

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the dialogue between painting and tapestry that developed in late nineteenth-century France, specifically at the Manufacture nationale des Gobelins, and in the work of the avant-garde artists known as the Nabis. Nineteenth-century tapestry remains an obscure subject in scholarship and its influence on painting is thus not well-known or understood. This study aims to recover the symbiotic relationship that existed between tapestry and painting, and demonstrate the importance of studying the fine and decorative arts in tandem. It furthermore presents an evaluation of tapestry's place in the history of modern art, as well as a study of the socio-cultural anxieties that accompanied rapid industrialization and technological progress in the late nineteenth century, examined through the luxury craft of tapestry.

Part I outlines a history of the Manufacture Nationale des Gobelins, the state tapestry manufactory, from the birth of the Third Republic in 1871, to the 1900 Universal Exposition in Paris. It is divided into three chapters following the tenure of three directors: Alfred Darcel, Édouard Gerspach, and Jules Guiffrey. Part II examines the needlepoint hangings of the Nabi circle in the 1890s. With a chapter each on Aristide Maillol, Paul Ranson, and József Rippl-Rónai, this section compares and contrasts the approaches of these three artists to needlepoint “tapestry,” in order to elucidate the issues of art's relationship to industry, nationalism, ideals of patronage, and gendered labor. With regard to the last issue, it was the artists' wives/ companions—Clotilde Narcisse, France Ranson, and Lazarine Boudrion—who executed the majority of their designs. Part III analyzes how Édouard Vuillard drew from tapestry to re-conceptualize modern painting through two monumental decorative commissions: *The Album* (1895), and the Vaquez panels (1896). These are exemplary of his so-called “tapestry aesthetic.” I go beyond the general scholarly assessment that his paintings resemble tapestry to argue that

tapestry provided him a haptic model for painting, and explore how his painting engaged with tapestry in the wider circulation of material culture of the fin-de-siècle. An epilogue follows Vuillard's tapestry aesthetic into the twentieth century and examines how it was buried and replaced by Henri Matisse's re-definition of the decorative in modernist painting.