



Texas Chapter
Patrons of the Arts in the Vatican Museums

Noli Me Tangere Tapestry

Restoration Project



Among the recently adopted restoration projects of the Texas Chapter, *Noli Me Tangere* (“Do Not Cling to Me”) is a little-known tapestry which depicts the Resurrection of Christ, as narrated in the Gospel of John. In the tapestry, Mary Magdalene kneels before the Risen Christ, who appears to her in gardener’s garb. Jesus holds one hand over her as if in blessing, but also physically expressing his words, “Do Not Cling to Me.” The background includes the open tomb and an elegant garden.

The project is estimated to cost €288,100 (USD \$320,000) and to be completed by July 2021. The total cost accounts for the cleaning, chemical evaluation and overall restoration of the *Noli Me Tangere* to its original glory. Dr. Alessandra Rodolfo is heading up the work, together with her team of specialized restorers. Detailed photographs are taken of the tapestry, including close-ups of the threads, to fully capture its state of deterioration. Temporary stitches are applied to the work

Dedicated to the Restoration and Preservation of the Works of Art Entrusted to the Vatican Museums

From the *Nuova Scuola* (New School)

Weaver: Pieter Van Aelst (Aelst, 1502 – Brussels, 1550)

Date: 1524 – 1531

Classification: Tapestry

Dimensions: 565 × 325 cm

Materials: Wool warp, wool, silk and gilded silver thread

Adopted by: The Texas Chapter

Total Cost:
€288,100

to reinforce the weaving and prevent deformation when the tapestry is washed in a demineralized water and non-ionic surfactant solution. A small vacuum is passed gently over the tapestry to remove foreign particles from among the threads. Then follows the most arduous part of the process, the thread by thread removal and correction of previous restorations that cause tension and deformation.

Although this tapestry is undoubtedly a significant work, it has not been much studied over the years. Hence, an important part of the current restoration project is a thorough documentation of the work itself, its history and the process of conservation it is undergoing.



Noli Me Tangere is one piece in the *Nuova Scuola* (New School), a series of tapestries which depict the life of Christ, from the Nativity to the Resurrection. These twelve tapestries formerly decorated the *Sala Regia* and *Sala Ducale*, rooms in the Vatican Apostolic Palace used for receiving monarchs and other nobility during their state visits. Such a significant work was more than likely commissioned by one of the popes of the first half of the sixteenth century: either Pope Leo X (1513-1521) or Pope Clement VII (1523-1534).

Woven between 1524-1531, the tapestries were purchased for a shocking 20,750 ducats (about 560 years' worth of wages for an artisan). Raphael's study drawings serve as the basis for the large cartoon of the *Noli Me Tangere*, designed by his pupils, Giulio Romano and Giovan Francesco Penni. Raphael himself, however, had little direct involvement in the creation of the *Nuova Scuola* since he died before the commission was received.



Pieter Van Aelst is credited as the official weaver of the *Noli Me Tangere*. He headed the tapestry workshop in the Marchè aux Charbons in Brussels, and was the most famous weaver and tapestry merchant of his time. Van Aelst gained favor from the Vatican, along with international renown, after his contribution to the Raphael tapestries in 1519, which were hung in the Sistine Chapel. No doubt this fame was a major consideration in his being given the papal commission to complete the *Nuova Scuola* series.

Today, the twelve tapestries, the *Noli Me Tangere* included, are displayed in the Tapestry Gallery of the Vatican Museums.



For further information, please contact Daniel Hennessy at 469-328-6980 or dhennessy@texasvaticanpatrons.org.

texasvaticanpatrons.org