

EMBROIDERED AND PAINTED SILK TAPESTRY

Artist: Unknown
 Date: 1852
 Dimensions: 475 x 297 cm
 Materials: Silk, cotton, gold leaf
 Inventory Number: AS2355, 5968

Total Cost € 30.000,00

STATE OF PRESERVATION:

The tapestry is in very poor condition. It has both surface level and ingrained dirt. There are severe lacerations and loose threads all over the surface of the tapestry. The gilding has partially detached from the paper. The restoration work will require sixteen months of work for two people.

RESTORATION PROCESS INCLUDES:

- Scientific and laboratory studies
- Photographic documentation
- Pesticide treatment
- Disassembly of the lining from the silk fabric
- Cleaning with microaspiration
- Consolidation by needlework on the lacerations on the silk, reattaching loose threads of the embroidery
- Reattachment of the gilding that is detached from paper
- Cleaning and replacement of the original lining by needlework or substitution with something similar

Symbolism plays an important role in the folklore of many societies, with certain objects or species being endowed with protective or propitious properties. It is especially important to the Chinese, particularly in centuries past, as they believed bad spirits were in the air all around ready to pounce on the unprotected. Consequently, many items used or worn were decorated with auspicious symbols designed to ward off these evil influences. Thus, clothing, furniture, vases, bowls and ornaments were covered with lucky emblems.

Chinese language is phonetic and many things are symbolic because phonetically the word sounds the same as something thought to be lucky. Therefore, these flowers, trees, animals, birds and creatures were used as decorative motifs on items around the home. Clothing was embroidered with auspicious designs of flowers, bats and butterflies, while furniture was carved with bamboo, dragons and cranes. Additionally, flower symbols convey beauty, grace, perfection, nobility and abundance. They are also excellent symbols of love, adoration, and unity.

This beautiful large silk tapestry is truly a unique piece in the Ethnological Collection of the Vatican Museums. This work features orange embroidery and a row of blue flowers that surrounds Chinese characters in the center panel. Along the border are scenes depicting different genres, people and Chinese symbols of good luck.

Standing above on the tapestry is the imperial couple of China, Emperor Xianfeng and his wife. The piece is lined with cotton and highlighted with gold leaf. The tapestry, created in the second year of the reign of the emperor Xianfeng 1852 (Qing Dynasty 1644-1911), tells the story of the family clan. The Xianfeng Emperor (1831-1861), born Yizhu, was the eighth Emperor of the Manchu-led Qing Dynasty, and the seventh Qing emperor to rule over China proper, from 1850 to 1861. Chosen as the Crown Prince in the later years of Dao Guang's reign, Yizhu had reputed ability in literature and administration which surpassed most of his brothers. He succeeded the throne in 1850 at age 19 and was a relatively young Emperor. He inherited a crumbling dynasty that faced challenges not only internally but also from Europeans. However, this situation did not reflect upon his reign title, Xianfeng, which means "Universal Prosperity." During his reign, the Qing Dynasty faced rebellion, battles and Western Imperialism.

