



RENAISSANCE SPLENDOR

CATHERINE de' MEDICI'S VALOIS TAPESTRIES



Visitors Guide to a Renaissance Drama



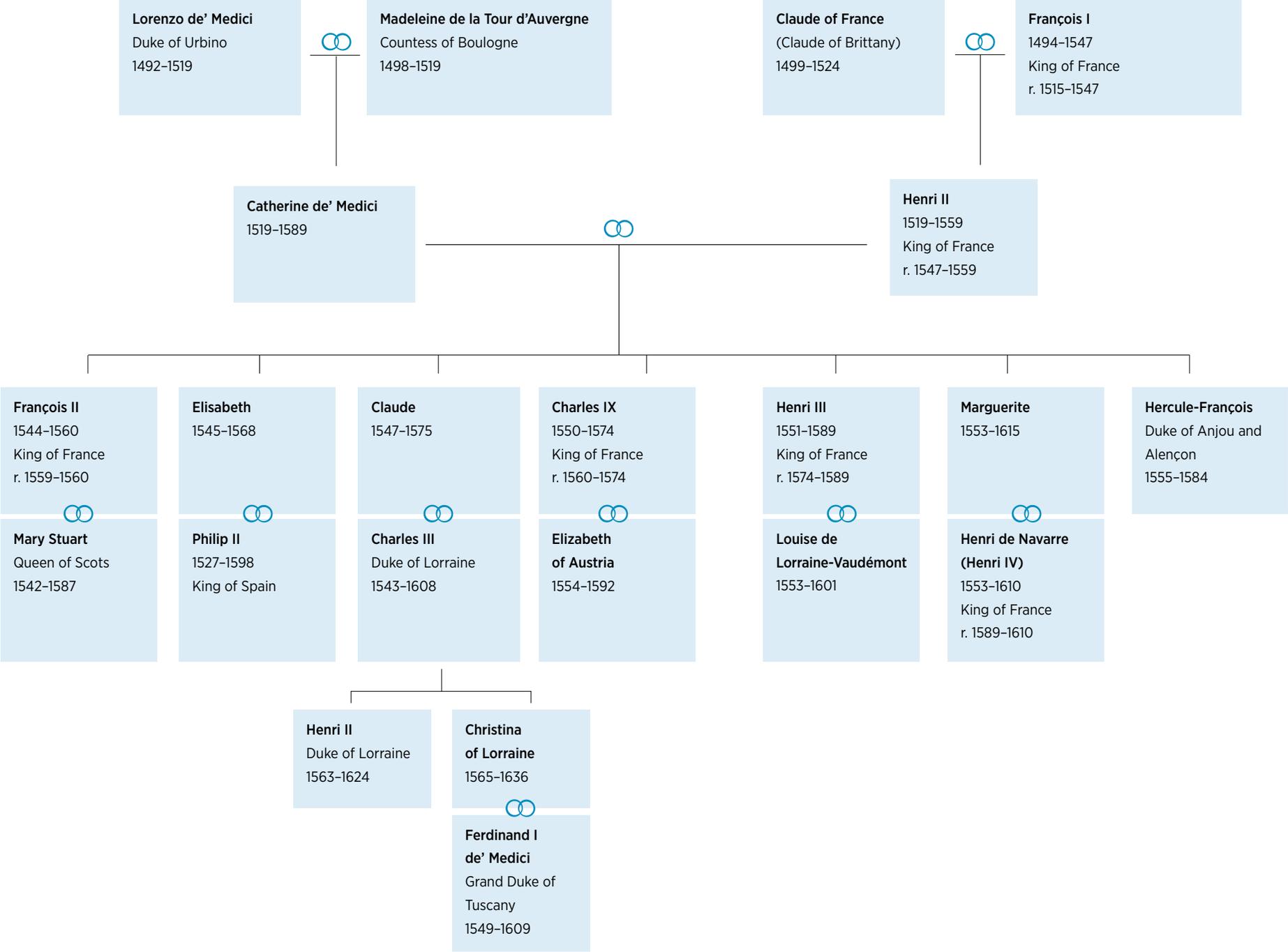
RENAISSANCE SPLENDOR

CATHERINE de' MEDICI'S VALOIS TAPESTRIES

November 18–January 21

A festive drama in six acts, the *Valois Tapestries* feature a captivating cast of characters, most of whom belonged to the Valois family, rulers of France from 1328 to 1589. Richly costumed and positioned in the foreground of these monumental hangings, the starring players lock eyes with us and invite us into the drama of their magnificent courtly life. This guide introduces the protagonists through images and biographies, and provides detailed accounts of Acts I to VI, each representing a tapestry in the exhibition. Get ready to follow along, look closely, and enjoy the show!

