropriate. According to Sally Rush the inventories of King James V from 1439 list two sets of unicorn tapestries of six and eight pieces respectively. Although I could not obtain access to the earliest documents myself, Scottish inventories made available online that date from 1488 describe tapestries of various themes including a history of Troy, Perseus, Aeneas and “the unicorne.” In this later inventory only one set of unicorn tapestries is mentioned, consisting of five pieces and presumed to be an amalgamation of the remaining tapestries from the two series recorded earlier.

Why choose unicorn tapestries over the other tapestries in James’ inventory? Though not often associated with Scotland or Scottish heritage, the unicorn has been a part of the Scottish arms since about 1426 (fig. 30) and sometime around 1484 King James III (1460-1488) created gold coins called ‘unicorns’, which depicted a unicorn supporting a shield of the royal arms on one side (fig. 31). I do not presume to have any great knowledge about the intricacies of Scottish heraldry and, interestingly, Romily Squire, the Herald Painter to the Court of Lord Lyon, characterizes heraldry in the 1500s thus: “just like today, many probably had not a clue about heraldry. The artists didn’t understand it either, so coats of arms were often badly drawn.” I was told by one of the docents at Stirling that it is important to remember that a noble would change their arms to show marriages and alliances (as exhibited by the various different arms in the Stirling apartments), and if the practices of today are any reflection of the past, arms could also be changed for political or artistic motives as well.

Unicorns appear on market crosses throughout Scotland, and it is commonly believed that they are meant to symbolize royal authority. Like most wealthy nobles of the time King James’ inventory indicates that he also owned “ane unicorne horne fet in gold.” But as I said, the unicorn is not often associated with Scotland or Scottish heritage and none of the history noted above is referenced by Historic Scotland or the media to justify choosing the unicorn tapestries for such a prestigious venture. The listings of one or two sets of unicorn tapestries in the inventories of King James IV and King James V are the only pretext given for the project and, in truth, I can only speculate as to why this particular subject was singled out. In her 2013 interview, Zoya Mirzaghitova pointedly asks weaver Ruth Jones “Why did Historic Scotland

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212 Penney, “Rediscovering the Unicorn Tapestries,” 148.
213 Thomson, A Collection of Royal Inventories, 49-50.
214 Katie Stevenson, “The Unicorn, St Andrew and the Thistle: Was There an Order of Chivalry in Late Medieval Scotland,” The Scottish Historical Review 1, no. 83 (2004): 12.
217 Thomson, A Collection of Royal Inventories, 9.
undertake this project?” Jones answers, “One branch of Scottish heritage is preserved through the pride and feeling of distinctness from mainstream English customs felt by the Scots,” an observation that is at once ambiguous and loaded with implications of a conflict between history and representation.

**Scottish Tapestry**

Despite the claims in an enthusiastic little pamphlet that was written, edited, published and printed in 1992 by W.T. Johnston, about whom I could find no information, Scotland is not represented in the history of European tapestry weaving. Nor was there much tapestry weaving in England when compared to the booming production on the continent. By the mid-sixteenth century England had a few organized workshops, but the only one of note was the Mortlake studio, which was created by King James I in 1619. Meant to follow the example of the French workshops of King Henry IV of France, Mortlake did produce some important works during its twenty-three years of existence. *Hero and Leander*, a popular set of six tapestries representing a tragic love story was designed by Francis Cleyn in 1625 and the first set was woven for James I (fig. 32). Francis Cleyn, however, was from Northern Germany, not England. It is also said that in 1630 Rubens convinced King Charles I to buy a set of cartoons illustrating the Acts of the Apostles created by Raphael and that twelve sets of tapestries based on the Raphael cartoons were produced at Mortlake. Discussions of the tapestries themselves are often overshadowed by the complexities of the cartoons and their famous author; after the death of Charles I the cartoons for the Acts of the Apostles were sold but documents show that Cromwell then purchased them on behalf of the government for 300 pounds. Mortlake also produced a “History of Achilles” from a set of Rubens’s cartoons between 1630 and 1635.

The weavers at Mortlake were immigrants, mostly of Flemish or French origins, imported from the successful studios on the continent. Ackerman writes, “Mortlake tapestry, in short, is Flemish tapestry, transferred across the Channel but in no way naturalized,” dashing the last of Mr. Johnston’s hopes of weaving Scotland’s name into the history of tapestry. This history is important to document because media representations of the tapestry project, such as the 2007 article “Castle unveils medieval tapestry” released by the BBC, quote the chief executive of

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218 Mirzaghitova, “The Hunt of the Unicorn: Interview with Ruth Jones.”


220 This could technically be called a Scottish connection because King James I of England was actually King James VI of Scotland. Madeleine Jarry, *World Tapestry*, 276.


223 Ackerman, *Tapestry The Mirror of Civilization*, 158.

224 Ackerman, *Tapestry The Mirror of Civilization*, 189.

225 Ackerman, *Tapestry The Mirror of Civilization*, 220.
Historic Scotland, John Grahm, saying “it [the tapestry project] is also helping to keep important traditional skills alive.” As a fact, Grahm’s remark is correct, but in context the statement leads the reader to conclude that tapestry weaving is a traditional Scottish skill, which is false. The article also incorrectly states, “The original tapestries, woven between 1495 and 1505, once adorned the walls of the castle, which was once the seat of the Stewart Kings.” I believe that the writer was confusing scholarship on the Cloister’s original Hunt of the Unicorn tapestries with what is documented about the original Scottish tapestries; to my knowledge there is no evidence for when the Scottish unicorn tapestries were created, let alone whether they were from the same cartoon as the Cloisters’ tapestries.

