



# Raphael's Tapestries: The Grotesques of Leo X

*Ms. Lorraine Karafel*

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Around 1515, Raphael (1483-1520) designed a set of tapestries for Leo X, the first Medici pope. Each was sumptuously woven in gold, silver, and silk, and depicted scenes from classical mythology with inventive grotesques. Now lost, these spectacular, grand-scale textiles are reconstructed in *Raphael's Tapestries* and set among a series of unprecedented decorative projects that Pope Leo commissioned from the artist. Likely produced by the Brussels weaver Pieter van Aelst, the tapestries pioneered a new *all'antica* style analogous with contemporary painted and sculpted interior programs. Tapestries played a central role at Leo's court, as spectacle and as propaganda, and the Grotesques of Leo X would inform tapestry design for the next three centuries. Their beauty and complexity rivaled those of contemporary painting, and their luxurious materials made them highly prized. With this new study, the Grotesques take their rightful place as Renaissance masterworks and as documents of the fervent humanist culture of early 16th-century Rome.

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