Get to Know the Valois Family



Key

- Marriage
- Offspring

Who's Who in the Cast

This set of tapestries was woven around 1575 during the French Wars of Religion, when even members of the Valois court held different allegiances that threatened to tear the family apart. Despite this dramatic tension, Catherine de' Medici, the queen mother of France, commissioned these tapestries in which her children represent a united front, a royal family strong in the face of violence and betrayal. Read this section to discover who's who.



Catherine de' Medici

Catherine de' Medici was the daughter of Lorenzo de' Medici, Duke of Urbino, and Madeleine de la Tour d'Auvergne, countess of Boulogne. In 1533, at age 14, Catherine married Henri II of France, who became king in 1547; together they had ten children. After Henri's untimely death in 1559, three of their sons successively became king of France; as queen mother, Catherine was influential during each of their reigns. Much of her energy was devoted to mediating religious conflicts between the Catholics and Protestants, but her overriding ambition was to maintain and glorify the Valois dynasty. A collector and patron of the arts, Catherine appears in each Valois tapestry, distinct in her black mourning attire, which she wore for the last 30 years of her life.

Catherine in the tapestries



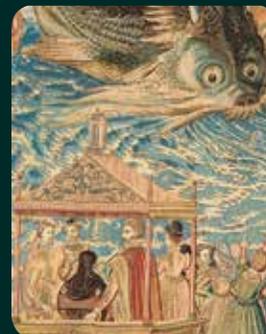
Fontainebleau



Elephant



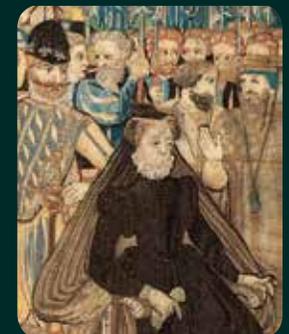
Journey



Whale



Tournament



Polish Ambassadors

Henri III, King of France



Henri was Catherine's third and favorite son, which caused discontent among his siblings. His mother used her considerable influence to advance Henri's fortunes. Briefly king of Poland in 1573, Henri inherited the French throne in 1574 upon the death of his older brother, Charles IX; Henri was the last French monarch from the House of Valois. The Wars of Religion overshadowed his reign, but he took a neutral stance, as he believed that religious tolerance would prevent the total collapse of the French government. He greets viewers in *Fontainebleau* and *Journey*. Look for Henri's neatly trimmed beard and mustache, curved hairline, and jeweled cap.

Louise de Lorraine-Vaudémont



The wife of Henri III, Louise appears in *Fontainebleau* and *Tournament*. With a quiet, pious demeanor and exceptional beauty, she was doted on by her husband, who delighted in choosing her clothing and making her look the part of queen. She often accompanied him to parties and events, but she was never involved in governance. Look for Louise's distinctive pearl necklace and sideways glance.

Hercule-François, Duke of Anjou and Alençon



Named Hercule at birth, Catherine's youngest son modified his name to honor his oldest brother, François II, who died at age 16. Hercule-François fled the French court in 1575 after disputes with his brother Henri III. He was a Protestant sympathizer, which did not sit well with his mother. After his army was defeated in Antwerp, he returned home to France, where he died of malaria at age 29. Look for Hercule-François with his hand on his hip, standing beside his sister Marguerite in *Elephant*.

Marguerite



Marguerite was Catherine's seventh child. Her relationships with her brothers, particularly Henri III, were strained because they disapproved of her affair with Henri, Duke of Guise, the leader of the extremist Catholic League. Despite this dalliance, Marguerite eventually married the Protestant Henri de Navarre, with whom she appears in *Whale*. The marriage was meant to bring peace between Catholics and Protestants; however, on August 23, 1572, just six days after their wedding, the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre broke out, during which thousands of Protestants lost their lives (almost including Henri himself). Look for Marguerite standing confidently in the foreground of three of the tapestries.