In 1912 the Marquess of Bute founded Dovecote Studios in Edinburgh, Scotland. A small book about Dovecot Studios compiled by the Scottish Arts Council in 1980 proclaims,

“For such a very old craft, the origins in Scotland are young indeed. There may have been some itinerant weavers in Scotland in the Middle Ages, but there is little evidence to support this, so we assume that tapestry weaving arrived here as late as 1912.”

The studio was influenced foremost by the Arts and Crafts movement and by William Morris in particular. The first tapestries woven were large, traditional scenes from Scottish history, designed by a contemporary artists, intended to adorn the Bute family homes. After the Second World War the studio obtained designs from leading contemporary artists and began weaving smaller commercial tapestries on speculation. The book states that when the studio needed more looms it obtained three French looms that supposedly dated back to at least the eighteenth century, perhaps as early as 1698. Documents also reveal that early nineteenth century Stirling was known for its cotton and wool fabrics, produced mostly for weaving tartans, and town records indicate that a weaver’s guild was incorporated in Stirling on September 7, 1703. Of course this is all well after the time period we are interested in and is not evidence that tapestry production occurred in Scotland prior to the twentieth century.

Despite the continuing success of the Dovecot tapestry studio in Edinburgh, the commission for the new unicorn tapestries went to an English workshop. The West Dean

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227 BBC News, “Castle unveils medieval tapestry.”
228 A statement on Wikipedia cites Cathérine Grodecki in “Documents du Minutier Central des Notaires de Paris: Histoire de l’art au XVIe siècle, 1540-1600” as evidence of the weaving of Histoire de la Chasse à la licorne in Paris in 1540, about the time King James IV was purchasing tapestries from France for Stirling, but I have not found the document in question to confirm. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Royal_tapestry_collection#cite_note-53.
230 Scottish Arts Council, Master Weavers, 40.
231 Scottish Arts Council, Master Weavers, 40.
tapestry studio is a part of the West Dean College and Estate, founded by the Edward James Foundation in 1971 and opened in Edward James’ converted family mansion, located in West Sussex to the South West of London. The College supports the creation of several types of craft through studios, workshops and conferences, while proceeds from the estate are reinvested in the galleries and projects that promote the visual arts, dance and music. The tapestry studio opened as a commercial workshop in 1976 and its first commission was from Mary Moore, who wanted a tapestry created from a drawing by her father, Henry Moore. West Dean Tapestry is described foremost as an “interpretive” studio, taking the works of artists and interpreting them into tapestry. The studio’s tapestries are commissioned by private individuals, businesses, governments and are exhibited throughout the world. In 2013, one of the new unicorn tapestries completed at West Dean was exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London with other examples of the College’s work, before it was transported to Stirling. West Dean also has the benefit of its own dye laboratory, enabling weavers there to create the bespoke colour pallettes essential to replicating the 500 year-old vision. Caron Penney states only that “West Dean’s tender bid was successful,” the reasons why Dovecot studio did not participate in the project are unknown to me.

Eighteen weavers worked to complete the seven new Hunt of the Unicorn tapestries for Stirling Castle. Similar to the organization of fifteenth and sixteenth century European tapestry studios described by researchers, several West Dean weavers would work on one tapestry until its completion, but due to the demands of other commissions, the great scope of the project and external factors in the lives of the weavers, the same people were not employed on every tapestry. Caron Penney for instance was the Studio Director and a Master Weaver on the unicorn project at West Dean from 2004 to 2013 when she left to create her own studio. Katherine Swailes continues to work for West Dean while collaborating with Caron Penney’s studio. Throughout the progress of the tapestries both Penney and Swailes have exhibited their work internationally and published books or essays about tapestry and the unicorn project. Many of the weavers on the unicorn tapestries are of international origins; Cecilia Blomberg was born in Sweden but has lived and worked in the United States since 1977, Hilary Green is a weaver from Australia and Ruth Jones is a Canadian who has studied in France. From their online biographies it appears that many of the tapestry weavers are flexible and innovative, their portfolios

235 Caron Penney, “Rediscovering the Unicorn Tapestries,” 149.
238 Emma Jo Webster, who worked on the several of the tapestries for West Dean, including the Mystic Hunt, is now employed by Dovecot, as of February 2015, http://dovecotstudios.com/about/team/27/emma-jo-webster.
239 Caron Penney's studio website, http://www.weftfaced.com
displaying a fine art that uses the medium with such originality that it could not possibly conform to a two-dimensional cartoon.\textsuperscript{240}

**Scottish Reproductions**

There are particular differences between the original tapestries and the new tapestries, supporting assertions that they cannot be considered copies. The materials and the physical composition of the new tapestries differ slightly from the originals, for the most part due to modern practicalities, but also as a result of a conscious effort to maintain the superiority of the originals. The exclusion of the mysterious “A” and “E” initials as well as the commercial ideals influencing the weavers’ technique point to a conscious distancing of the new unicorn tapestries from the originals. Despite appearing compositionally almost identical, care was taken to ensure that the new tapestries would never be mistaken for their forebears, at least not to the eyes of the tapestry scholar or the insurance provider.

Before the weaving could begin the weavers of West Dean began their research by colour matching threads with Pantone, researching historical weaving techniques and recording their findings on half-sized cartoons and excel spreadsheets. The Metropolitan Museum of Art granted the project special after-hours access to the original unicorn tapestries in the Cloisters in order to study the objects more closely using “cherry-pickers and special lighting.”\textsuperscript{241} The weavers used the fronts of the originals and high resolution digital photos of the backs, made in 2005 to produce the custom threads in West Dean’s dye lab, but as Penney points out, “the project spans a 12-year period and during this time both suppliers of materials and technology have changed dramatically.”\textsuperscript{242} Mercerized cotton was used instead of silk because of its durability and the cartoons designed by Katharine Swailes also benefited from advancements in computer technology over the last decade. To fit into the spaces planned for them in the queen’s apartments the reproductions were created to be approximately 10\% smaller than the originals,\textsuperscript{243} with the exception of the *Mystic Hunt*, which I will elaborate on later.

