



The Cathedral
Church of **Saint John**
the Divine

1047 Amsterdam Ave.
at 112th Street
New York, NY 10025
T (212) 316-7541
F (212) 932-7348
stjohndivine.org

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The Barberini Tapestries: Woven Monuments of Baroque Rome
The Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York
March 21 – June 25, 2017

The Cathedral of St. John the Divine is mounting an exhibition showcasing its collection of gorgeous baroque tapestries, the *Life of Christ* series, which opens at the Cathedral on March 21, 2017. The tapestries and related artifacts will travel to the Jordan Schnitzer Museum Eugene, Oregon in the fall.

Curated by Marlene Eidelheit, director of the Textile Conservation Laboratory at the Cathedral and James Harper, professor of art history at the University of Oregon and an internationally recognized scholar on seventeenth-century Rome and the Barberini tapestry manufactory, this exhibition brings together the tapestries for the first time in many decades.

The twelve-panel tapestry series was designed by the baroque master Giovanni Francesco Romanelli and woven by handpicked weavers for Francesco Barberini, the nephew of Pope Urban VIII, in his own tapestry workshop – itself a rarity at a time when most tapestries were made elsewhere in Europe. This series was installed at the Vatican and the Barberini family palaces before coming to America at the end of the nineteenth century.

The Barberini tapestries were among the first gifts acquired by the Cathedral, and are considered some of the greatest art treasures in the world. Over fifteen and a half feet tall and ranging from twelve to nineteen feet in length, these heroically scaled panels, in vibrant colors, never forget the intimate and homey details that make the divine human and the past present. Admired by early worshippers at the Cathedral, where they hung in the apse, and seen on rotation at various periods since then, the collection, freshly conserved, is an unparalleled glimpse into seventeenth-century Roman craftsmanship and imagination.

In 2001, a major fire destroyed the Cathedral's north transept and seriously damaged several of the *Life of Christ* tapestries. The Textile Conservation Laboratory, renowned worldwide for its work on antique and modern textiles, has spent the past 16 years cleaning and conserving the tapestries, culminating in this highly anticipated exhibition. Fragments from one of the most heavily damaged tapestries will be displayed in the exhibition, along with text and illustrations providing a fascinating glimpse into the advanced methods and painstaking care required to return the series to its original glory.

Four hundred years ago, tapestries were among the most prized objects in the great princely collections. They were not only beautiful but portable and warm at a time when palace walls were stone and chilly. Wraparound tapestry décor was de rigueur for the European nobility, who often traveled with their favorite pieces, and the Cathedral will display them in a similar side-by-side, nearly overlapping fashion.

As the centerpiece of the exhibition, an installation of eight tapestries will envelop the Chapel of St. James, one of the Cathedral's seven Chapels of the Tongues, dedicated to the patron saints of the first ethnic groups to emigrate to New York City upon the opening of Ellis Island in 1892 (the same year the Cathedral's cornerstone was laid). The exhibition, with rare books, period objects, and computer kiosks offering detailed background information, will transport the visitor to the cultural, dynastic, political



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and religious worlds of the Barberini family.

A variety of educational programs will accompany the exhibition, including family and school workshops focusing on craftsmanship and guilds. Other events during the course of the exhibition will include gallery tours, hands-on art projects, and a self-guided scavenger hunt incorporating many of the Cathedral's sumptuous artworks. Program and workshop prices vary, with special events available for adults and children of all ages.

A fully illustrated scholarly catalogue, published by Officina Libraria srl, Milan, is intended to stand as the standard reference on the Barberini *Life of Christ* tapestries, and as a significant contribution to the growing and vibrant field of tapestry studies. Images from the exhibition are available by request.

Major support for this exhibition and the catalogue was provided by the National Endowment for the Arts; the National Endowment for the Humanities; the Coby Foundation, the Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation; the Achelis and Bodman Foundation; the Harold and Arlene Schnitzer CARE Foundation; and Furthermore: A Program of the J. M. Kaplan Fund.

Entry to the Cathedral and the exhibition is free with a suggested contribution of \$10.

About the Textile Conservation Laboratory

The Cathedral's Textile Conservation Laboratory, familiarly known as "the Lab," was founded in 1981. At the heart of its mission is the ongoing care and conservation of the Cathedral's treasured Barberini and Mortlake tapestry sets. The Lab's current Director, Marlene Eidelheit, has been at the helm since 1992. During her tenure, with a staff of five conservators and the assistance of dedicated interns, the range of Lab projects has grown, and it continues to develop and expand the field of tapestry conservation.

About the Cathedral

The Cathedral of St. John the Divine is the Cathedral of the Episcopal Diocese of New York. It is chartered as a house of prayer for all people and a unifying center of intellectual light and leadership. For more than a century, it has been deeply involved in education, social justice and active support of the arts and the environment. People from many faiths and communities worship together in services held more than 30 times a week; the soup kitchen serves roughly 25,000 meals annually; and social service outreach has an increasingly varied roster of programs. The distinguished Cathedral School prepares young students to be future leaders, while Adults and Children in Trust, the renowned preschool, afterschool and summer program, offers diverse educational and nurturing experiences.

Over the past seven years, the Cathedral has hosted and curated a number of ambitious exhibitions, including *The Value of Water*; *Jane Alexander: Surveys (from the Cape of Good Hope)*, presented in partnership with the Museum of African Art, which was listed in the *New York Times* as one of the ten best exhibitions of the year; *Phoenix: Xu Bing at the Cathedral*; *The Value of Food: Sustaining a Green Planet*; and most recently, *The Christa Project: Manifesting Divine Bodies*, among others.