Henri de Navarre



Prior to marrying Marguerite, the Protestant Henri was king of Navarre, an area between present-day Spain and France. He traveled to Paris in 1572 for his marriage and narrowly escaped death during the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre by promising to convert to Catholicism (although he put off doing so for more than 20 years). When Catherine's youngest son, Hercule-François, died in 1584, Henri became the heir to the French throne. Five years later, after the death of his brother-in-law Henri III, Henri de Navarre became Henri IV, king of France—but only after officially converting to Catholicism. Marguerite could not inherit the throne, as the line of succession was male, but as Henri's wife she became queen. Henri and Marguerite had no children, and their marriage was eventually annulled. Despite their unhappy relationship, he appears in two of the tapestries alongside her, his back turned toward us in both.



Charles III, Duke of Lorraine

Charles was married to Catherine's favorite daughter, Claude, who is not represented in the tapestries because she had died prior to their creation. In Lorraine, Charles presided throughout a long period of peace during the Wars of Religion. He aligned himself with Catholic factions, and perhaps because of that, he was unwilling to accept the former Protestant Henri de Navarre as king of France. Still, the two men are represented together in *Whale*, and they eventually reconciled in 1594. In *Whale*, Charles peers out at us from between Marguerite and Henri de Navarre; look for his distinctive mustache.



Henri II, Duke of Lorraine

The son of Claude and Charles III, Duke of Lorraine, Henri might be the adolescent depicted in *Elephant* alongside his aunt and uncle, Marguerite and Hercule-François.



Henri I, Duke of Guise

As the ruler of Guise, an area in northern France, Henri I had a volatile relationship with the Valois family. Not only was he the leader of the extremist Catholic League during the Wars of Religion, but he also had an affair with Marguerite, which soured Catherine's attitude toward him. However, his eventual marriage to Henri de Navarre's cousin, Catherine of Cleves, improved his relationship with the queen mother. Find Henri I in the left foreground of *Ambassadors*.

You may have noticed many Henri's in this story! The last of the Wars of Religion, ending in 1589, was even called the War of the Three Henri's, having been fought between Henri III of France, Henri de Navarre, and Henri I, Duke of Guise. Henri de Navarre won this conflict, eventually becoming king of France.

Charles de Guise, Duke of Mayenne



Charles, the brother of Henri I, Duke of Guise, ruled an area in northwestern France known as Mayenne. He was once a supporter of Henri III, even accompanying him to Poland. However, Charles soon pledged allegiance to his brother and the Catholic League, and it was he who demanded that Henri de Navarre convert to Catholicism before being crowned king of France. Find him holding a sword in the foreground of *Journey*.

Acknowledgments

The producers would like to extend their thanks to some of the great talents who made the *Valois Tapestries* possible: Antoine Caron, master artist and draftsman, whose detailed sketches of Catherine's "magnificences" inspired the settings for each act of our play.

François Clouet, Jean de Court, Pierre Dumonstier, Jean Rabel, and the artists in their circle, for providing the vivid and lifelike headshots of our star-studded cast.

The many skilled artisans and weavers of the Brussels tapestry workshops of Master WF and Master MGP, who devoted thousands of hours to create the elaborate sets and costumes that make each act truly magnificent.

The talented conservators at Restauero Tessile di Beyer e Perrone Da Zara, Florence; Open Care, Milan; and Opera Laboratori Fiorentini, Florence, who have restored the original brilliance of our drama.

Setting the Stage

Each of the tapestries represents a splendid party or event, known as a "magnificence," hosted by the Valois family. Potentially lasting several days, the parties included performances such as ballets and jousting or other war games. The projection of magnificence, or luxurious richness, was important to the queen mother. Even though the Valois dynasty experienced financial instability, Catherine went to great lengths to create the illusion of endless power and wealth, spending vast sums of money on festivities, clothing, art objects, and building projects. While the life-size family portraits are contemporary with the weaving of the tapestries, the "magnificences" in the backgrounds are depictions of celebrations from the past. Continue reading to discover what's happening in Acts I to VI.