The new series has been woven at four warps per centimeter as opposed to the originals, which are at eight warps per centimeter. A higher warp, or the more warp threads used, results in a more detailed image and a stronger quality fabric.\textsuperscript{244} In her interview, weaver Ruth Jones indicates that the difference in warp was one of the crucial factors convincing the Metropolitan Museum of Art to approve the project.\textsuperscript{245} Caron Penney writes that the lower warp used in the

\textsuperscript{240} Hillary Green especially uses tapestry in a three-dimensional manner, as pictured on her tapestry blog, http://tapestry2008.blogspot.ca/2008/06/hilary-green-artist-in-residence-at.html.
\textsuperscript{241} Penney, “Rediscovering the *Unicorn* Tapestries,” 152.
\textsuperscript{242} Penney, “Rediscovering the *Unicorn* Tapestries,” 152.
\textsuperscript{243} Harrison, *Rebirth of a Palace*, 110.
\textsuperscript{244} Belozerorskaya, *Luxury Arts of the Renaissance*, 121.
\textsuperscript{245} Mirzaghitova, “The Hunt of the Unicorn: Interview with Ruth Jones.”
new tapestries will give them a “bolder” look, but I believe this is a rather thin explanation for what was more probably the Metropolitan’s way of maintaining the superiority of their own tapestries.

The new tapestries are officially described as “contemporary interpretations”, a classification that seems deliberately designed to avoid the connotations and controversies attached to terms like ‘copy’ and ‘reproduction’. Visually all but one of the new tapestries are almost identical to the original compositions, with the important exclusion of the A and E initials. I do not know whether it was a requirement of the Metropolitan Museum or a decision by Historic Scotland’s team, but the omission of the mysterious initials strips away a vital part of the tapestries’ history, disregarding a century of research and discussion over their status and origin. John G. Harrison’s description of the differences between the originals and the reproductions is the only source even to mention the exclusion and his statement is one simple sentence, “The initials “AE” which appear on the originals (with the E reversed) are not being included.” Untethering the new tapestries from the conspicuous lettering enables their transition both visually and psychologically into a different context as the viewer is not distracted by the perplexing signs that bear no obvious relation to Scottish royalty. Looking beyond the most recognizable initials in the corners and centres, the reproductions have also altered the “A” and “E” initials found on the dog collars in The Unicorn Leaps out of the Stream, changing them to three confusing figures (fig. 33). The unintelligible design appears random and incompatible next to the particularly careful iconography of the unicorn tapestries. This may have been the best chance for Scotland to truly re-interpret the tapestries for themselves, to incorporate a cultural or national symbol that would complete the appropriation. But if there is a meaning to the new symbols, it is not being highlighted.

In 2003 a custom studio was built on the grounds of Stirling Castle where four of the seven new tapestries would be woven, the other three were completed at West Dean’s studio in West Sussex. The studio is a subtle but modern structure at the back of the castle site, past the kitchens and what would have been the armouries (fig. 34). A strange and incongruous addition to a Renaissance refurbishment, the studio showcased the production of the fantastic mythical representations until December 2014, but what will it house now and in the future?

This leads us to the most obviously commercial deviation, in terms of the production of the new tapestries; the weavers at Stirling Castle worked from the front of the tapestry to the back instead of the standard method of back to front. The weaving was done backwards because the studio is open to the public and weaving from front to back allowed visitors to see the image as they were being woven. Watching the weaving was intended to enhance a tourist’s visit to Stirling Castle, providing an educational performance of the authentic weaving process.

246 Penney, “Rediscovering the Unicorn Tapestries,” 153.
247 Sim and Wain, “First year visit to Stirling Castle’s Tapestry Studio.”
248 Harrison, Rebirth of a Palace, 110.
Detailing differences between medieval and contemporary weaving Caron Penney suggests that it is impossible for weavers today to re-create an “authentic” medieval tapestry because, although the process has remained relatively unchanged in 500 years, the knowledge and circumstances of the weavers has transformed radically. As I am quite sure that weavers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries did not have to concern themselves with camera-toting tour groups, in this way Stirling’s new tapestries certainly are unique.

The final tapestry to be woven at Stirling was *The Mystic Hunt of the Unicorn* (fig. 35). Originally scheduled to be complete in 2013, the cutting off ceremony was held in December, 2014 and the revised installation will take place in the summer of 2015. *The Mystic Hunt* is a new composition created by West Dean based on the fragments from the original series. As noted previously the two fragments of what has been titled *The Mystic Capture of the Unicorn* at the Cloisters are thought to represent one of the most common elements of the unicorn legend, the capture of the unicorn by a virgin maiden. The fragments are estimated to represent approximately one third of the original tapestry, based on the location of the large “A” and “E” initials when compared to the other pieces.

Before launching into a critical analysis of the new *Mystic Hunt* tapestry I would like to express my own feeling of awe at the complexity of this endeavor and the courage and skill of those who were involved in it. The new *Mystic Hunt* tapestry adds only enough width to the combined fragments to incorporate the figure of the maiden whose hand strokes the enraptured unicorn, and a slim tree extending above the maiden’s left shoulder. The maiden’s face had not yet been woven on my visit but the gown which is to be appear as a stunning red and gold brocade that will no doubt shine beautifully when the tapestry is installed in the Queen’s Inner Chamber with the rest of the series. I think this particular work could merit a more profound study in itself once the tapestry is publicly accessible. Studying it within the framework of the series will have to be enough for now.

