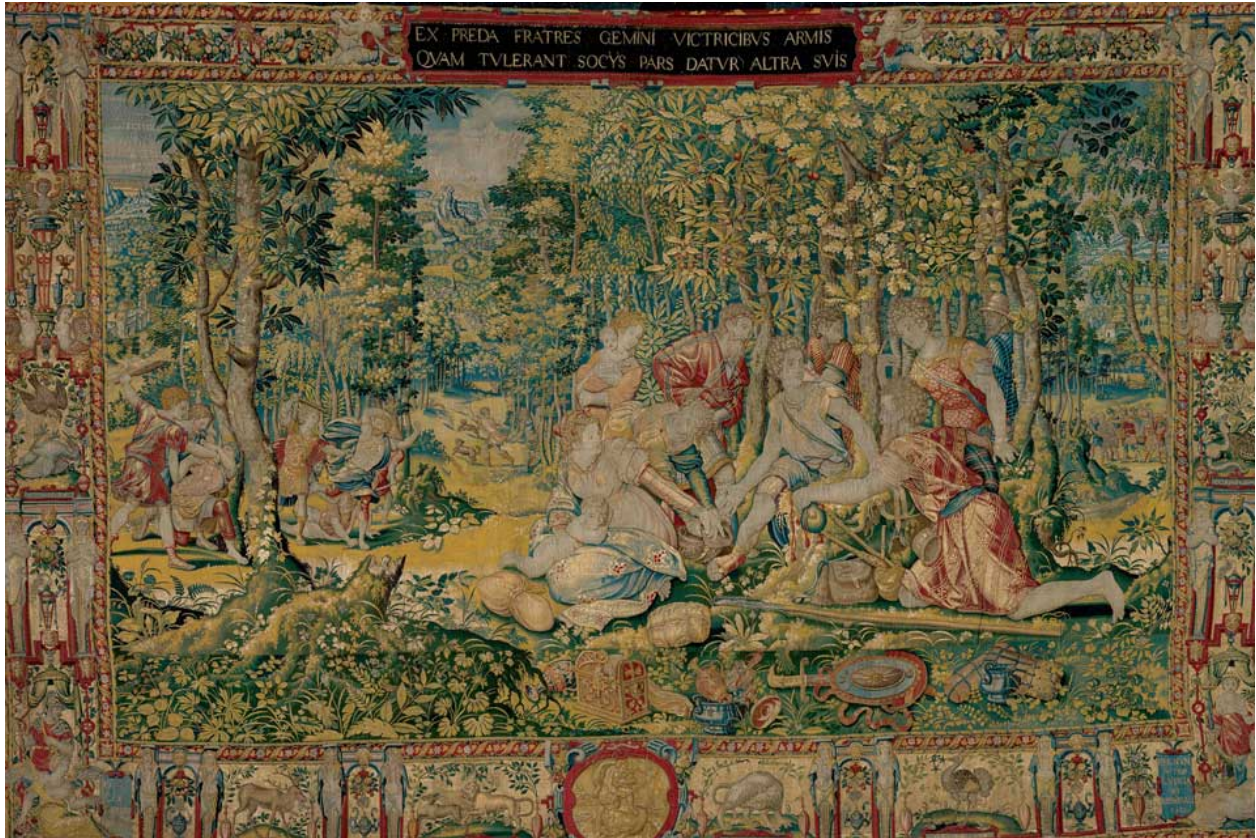


## Royal Tapestry Exhibition Travels to U.S. for the First Time



"The Twins Share Out Loot".

**COLUMBIA, SC.-** Royal Renaissance tapestries from one of the premier museums of fine and decorative arts in the world, the Kunsthistorisches Museum of Vienna, will be on view in South Carolina's capital city. Imperial Splendor: Renaissance Tapestries from Vienna opens at the [Columbia Museum of Art](#) on Friday, May 21, a free admission day, and runs through September 19, 2010. The exhibition marks the first time these centuries-old tapestries have travelled to the United States. Each of these eight exquisite tapestries, intricately crafted, measures from 11- to 12-feet high and from 12- to 18-feet long. The tapestries came to the Kunsthistorisches Museum from the collections of King Matthias (Holy Roman Emperor 1612-1619) and King Francis I (1708-1765).

The 16th-century Flemish tapestry collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum is widely known as one of the greatest in existence. Richly woven with silk, wool, and gold and silver thread, these eight newly restored wall hangings were made for the Hapsburg emperors at the famous Brussels atelier of Frans Geubels. They depict one of the most beloved secular themes in the 16th-century repertoire of Flemish tapestry making: the legendary founding of ancient Rome by Romulus and Remus. The series begins with the birth of the two brothers, when they were placed in a basket and set afloat on the Tiber River, and ends with the legendary rape of the Sabine women. For King Matthias and

subsequent Habsburg emperors, the tapestries, displayed prominently, also served as an important venue for relating powerful messages about the ancestral roots of the Holy Roman Empire and the Habsburg family.

In the late Middle ages, Renaissance and Baroque, tapestry was the art form – far more costly and elite than art in any other medium (sculpture and painting included). Renaissance tapestries served a number of different purposes. They were symbols of rank, wealth and power and effective sources of propaganda, made to order for the religious and political elite. They could cost as much as a warship and be more expensive than great paintings by acknowledged masters. Michelangelo was paid less money for painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel than the designers of a series of tapestries commissioned by Pope Leo X (*Acts of the Apostles*) were. Tapestries were taken along on campaigns and hung outdoors during festivals, as a way of uniting townspeople around their lord. Tapestries were not only beautiful works of art, and sometimes objects of propaganda (The Holy Roman Emperor Charles V was even accompanied into battle by his court painter who made sketches at the site for later weaving), but they served a useful purpose as well, being transported from castle to castle, palace to palace, and placed on cold masonry walls for warmth as a form of insulation. They were colorful and lively backdrops in dark, dank, cold and windowless interiors. The most famous weavers were in France and Brussels – where these tapestries were woven.

Imperial Splendor shows the role tapestries played as a valuable and important tool of artistic production during the Renaissance. This international touring exhibition is organized by the Kunsthistorisches Museum, which opened in 1891 and was built at the behest of Emperor Franz Joseph I as part of his expansion of Vienna. The Museum was established to unite and appropriately represent the artistic treasures collected by the Habsburgs over the centuries. The Kunsthistorisches ranks as one of the great Museums of Europe and among the premier fine arts Museums in the world. It is a rare and special opportunity that the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna is lending these magnificent works for a U.S. tour. This exhibition travels to only three cities, including Columbia, South Carolina.

This exhibition is developed by the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, and tour organized by International Arts & Artists, Washington, DC.