Tapestry in the Renaissance: Art and Magnificence by Tom Campbell

Often slighted by art historians, tapestries were actually the most widely commissioned figurative art form in Europe in the 1500s. In Tapestry in the Renaissance: Art and Magnificence, Thomas P. Campbell and other scholarly contributors survey the elaborate woven hangings produced primarily by Flemish workshops for the palaces and cathedrals of Italy and Northern Europe. The authors discuss the designers' careers, patrons' motives, symbolic meanings of the imagery, and stylistic features unique to the labor-intensive medium. Initially, the need to lessen skilled weavers' workloads led designers to arrange elaborately costumed figures in manageable rows. Raphael's cartoons (full-size drawings) for the monumental Acts of the Apostles tapestries, commissioned by Pope Leo X, moved the art form into a new era. Flemish designers incorporated Raphael's spatially persuasive treatment of the figure into sophisticated narratives full of anecdotal detail. The 250 color photographs, specially commissioned for this catalog for an exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum in spring 2002, vividly illuminate the technical brilliance of these works. -- Cathy Curtis

My Personal Review:
I had no idea how important a medium tapestry was prior to stumbling on the Met exhibition during a recent visit to NYC and then reading this book. I was amazed to learn the amount of money spent to produce (and purchase!) them, and how important the industry was to the economy of the time. Anyone who thinks of tapestries as beige, boring and historically insignificant is in for a surprise. As for this book itself, the photography is stunning and lavish. Each time you look at one of these magnificent works you see something new--it's hard to believe that these are woven objects, the detail and color is so vivid...no wonder the NY Times listed it as a holiday gift buy. (I think they rated the accompanying exhibition one of the year's best too)
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