I argue that the *Mystic Hunt* is the most enigmatic and controversial tapestry in the new series due to a combination of historical ambiguity and modern deception. In his book Harrison makes two misleading statements regarding the original tapestry. The first is that the fragments “comprise a substantial part of a single hanging – and the new tapestry has been designed as a single ‘complete’ piece,” leading the reader to believe that the new ‘complete’ tapestry could be an approximate likeness of the lost original when it is in fact substantially smaller. When I asked one of the Castle’s costumed guides to point out the location designated for the new *Mystic Hunt* tapestry I was surprised by how little room it was given, in a narrow space between two windows (fig. 36). I was advised that the edges could curve around the window wells as might have occurred in the period because tapestries were often moved and re-hung in spaces they were not initially designed for. This is certainly true, and research has shown that parts of tapestries

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249 Penney, “Rediscovering the *Unicorn* Tapestries,” 158.
250 Colburn, “Three Fragments of *The Mystic Capture of the Unicorn* Tapestry,” 97.
251 Harrison, *Rebirth of a Palace*, 111.
were cut off or added so they could accommodate their new quarters, although it seems irrational to create such a valuable piece of art to be the wrong size on purpose. I could also have been misinformed, but there appeared to be no other space in the room where a tapestry could be hung. In 2011, just prior to beginning the Mystic Hunt, senior weaver Louise Martin noted that the tapestry was designed to be the same length as the other six to ensure that they were all of uniform length when hanging in series. It is unclear whether the width of the new tapestry was decided based on the work involved, the aesthetics of the design, the space available, or a combination of all these factors. Whatever the reasons, it cannot be claimed that the new Mystic Hunt is representative of anything but a twenty-first century imagination.

The second misleading statement by Harrison, “It would have hung alone and its ‘story’ does not directly relate to the others” is conjecture that disregards a wealth of scholarship and debate affirming that The Mystic Capture is a pivotal piece in the Hunt of the Unicorn series. Furthermore, if this was the case, there is little justification for why the fragments were chosen to be included in the new set for Stirling, especially considering their creation involved more research and resources than the other tapestries. Historic Scotland claims that the Palace renovations are foremost about historical authenticity, and that it chose the unicorn tapestries because there was reliable evidence that the king possessed unicorn tapestries. The lack of clear, accurate information regarding either the history of the original tapestries or the logic behind the reproductions gives the project the feel of an expensive marketing campaign.

The new tapestries have, in fact, operated as new branding for Historic Scotland’s heritage revival. Over the last few decades the Loch Ness Monster and tartan have become the most recognizable signs of Scottish heritage prompting endless nauseating visions of green plaid throughout the country’s many tourist destinations. Stirling Castle’s website and promotional material are different. Everything from the website to the brochures and ticket receipts prominently display the head of a unicorn in profile (fig. 37). Even the onsite restaurant is called the “Unicorn Café”, its menu styled consistently with Stirling’s marketing design (fig. 38). The original tapestries are embedded as cultural icons in much of the western world; whether or not you know anything about their history, you have probably seen the unicorn images at some point, planting a seed of recognition that may encourage you to visit Stirling. Using these tapestries is a sound marketing strategy, even if it does stretch the concept of historical accuracy. In the end, are the new tapestries displayed in their ‘authentic’ castle really very different from the originals displayed in their twentieth-century representation of a medieval building at the Cloisters in New York?

The contexts in which the original and the new tapestries are displayed are visually different, but both are a deceptive artifice. The physical contrasts between The Cloisters and Stirling Palace are obvious; the only colours on the bare stone walls of the room at the Cloisters

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252 Belozerskaya, Luxury Arts of the Renaissance, 125.
254 Harrison, Rebirth of a Palace, 111.
come from the tapestries themselves, while the apartments at Stirling are brightly painted with elaborate murals from floor to ceiling. The room at the Cloisters was custom designed to show off the original tapestries, a twentieth-century ‘interpretation’ of a historical cloister. Stirling, of course, has it the other way around, with custom made tapestries intended to show off the sixteenth century palace. There is deception in both exhibits, the recreation of a particular past to ensure the viewer understands the authenticity of the real object. Like Peter S. Beagle’s *Last Unicorn*, a fake horn has been created so that people can see the real unicorn.

Chapter 4

Simulacrum / Conclusion

"One always hopes, of course, even now--to be collected, to be verified, annotated, to have variant versions, even to have one's authenticity doubted." 255

The new *Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestries are not copies. As explained by Gilles Deleuze, “a copy truly resembles something only to the extent that it resembles the Idea of the thing” 256 and the new tapestries, constructed to promote Scottish interests, cannot represent the same Idea as the original French series. Historic Scotland’s project was commissioned for the specific purpose of creating a ‘modernized’ representation of the history of Stirling Castle for the benefits of tourism, and to reflect a contemporary Scottish identity. The new tapestries were woven to accommodate the refurbished Stirling Palace under the watchful gaze of twenty-first century tourists. Stripped of markings that could fix the tapestries to a specific time and place, the new weavings without the distinctive “A” and “E” initials can embody whatever Idea the viewer imagines or whatever the viewer is encouraged to imagine by Heritage Scotland. But if this is history being created, we should know what we are creating, and what the consequences could be.

In Summary

Visually, the new *unicorn* tapestries appear to be a medieval depiction of a unicorn being hunted by men. The mythical subject fits well into the definition of the simulacrum. Representations of a one-horned beast have circulated across the world since time was recorded; representations of an animal that does not exist. The narrative traditions these images follow have no discernable origins and thus we are unable to confirm whether they resemble the original ‘Idea’ of the unicorn. The unicorn was an allegory of Christ, a myth standing in for a man. The unicorn was an allegory of love, a beast representing human devotion. We know that the image is

255 Beagle, *The Last Unicorn*, 86.
false, that unicorns were not hunted like stags and captured in medieval forests, but the pictures endure in popular culture and high art alike. Deceit and fraud are prominent traits in the unicorn’s story, from the curative powers of their horns to the beast’s capture by a beguiling woman, making the story, and the unicorn itself, a deceptive simulacrum.

