



COOK AT THE TABLE WITH GAME Tapestry

Imperial Tapestry Manufactory,
Saint Petersburg, Russia

1775–1789

*Wool, silk, silver and passing threads,
hand weaving*

About the project

<https://tsaritsyno-museum.ru/events/special/p/lyudi-i-fondy-eng/>





SELECTED BY
Elena Karasyova,
Chief Curator



I have been working in the museum since 2003. During these twenty years, the museum has undergone great transformations, including changes in record-keeping and collecting work. I would like to tell you about a small episode of this challenging work.

In 2011, I was appointed Chief Curator and took charge of the Expert Collection Purchase Commission (ECPC) of the museum. In the early 2010s, the Moscow Department of Culture asked the museum to complete the collection with pieces of art from the era of Catherine the Great that were of exceptional merit. The museum staff employed every effort to search for masterpieces of the 18th century. We were extremely lucky to find a tapestry 'The Cook at the Table with Game' of the Imperial Tapestry Manufactory in a private collection. Negotiations with the owner of this unique artwork fell on my shoulders. As a result, in late 2011, a meeting of the museum's ECPC was held to consider the purchase of the tapestry. The experts noted its exceptional qualities and importance for the museum's collection.

The tapestry 'The Cook at the Table with Game' echoes the composition of the painting of the same name by Frans Snyders from the collection of the State Hermitage, which Catherine the Great acquired in 1764. Documents show that paintings from the Hermitage collection used to be copied onto tapestries at the Imperial Tapestry Manufactory.

The painting is a companion piece to 'The Maid with a Boy in a Fruit Shop'; it is believed that their concept can be traced to Rubens' sketches. Researchers put the canvas's date between 1634 and 1637. This masterfully done Baroque composition by Snyders was used for cartoon (as the preparatory drawings for a life-size tapestry are called) after which a tapestry with the same title was woven at the Imperial Tapestry Manufactory between 1775 and 1889. Such works were mostly sent to the court.

The tapestry obtained by the Tsaritsyno Museum is a rather loose copy of Snyder's painting. The composition of the original piece was changed: it was narrowed at the bottom and top using a stitched narrow border, while its width was greatly increased (this was probably due to the size of the room for which the tapestry was made). The colouristic solution is as close as possible to the painting.

Our tapestry is a good example of how wall carpets and easel painting converge. The high level of weavers' skill allowed them to convey the colour nuances, imitate brush strokes and colour changes, which creates the illusion of a painting.

I am proud to have been involved in acquiring this fine work of art for the collection of the Tsaritsyno Museum-Reserve. This was the beginning of the tapestry section of the Imperial Tapestry Manufactory in the museum's holdings. 'The Cook at the Table with Game' is not only a jewel of the Tsaritsyno collection but also a masterpiece of the Museum Stock of the Russian Federation, as there are only a few Russian tapestries of this type preserved in different museum collections.