Portrait credits

Portrait of Catherine de' Medici (1519–1589), Wife of Henri II, King of France, 1500s. Studio of François Clouet (French, c. 1516–1572). Morgan Library & Museum, New York, Purchased by J. Pierpont Morgan in 1907, III, 65c

Portrait of Henri de Navarre, Later King Henri IV (1553–1610), c. 1568. Pierre Dumonstier (French, c. 1545–1610). Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Estampes et photographie, Paris, Rés. Na 22 (12), 12

Portrait of Louise de Lorraine-Vaudémont, Queen of France (1553–1601), c. 1575. Jean Rabel (French, 1548–1603). Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Estampes et photographie, Paris, Rés. Na 22 (16), 1

Portrait of Charles III, Duke of Lorraine and Bar (1543–1608), c. 1570. Studio of François Clouet (French, c. 1516–1572). Musée du Louvre, Paris, 33436 recto. © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY. Photo: Thierry Le Mage

Portrait of Henri III, King of France (1551–1589), c. 1573. Jean de Court (French, c. 1530–c. 1585). Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Estampes et photographie, Paris, Rés. Na 22 (12), 7

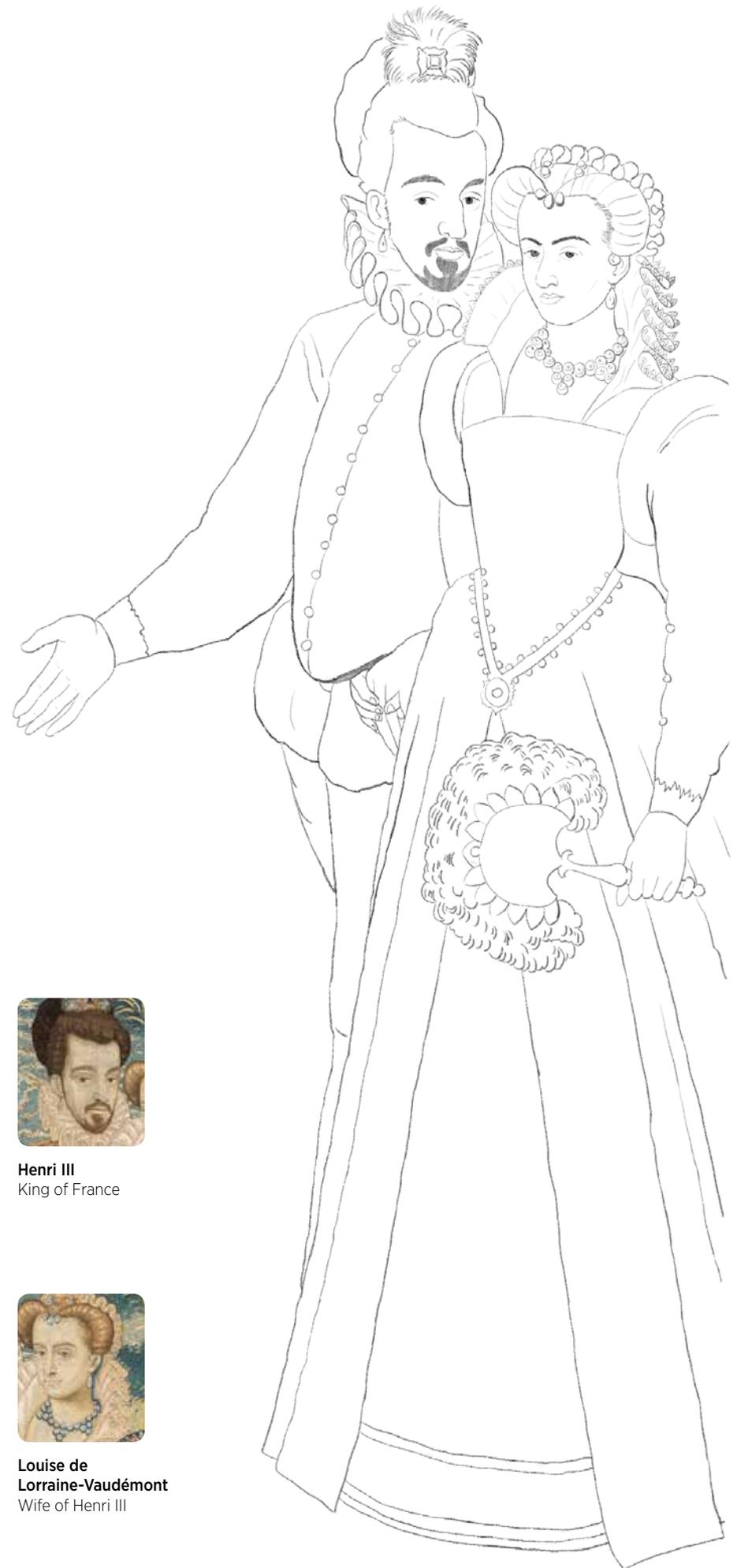
Portrait of Marguerite de Valois (1553–1615), c. 1571. French School. Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Estampes et photographie, Paris, Rés. Na 22 (16), 11