The practice of tapestry weaving is itself a process that challenges traditional notions of the faithful copy. Translating the marks of a pencil or the strokes of a brush into a picture of woven threads involves both technical skill and the ability to make crucial design decisions, enhancing or diminishing particular lines and details. The Renaissance weaver’s power to alter an artist’s design was such that guild restrictions in the sixteenth century were codified, to the detriment of the weavers and benefit of the artists. The cartoons from which the tapestry image was copied became a crucial component of the trade, enabling the wealthy to purchase copies of admired or powerful tapestries, or to prevent others from obtaining their own copies. As noted in Luxury Arts of the Renaissance, “an artwork of demonstrable power was worth emulating and, in a sense, co-opting.” Like the unicorn, the origins of tapestry, and weaving in general, are unknown. Throughout human history weaving has been such an important custom that imagery has been “woven” into the most prominent and influential legends of civilizations around the world. The act of weaving a tapestry is a kind of performance that blurs the line between original and copy, subverting the power of the artist into the materiality of the fabric.

With only tenuous links to Scotland or Scottish history, Stirling Castle’s new Hunt of the Unicorn tapestries cannot be true likenesses of the missing tapestries King James V allegedly possessed. Nor can we say that they were created under the same circumstances, in the same location or by the exact same methods as the originals. Although they were not reproduced by mechanical means, the new unicorn tapestries have appropriated the images from the Hunt of the Unicorn tapestries in New York while displacing their original Idea, or ‘aura’, and leading, as Walter Benjamin proposes, to a “shattering of tradition.” But the ‘tradition’ being obliterated in the new unicorn tapestries is not the allegory of Christ or Love, it is time. The new tapestries both confer and receive a manufactured reality based on the interpretations, inferences and desires of those who were involved in the twenty-first century renovation of Stirling Palace, not on the building’s original construction in the 1540s.

So What are They?

The seven new Hunt of the Unicorn tapestries created for the Queen’s Apartments at Stirling Castle are beautiful and complex, just like the series of tapestries at the Cloisters Museum in New York City. I would like to say that the ‘new’ set of unicorn tapestries are simulacra, but am stuck on the problem of what happens to the original of a copy that has no original. Gilles Deleuze defines the simulacrum not as a “degraded copy”, but as containing “a

257 Belozerskaya, Luxury Arts of the Renaissance, 115.
positive power which negates *both original and copy, both model and reproduction,*\(^{259}\) but at what point does this process of negation begin? The concept of the Eternal Return, that behind each mask there is still another, and another, is a dizzying explanation for how we project our own experiences and desires onto reality, creating our own version while destroying the previous one.\(^{260}\) False or misleading claims that confused historical facts about the original tapestries with ambiguous data concerning the reproductions, indicate that a deterioration of knowledge about the originals has already begun. Although the Metropolitan Museum has taken steps to ensure that its historic *unicorn* tapestries cannot be confused with the new *unicorn* tapestries on a material level, controlling the perceptions of viewers will prove to be infinitely more difficult.

At the centre of this thesis is the problematic concept of authenticity, its relationship to art and to history. While we want to view the discipline of History as objective, based on recorded facts, the study of Art demands more imagination. An event that has been recorded in history, such as a war, is in the past. Whether that record is or will continue to be an accurate description of the event is another matter, the point I am making here is that a historical event cannot be physically experienced at a later date by an individual who was not there in the first place, but an object can. If “Art remains, at its core, a fabrication,”\(^{261}\) what is the state of authenticity in a historical work of art? The two sets of *Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestries can be perceived as authentic based on the contexts in which they are presented and the authorities who quote them, but as historical evidence they are both simulacra.

**Authenticity and Context**

In her work on the history of tapestry Phyllis Ackerman says, “tapestries are today even less approachable than most of the pictorial or decorative arts, for they have ceased to have any essential function in our own life. They are wholly of the past, isolated in the institutional blankness of museums or in the museum houses of the rich.”\(^{262}\) While it is true that reproductions of famous historical paintings, photographs and even sculptures can be found in many homes today, the same cannot be said of tapestry. I would argue, however, that it is this ‘distance’ that maintains the perception of authenticity in tapestries, a medium that was, and still is, only available to the extremely wealthy. Unlike paintings, prints, or photographs that could be displayed in more humble settings, grand tapestries like the *unicorn* series require large, gallery-like spaces to be properly viewed. Both the original and reproduction *Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestries are displayed in spaces that were custom-built to convey a particular sense of history, spaces that evoke the past and authenticate the objects as presentations of that past.

\(^{259}\) Deleuze and Krauss, “Plato and the Simulacrum,” 53.
\(^{262}\) Ackerman, *Tapestry, the Mirror of Civilization*, preface.
The illusion of the visual as ‘truth’ or ‘evidence’ burdens museums and historical buildings with the responsibility of accurately presenting the past, while being physically in the present. Criticism of the practices and structures of museums is often “concerned that the museum ambience could change the meanings of the objects it held, redefining them as works of art and narrowing their import simply by removing them from their original settings and obscuring their former uses.” As Baudrillard argues, there is a danger in presenting objects under the pretence of historical accuracy. Removing a tapestry from its original context does not immediately destroy its connection to history, after all, tapestries were moved all the time, but the re-contextualization of the *unicorn* tapestries into environments that have been fabricated to appear historical is precisely the kind of simulacrum Baudrillard warns us about. Visitors to museums and historical sites expect to see history offered up in an orderly fashion and categorized by date or subject, but there is also a desire to “experience it as though it were the real thing.”

