



'THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST' FROM 'LIFE OF CHRIST' SERIES (1643-46)

UO PROF AWARDED MAJOR ARTS GRANT

What if you could peel off Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel fresco from the Vatican, roll it up, send it on a plane and put it on display here in Eugene? That's on the same scale of what UO Associate Professor James Harper is trying to do, except with some of the most famous tapestries in the world, the Barberini Tapestries, commissioned by Roman 17th-century nobility and contemporaries of the Medicis, the Barberini family. And after receiving an \$80,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) last week with co-recipient Marlene Eidelheit, the director of New York's Textile Conservation Laboratory at the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Harper is one step closer. The grant is for a book catalogue and touring exhibit of "The Barberini Tapestries: Woven Monuments of the Roman Baroque" that will show in New York City and Eugene.

"You can't bring Michelangelo's ceiling to Eugene but this is something that you can," says Harper, a professor in the UO Department of Art History and expert in the Barberini Tapestries. The Barberinis founded one of two tapestry factories south of the Swiss Alps in the 1600s that produced six sets of tapestries over 50 years. The exhibition will feature the "Life of Christ" panels, which, when lined up side-by-side, will stretch 175 feet across. "They're not these dusty things in the background," Harper says. "They were the proud items in these collections. They're huge, brightly colored, materially rich, monumental propaganda, telling stories and pushing agendas of the people who commissioned them."

Harper says that the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art is the frontrunner for the exhibition venue, but the tapestries won't come to Eugene until 2015 due to scheduling conflicts and the need for more fundraising. "\$80,000 doesn't actually cover a traveling exhibition," Harper says. "We are looking for funding from all sorts of sources. We haven't started beating the bushes in Eugene yet."

The NEA grant, however, was exactly the kind of validation that the traveling exhibit needs to be a success, Harper says. — Alex Notman



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