Act I: Fontainebleau

Henri III and Louise de Lorraine-Vaudémont beckon us into a scene of mock nautical battle, with soldiers dressed as Greeks and Trojans rowing boats and defending a small island. Spectators, including Catherine, who is dressed in black, throng the bank to get a better look, and we are invited to do the same. In 1564 a similar party may have taken place at the Palace of Fontainebleau, southeast of Paris, to celebrate Catherine and her son Charles IX's tour of France. Charles is only ten years old when he becomes king of France, so Catherine takes him on a grand tour of his territory to introduce him to his kingdom and to inspire loyalty among his subjects. Because Charles had died by the time this tapestry is woven, he is not included. Instead, his successor Henri III, who is the reigning Valois monarch at the time, is given a prominent position in the foreground.



Fontainebleau (detail), from the *Valois Tapestries*, c. 1576. Woven under the direction of Master WF, Brussels. Wool, silk, silver and gilded silver metal-wrapped thread; 395.5 x 338 cm. Gallerie degli Uffizi, Palazzo Pitti, deposit, Florence, Arazzi n. 473. Photo: Roberto Palermo



Henri III
King of France



Louise de Lorraine-Vaudémont
Wife of Henri III

Act II: Elephant

A large mechanical elephant dominates the festivities behind Hercule-François and Marguerite, who stand in the foreground with (probably) their nephew, Henri II, future Duke of Lorraine, between them. Men dressed as soldiers attack the elephant, which remains strong in the face of the assault. This “magnificence” is a reenactment of an ancient battle between the Carthaginian general Hannibal, who crossed the Alps into Italy with his war elephants, and the Roman general Scipio, whose victory ended the Second Punic War. Here, the elephant and its apparent resilience may represent the strength of the Valois family during the Wars of Religion, a difficult time for every member of the dynasty. The elephant could represent King Henri III, the reigning monarch, while two of Catherine’s other children stand together in the foreground, strong in the face of conflict.



Elephant (detail), from the *Valois Tapestries*, c. 1576. Woven under the direction of Master MGP, Brussels. Wool, silk, silver and gilded silver metal-wrapped thread; 382.5 x 468 cm. Gallerie degli Uffizi, Palazzo Pitti, deposit, Florence, Arazzi n. 474. Photo: Roberto Palermo

A mechanical elephant steals the show.



Marguerite
Daughter of Catherine



Hercule-François
Son of Catherine



Henri II
Duke of Lorraine

Act III: Journey

In this depiction of a victorious procession, men on horseback wind their way through the scene. The queen mother, dressed in black, is carried in a litter, with a servant walking at its side. The royal retinue departs from the Château d'Anet in the upper left corner of the tapestry. King Henri II, Catherine's husband, had renovated this residence for his favorite mistress, Diane de Poitiers, who wielded great power at the French court: Henri favored her over Catherine. After Henri's death, Catherine takes possession of the château and removes all traces of her rival. Charles de Guise, Duke of Mayenne, occupies the foreground, his foot overlapping the tapestry's border. While the Guise family would eventually become Catherine's fierce enemies, they are on good terms at the time the tapestries are woven. At the center of the scene, a mounted King Henri III makes eye contact with us.



Journey (detail), from the *Valois Tapestries*, c. 1576. Woven under the direction of Master WF, Brussels. Wool, silk, silver and gilded silver metal-wrapped thread; 389.5 x 533 cm. Gallerie degli Uffizi, Palazzo Pitti, deposit, Florence, Arazzi n. 3. Photo: Roberto Palermo



Charles de Guise
Duke of Mayenne



Henri III
King of France

Act IV: Whale

Extravagant celebrations, including a mock nautical battle and a concert, accompany Catherine's meeting with an envoy, or representative, of Philip II, king of Spain, at Bayonne in southern France in 1565. They meet to discuss the volatile relationship between Catholics and Protestants in their respective homelands. Catherine is especially pleased to see her daughter Elisabeth, the wife of Philip II. The evening's entertainment takes place on an island in a river; guests are ferried to the island on barges that give them prime views of a dramatic display. Actors dressed as Greek deities represent peace between France and Spain, working together to defeat the horrible monster of war – an artificial whale. Catherine, seated on a barge with her back to us, is captivated by the symbolic performance at the center of the tapestry. Marguerite, her husband Henri de Navarre, and Charles III, Duke of Lorraine, stand in the foreground, perhaps having a lively conversation about the elaborate festivities.