Heritage tourism is a lucrative way for Scotland to showcase its many castles and to promote a modern and distinct Scottish identity, countering its complicated political status within the United Kingdom. In the case of Stirling Castle, Scotland has chosen to present the site as it was in its most independent and wealthy period; “To control a museum means precisely to control the representation of a community and its highest values and truths.” In research on tourism there is a theory that tourists perceive a cultural experience as a representation of either the “front” or “back” version of a community’s culture. The “front” is the cultural equivalent of a Nessie hunting cruise on Loch Ness, following the popular but completely fake trail of Scotland’s world-renowned monster, while the “back” is what is considered by the tourist to be the real or authentic version of culture. As the ‘authentic experience’ becomes more important to tourists, the tourist industry must evolve to satisfy the vague and changing perceptions of what authenticity means. Melissa McMullen’s study of “Old Town” Scottsdale Arizona, a wildly inaccurate reconstruction of a nineteenth century American Old West town, reveals the simulacrum as “both recognized and expected as a tool of staged authenticity.” In interviews McMullen conducted with tourists in Old Town the visitors were all well aware of the falseness of their surroundings, but nevertheless enjoyed the performance. It might at first appear that Old Town is a cultural “front”, a deliberate tourist trap. Upon further inquiry, however, McMullen concludes that the perception of Old Town’s authenticity is not based on it being a believable example of an “Old West” town, but as an authentic piece of *Arizonian* culture.

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Historic Scotland commissioned skilled weavers to produce a set of tapestries, based on a theme they liked, to decorate the walls of their castle. This tapestry commission mirrors the tradition performed by wealthy nobles 500 years ago, as does Stirling Castle’s renovation in general, procuring and displaying valuable objects to convey a particular image or message about the owner’s identity. Harrison states, “The entire Palace at Stirling was designed to convey messages about the ruling dynasty and national identity while proclaiming the wisdom, learning and piety of the monarch who commissioned it,” which also appears to have been Historic Scotland’s goal when they began their efforts to ‘restore’ Stirling Castle in the late 1990s. Despite the assertions of Stirling Castle’s docents and promotional material, that the sixteenth century Scottish Royal Court was at the very height of luxury and style, letters from the English envoy, Sadler, who attended the coronation of the infant Mary Stuart at Stirling Castle on September 9, 1543, described the ceremony as solemn, “as they do use in this country, which is not very costle.” Magnificence, it seems, is in the eye of the beholder. Nicholas Mirzoeff describes the connection between visuality and context as being “haunted” by our experiences, and the ghosts of Stirling Palace will no doubt influence how the unicorn tapestries are seen in the years to come.

**Authenticity and Authority**

Kent Drummond places the curator at the top of a hierarchy of image producers. Museum curators, or art critics or scholars, wield the power to compile the work of particular artists and frame it based on their own goals or interests. This representation, Drummond says, is received by the public “as ‘real’ or ‘true’ – the essence of the work itself.” As shown in the example of Old Town, Drummond’s scenario of the passive viewer does not address a complex system of power relations at work in the creation of authenticity. What and how objects may be displayed in an exhibition, or which time period is chosen to be represented in the renovation of a thousand-year old castle “is closely linked to larger questions about who constitutes the community and who defines its identity.” The unicorn tapestries are in many ways masquerading as truth, but this masquerade requires the participation of the viewer using their own experiences and perspectives to distinguish between the ‘real’ and the ‘interpretation’, the model and the simulacrum.

It is easy to see how Historic Scotland is using the fame of the Metropolitan Museum’s *Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestries for their cultural capital. The gift shops at both the Cloisters Museum and Stirling Castle sell many of the exact same unicorn products, although it should be

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271 Drummond, “Consuming Caravaggio”, 91.
noted that the Cloisters makes no reference to the Scottish reproductions while images of the original *unicorn* tapestries, with their distinctive “A” and “E” initials, are easily found in Stirling’s Castle shop. Julie Codell and Hellen Roberts’ theory of surrogate images has yet to work in favour of the original tapestries because the reproductions at Stirling are too new. At this time not all of the reproduction tapestries have been made available to the public, and thus they have not yet had the opportunity to be judged or compared with the originals. Perhaps the weavers and others close to the project have formed an emotional attachment to the tapestries they have created, but even for them the original tapestries were their first experience, their authentic point of reference. A formal analysis comparing the two sets of tapestries would no doubt draw attention back to the awe-inspiring workmanship and mystery of the originals, but this would require the acceptance of the modern reproductions as equals to their historically authentic originals.

The opinions of the artist-weavers of the new *unicorn* tapestries have so far been recorded only in the few interviews and essays I discussed earlier, frequently defining the new tapestries as ‘interpretations’ while expressing great reverence for the original *Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestries. It can be argued that the placement of power with the artist presupposes an argument against copying and it is often said that the process of copying and reproducing an original work of art subtracts something from the object. Cartoons were drawn in order to weave the new *Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestries and their status too is ambiguous. I have found no references by any weaver or Historic Scotland regarding the status of ownership or the potential future use or exhibition of the new cartoons, but I am hopeful that they have been preserved and interested to see how these copies are evaluated given our knowledge of how highly tapestry cartoons were valued at the time the original *unicorn* tapestries were made. It is unlikely that the *Hunt of the Unicorn* reproductions will make celebrity artists of the weavers who created them. As a commission tasked with bestowing authenticity on a sixteenth-century castle it would not be entirely fitting to promote the twenty-first century individuals who created the new tapestries, especially when we consider the long tradition of the weaver as ‘translator’, the skilled tradesman bringing an artist’s vision to life.

If we take away the divine power given to the object by the genius artist, what is left? Some may say that it is pure aesthetics that remain and that this is in fact liberating, like the chaos encouraged by Deleuze. But if the aesthetics relies purely on the physical object and values that one form as unique and authentic, than this approach is also bias against the copy. If, however, we suppose that it is the copy that gives value to the original, and that in reproducing and re-contextualizing the image we are merely following a long tradition of reflection and recreation, we begin to perceive copying as the complex ritual of power and identity that it truly is. Like Catharine Soussloff, Garen Torikian questions the faith we place in authors and artists to provide accurate portrayals of history. Asking, “Who is to say Dickensian characters are representative of nineteenth-century conditions but our faith in the honesty of the author?”

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274 Torikian, “Against a Perpetuating Fiction: Disentangling Art from Hyperreality,” 104.
Torikian challenges the notion that ‘art’, visual, literary and otherwise, always aims to reveal the truth. If we follow this logic, Stirling Castle’s *Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestries are not expected to reflect or to stand in for reality, they are like a mirage in the desert, a simulacrum by virtue of being an object called art. Using the example of an engraving that illustrated a grand Renaissance room covered completely in tapestries, Marina Belozerskaya states, “tapestries strove to complete the illusion of the wholeness of the woven reality,” a task that has become all but impossible for someone from the twenty-first century looking at a medieval tapestry.

**Authenticity and History**

Weaving another set of the *Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestries was about more than creating a work of art, just as the study of art history is more than the cataloging of old objects. It often seems that our imaginations require a visual or material prompt to understand our own history, “We require a visible past, a visible continuum, a visible myth of origin, which reassures us about our end.” Using tourist data recorded for Scotland from 1876 to 1905, Alastair J. Durie claims that the much greater number of tourists who visited the Wallace Monument, as opposed to the fields of Bannockburn, shows “the superiority of a manufactured draw as against an authentic but unenhanced site.” The two sites are located within five a five minute drive of each other so geography was not a factor, but there are more practical justifications for why someone would wish to visit the “manufactured” site over the “authentic but unenhanced” one. The Wallace Monument was completed in 1869 after an exciting fundraising campaign extolling Scottish identity and pride, making it still relatively new attraction when the tourist data was recorded. The draw of the ‘new’ is in part an emotional impulse, but can also be attractive for the promise of modern and upgraded amenities. At the time, the Bannockburn was just a field, while the Wallace Monument gave shelter from the temperamental Scottish climate and provided toilet facilities. Regulations in many countries today require, where possible, the installation of various amenities for accessibility and comfort such as ramps, elevators and infant change stations. The new tapestries also propose a kind of ‘upgrade’ to the originals, restoring the vibrancy and composition in places where the originals have become faded or worn.

**The Finale**

Debates about the use and value of copying works of art have drawn on disciplinary theories from history to ethnography, and with such a vast pool of discourse to draw on it was inevitable that not all theorists and arguments could be covered in this thesis. My decisions to include and exclude particular theorists and theories have been the result of a careful

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275 Belozerskaya, *Luxury Arts of the Renaissance*, 100.
consideration of how the arguments could direct and inform the study of Historic Scotland’s *Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestry project. I have omitted principles of the gaze and spectatorship in my analysis of viewership in historic sites because these would have distracted from analysis of the tapestries, and what I believe to be a very unique circumstance. Using the simulacrum has allowed me to focus on how the binary division between the original and the copy defines what it means for a historic object to be ‘authentic’. Investigating the *Unicorn* tapestry project, an argument could be made for the side of Baudrillard, lamenting the hollow use of the Cloisters Museum’s magnificent artworks for commercial gain, or for the chaos of Deleuze, rejoicing in Scotland taking control of their own cultural image. Studying art history and visual culture in a visual world dominated by endless quotations and copies creates friction with the traditional art historical approach privileging the original over the reproduction. By testing the boundaries of what is a copy and what is not, I have found the simulacrum useful not necessarily in dissolving the border between fiction and reality but to draw attention to the social and political contexts that create those borders.

The *Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestry project reveals how authenticity is inextricably woven with identity. The impossibility of providing tourists with a definitively accurate experience of Stirling Palace in 1540 does not make the renovation by Historic Scotland any less authentic because the ‘interpretation’ is a reflection of Scottish identity. The interpretation requires the visitors to imagine in history for Scotland that never happened, but is no less real than the tapestries hanging on the walls.

Back at Mommy Fortuna’s “Midnight Carnival” there is not only the real unicorn and the fake satyr, but also Arachne of Lydia. The carnival guide recites:

“She had the bad luck to defeat the goddess Athena in a weaving contest. Athena was a sore loser, and Arachne is now a spider, creating only for Mommy Fortuna’s Midnight Carnival, by special arrangement. Warp of snow and woof of flame, and never any two the same. Arachne.”

In the cage is a small brown spider, of little note or consequence, spinning its simple spider’s web. But soon the visitors and the unicorn are mesmerized by the web, watching the weaving in a trance. The unicorn comments that this spider is not like the other creatures in the carnival, to which she receives this reply, “You see, the spider believes … Why, if that troop of witlings withdrew their wonder, there’d be nothing left of all her witchery but the sound of a spider weeping. And no one would hear it.”

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Fig. 1  Weaving “The Mystic Hunt” at Stirling Castle, September 28, 2014.

Fig. 2  Jean Duvet, A King Pursued by a Unicorn, ca. 1555, Engraving, 23 x 37.6 cm, The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, Reproduced from http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/.
Fig. 3  A and E initials on “The Unicorn Leaps the Stream” tapestry, The Cloisters Museum, New York City.

Fig. 4  Byzantine psalter, 1066, reproduced from Lavers, The Natural History of the Unicorn, 74.
Fig. 5. Tapestry altar frontal (detail), middle Rhenish, about 1500, Gelnhausen, Marienkirche, reproduced from Freeman, *The Unicorn Tapestries*, 49.

Fig. 6. “Wild Woman” with Unicorn, Strasbourg, ca. 1500/1510, tapestry: wool, linen, cotton, silk, metallic thread, 75 cm x 63 cm, Historisches Museum Basel, reproduced from http://www.hmb.ch/en/sammlung/textilkunst.
Fig. 7. Medal of Cecilia Gonzaga (obverse and reverse), 1447, bronze, 8.7 cm diameter, National Gallery of Art Washington, reproduced from http://www.wga.hu/html_m/p/pisanell/2medals/cecilia.html.