Whale (detail), from the *Valois Tapestries*, c. 1576. Woven under the direction of Master MGP, Brussels. Wool, silk, silver and gilded silver metal-wrapped thread; 398 x 396 cm. Gallerie degli Uffizi, Palazzo Pitti, deposit, Florence, Arazzi n. 493. Photo: Roberto Palermo



Marguerite
Daughter of Catherine



Charles III
Duke of Lorraine



Henri de Navarre
Husband of Marguerite

Act V: Tournament

This is the only tapestry in which Catherine appears as one of the foreground figures. She stands at the left, accompanied by her daughter Marguerite and her son-in-law Henri de Navarre. *Tournament* might represent the festivities of June 1559, when Catherine's husband, King Henri II, is accidentally killed at a tournament celebrating a peace treaty between France, Spain, and England. During a joust with one of his bodyguards, a wood splinter from a lance pierces Henri II's eye and enters his brain. The king succumbs to his injuries several days later, paving the way for three of his sons to eventually become king of France. In the background of this scene, a group of women, including the tiny, nondescript figure of Catherine, watches the festivities from under a canopy – performers on horseback and in chariots engage in simulated battle. Some historians interpret this scene as referencing an event that occurs during a diplomatic encounter at Bayonne, while Catherine is visiting her daughter Elisabeth, queen of Spain.



Henri de Navarre
Husband of Marguerite



Marguerite
Daughter of Catherine



Louise de Lorraine-Vaudémont
Daughter-in-law
of Catherine



Tournament (detail), from the *Valois Tapestries*, c. 1576. Woven under the direction of Master MGP, Brussels. Wool, silk, silver and gilded silver metal-wrapped thread; 385 x 604.5 cm. Gallerie degli Uffizi, Palazzo Pitti, deposit, Florence, Arazzi n. 495. Photo: Roberto Palermo

Act VI: Polish Ambassadors

This celebration of Catherine's favorite son, Henri III, is presented to us by Henri I, Duke of Guise, who looks out at us with his hand on his hip. When this scene is composed, Henri of Guise is a favorite of King Henri III, although later he opposes the king and consequently loses favor at court. The festivities in the background honor the arrival of Polish ambassadors who come to elect Catherine's son Henri as king of Poland. This "magnificence" includes a lengthy ballet with actors and musicians dressed as nymphs who perform on a specially constructed rock visible on the right side of the tapestry. Atop the rock is the Greek god Apollo holding his lyre, a reference to Henri III and his supreme power. Wearing black mourning attire, Catherine sits in the middle of the scene, her eyes on the ballet, another symbol of her son's authority.



Polish Ambassadors (detail), from the *Valois Tapestries*, c. 1576. Woven under the direction of Master WF, Brussels. Wool, silk, silver and gilded silver metal-wrapped thread; 381.5 x 394.5 cm. Gallerie degli Uffizi, Palazzo Pitti, deposit, Florence, Arazzi n. 472. Photo: Roberto Palermo



Henri I
Duke of Guise

The Uffizi Galleries and the Cleveland Museum of Art are profoundly grateful to Friends of the Uffizi and their major benefactor, Mrs. Veronica Atkins, for their generous support of the restoration of the *Valois Tapestries*.



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Exhibition Programming

Special Exhibition Tours Tue/Nov 27–Sun/Jan 13, Tue and Wed at 11:00 and Sun at 2:00. Join CMA volunteer docents for tours of *Renaissance Splendor: Catherine de' Medici's Valois Tapestries*. Tours are limited to 25 participants and depart from the information desk in the atrium. Exhibition ticket fee; CMA members free. Reservation required.

Close-Looking Session: Renaissance Splendor Wed/Nov 28 and Jan 16, 6:00–7:00, Kelvin and Eleanor Smith Foundation Exhibition Hall. These sessions offer a guided look at a work of art to mine for richer meaning, explore ideas, and discover overlooked details. Exhibition ticket fee; CMA members free.

Introduction to Weaving Workshop Wed/Jan 9, 6:00–8:00, or Sat/Jan 19, 1:30–3:00. In partnership with Praxis Fiber Workshop. Learn the basics of hand weaving with Praxis teaching artist Trey Gehring. \$50, CMA members \$40.



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