Fig. 8. Dish with and allegory of Chastity and the arms of Matthias Corvinus and Beatrice of Aragon, 1476–ca. 1490, tin-glazed earthenware, 47.9 cm diameter, reproduced from http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/46.85.30.
Fig. 9. Emblem of Chastity, c. 1465-1480, engraving on paper, 153 milimetres diameter, The British Museum, reproduced from Freeman, *The Unicorn Tapestries*, 52.

Fig. 10. Arabian Oryx, reproduced from http://animal-kid.com/arabian-oryx-fighting.html (accessed April 27, 2015)
Fig. 11 Narwhal, reproduced from http://www.foxnews.com/science/2013/01/03/feds-crack-alleged-narwhal-tusk-smuggling-ring/ (accessed April 27, 2015).

Fig. 13 Border Illumination, Bible of Borso d’Este, 1455-1462, Modena, Biblioteca Estense, reproduced from Freeman, *The Unicorn Tapestries*, 60.

Fig. 14 A Mon Seul Desire, tapestry in series of six, ca. 1484-1500, Musée de Cluny Musée national du Moyen Âge, Paris, http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Dame_%C3%A0_la_laconie (accessed April 27, 2015).

Fig. 15 Unicorn merchandise at The Cloisters’ Museum gift shop, March 6, 2014.
Fig. 16. Velázquez Hilanderas, The Fable of Arachne (Las Hilanderas), c. 1657 Oil on canvas, 220 x 289 cm Museo del Prado, Madrid, reproduced from http://www.wga.hu/support/viewer_m/z.html (accessed April 27, 2015).


Fig. 19. The Hunters Enter the Woods (from the Unicorn Tapestries), 1495-1505, tapestry: wool warp, wool, silk, silver, and gilt wefts, 145 cm x 315 cm, The Cloisters Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, accession number: 37.80.1.

Fig. 20. The Unicorn is Found (from the Unicorn Tapestries), 1495-1505, tapestry: wool warp, wool, silk, silver, and gilt wefts, 368.3 cm x 378.5 cm, The Cloisters Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, accession number: 37.80.2.
Fig. 21. The Unicorn is Attacked (from the Unicorn Tapestries), 1495-1505, tapestry: wool warp, wool, silk, silver, and gilt wefts, 368.3 cm x 426.7 cm, The Cloisters Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, accession number: 37.80.3.

Fig. 22. The Unicorn Defends Itself (from the Unicorn Tapestries), 1495-1505, tapestry: wool warp, wool, silk, silver, and gilt wefts, 368.3 cm x 401.3 cm, The Cloisters Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, accession number: 37.80.4.
Fig. 23a The Mystic Capture of the Unicorn (fragment from the Unicorn Tapestries), 1495-1505, tapestry: wool warp, wool, silk, silver, and gilt wefts, 168.9 cm x 64.8 cm, The Cloisters Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, accession number: 39.51.1.
Fig. 23b The Mystic Capture of the Unicorn (fragment from the Unicorn Tapestries), 1495-1505, tapestry: wool warp, wool, silk, silver, and gilt wefts, 198.1 cm x 64.8 cm, The Cloisters Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, accession number: 38.51.2.

Fig. 24. The Unicorn is Killed and Brought to the Castle (from the Unicorn Tapestries), 1495-1505, tapestry: wool warp, wool, silk, silver, and gilt wefts, 368.3 cm x 388.6 cm, The Cloisters Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, accession number: 37.80.5.
Fig. 25. The Unicorn in Captivity (from the Unicorn Tapestries), 1495-1505, tapestry: wool warp, wool, silk, silver, and gilt wefts, 368 cm x 251.5 cm, The Cloisters Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, accession number: 37.80.6.

Fig. 26. The Stirling Heads, ceiling of the King’s Hall of Stirling Palace, Stirling, Scotland, September 28, 2015.
Fig. 27. The Original Stirling Heads in the Gallery at Stirling Palace, Stirling, Scotland, reproduced from http://www.stirlingcastle.gov.uk/stirlingheadsgallery.htm (accessed May 4, 2015).

Fig. 28. The Queen’s Inner Hall, Stirling Palace, Stirling, Scotland, September 28, 2014.

Fig. 29. The Palace Kitchens, Stirling Castle, Stirling, Scotland, September 28, 2014.
Fig. 30. Scotland’s Royal Arms.

Fig. 31. ‘Unicorn’ of James IV of Scotland (r 1488-1513), gold coin, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, accession number: 2002.399.1.

Fig. 32. The Meeting of Hero and Leander at the Temple of Venus, Sestos (from series of six tapestries), 1660-1670, tapestry: wool and silk, 286 cm x 311 cm, Lady Lever Art Gallery, Liverpool, England, accession number: LL5464.
Fig. 33. Comparison of dog collars from “The Unicorn Leaps Out of the Stream” original and reproduction tapestries.

Fig. 34. Tapestry studio at Stirling Castle, Stirling, Scotland, September 28, 2014.
Fig. 35. Cartoon for the new “Mystic Hunt of the Unicorn” tapestry at Stirling Castle tapestry studio, Stirling, Scotland, September 28, 2014.

Fig. 36. Location for completed new “Mystic Hunt of the Unicorn” tapestry at Stirling Palace, Stirling, Scotland, September 28, 2014.
Fig. 37. Logo for Stirling Castle, reproduced from http://www.stirlingcastle.gov.uk/ (accessed January 15, 2015).

Fig. 38. Unicorn Café Menu, Stirling Castle, Stirling, Scotland, reproduced from http://www.stirlingcastle.gov.uk/ (accessed January 15, 2015).