

# **Kimbell Art Museum**

## ***Art and War in the Renaissance: The Battle of Pavia Tapestries***

June 16-September 15, 2024

An Acoustiguide Tour

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**Stop 5 (504):** Attributed to Pietro Paolo Malfettano (Italian, active 16th century), Farnese Guard Triple-combed Steel Helmet, first half of 16th century; Rotella Shield, ca. 1590; Ceremonial Helmet originally from Canicattì, ca. 1570

**Stop 6 (505):** *The Advance of the Imperial Army and Counterattack of the French Cavalry Led by King Francis I*

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## 500. INTRODUCTION

### **ERIC LEE:**

Hello and welcome to *Art and War in the Renaissance: The Battle of Pavia Tapestries*. I'm Eric Lee, director of the Kimbell Art Museum.

The seven extraordinary tapestries you are about to encounter are some of the most monumental and prestigious art works of the Renaissance period. They portray, in vivid and realistic detail, the decisive battle of Pavia that took place on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 1525, when the imperial forces of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V defeated the army of French King Francis I, marking a decisive victory and turning point in the lengthy Italian Wars which lasted from 1494–1559.

These very costly and luxurious works of art were made as a diplomatic gift for the victorious Charles V. They were designed by Flemish court artist Bernard van Orley; and they were woven in Brussels, the leading center of tapestry production, in the workshop of Willem and Jan Dermoyen.

The tapestries are now among the treasures of the Capodimonte Museum in Naples, Italy, and we are immensely excited that this is the first time they are being displayed in the United States. Exquisite and powerful arms and armor from the period, drawn from the Capodimonte's renowned Farnese armory, are also being presented. So, as the dramatic scenes unfold around you in the tapestries, you can see similar types of armor and weapons that played such a key role in the battle.

We are delighted to be joined on this tour by Carmine Romano, the exhibition curator from the Capodimonte Museum; Nancy Edwards, curator of European art at the Kimbell Art Museum; and Thomas Campbell, renowned European tapestry specialist and director of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. Thomas Campbell.

### **THOMAS CAMPBELL:**

**The reason that the Battle of Pavia tapestries are so significant from an artistic point of view is that this was the first large scale set of tapestries in which the leading designer of the day, Bernard van Orley, really explored tapestry as a medium to portray life-sized figures, life-size settings. Never before had a Northern artist attempted to portray a contemporary event in such detail with such accuracy to life in terms of the arms and the armor, the physical setting, the background landscape. It was absolutely groundbreaking.**

### **ERIC LEE:**

Please continue into the galleries and enjoy your tour.

## 501. TAPESTRY 1

*The IncurSION of the Imperial Baggage Train into the Battlefield, and the Surrender of the Swiss Pikemen of the French Army*

### **NARRATOR:**

The Battle of Pavia was the climax of a conflict between two major European powers: the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, head of the Habsburg dynasty; and Francis I, king of France. Months earlier, the French army had invaded Northern Italy, then under Habsburg dominance, and laid siege to the town of Pavia. In the early morning hours of February 24th, 1525, imperial troops launched an attack to break the siege.

The battle was a short period of intense action. As you will see, the designer of the tapestries, Bernard van Orley, did not flinch from depicting the horror and violence of war.

Displayed in the order you see here around the gallery, these seven tapestries offer an all-encompassing view of a raging battlefield set within an uninterrupted landscape. Rather than giving us a strictly chronological narrative, van Orley captures that sense of frantic activity by showing scenes that happened in quick succession or even at the same time. Key characters appear repeatedly – sometimes in the same tapestry. Carmine Romano.

### **CARMINE ROMANO:**

**The scenery or the back of the scene is connecting one to each other, creating a kind of continuous movie that describes all the scene and also that gives you an immersive experience like you really feel yourself like part of what is happening.**

### **NARRATOR:**

Focusing now on this first tapestry, one feature that connects the series is a brick wall. At the left, camp followers surge through a break in the wall. Nancy Edwards.

### **NANCY EDWARDS:**

**In addition to these large military forces, there were hundreds or thousands of others who helped in various ways. So, they would include the families of the soldiers: their wives, their children. There were long periods when they weren't fighting, and so there was domestic life. They would cook. There were carpenters, there were surgeon barbers, who helped heal the wounded. There were clergy.**

### **NARRATOR:**

At left foreground is a man running at the front of the group, with chickens hanging from his pike.

### **THOMAS CAMPBELL:**

**There were huge opportunities, if an army was successful, for pillage and robbery. And even as the battle is in pitched intensity, they would have stripped the clothes and the possessions from dead bodies and taken anything they could.**

**NARRATOR:**

Immediately to the right of the man and child is a very tall, large sword, planted vertically into the ground. There is a case behind you – near the final tapestry – with a very similar two-handed sword.

**CARMINE ROMANO:**

**It was put in the center of the battlefield and also like a point of reference. As you can see from the tapestry, it's taller than a man, and I must tell you that it's very heavy.**  
*(Laughs)*

**NARRATOR:**

This is a pivotal moment of the battle. To the right of the child is a flag and drum, and several pikes – like long spears – on the ground. The Swiss mercenaries, paid to fight on the French side, have thrown down their arms and surrendered.

**THOMAS CAMPBELL:**

**But not all of them did so. Down in the foreground, with a huge pike that stretches from the bottom of the tapestry to the top of the tapestry, we see the commander of these mercenaries, a man called Jean de Diesbach, who preferred to die with honor than to flee and we see him literally standing, not putting up a fight, as one of the imperial cavalymen raises his sword and is about to slice off his head with a single blow.**

## 502. TAPESTRY 2

*The Surrender of King Francis I*

### **NARRATOR:**

In this tapestry, we are shown the main event of the battle. The focus of the drama is towards the left, in the foreground. Thomas Campbell.

### **THOMAS CAMPBELL:**

**The decisive moment in the Battle of Pavia was the capture of the French king. His horse was killed by a shot from one of the guns of the imperial army and died beneath him. And in this tapestry, we see the French king being helped from his horse by three members of the imperial army.**

### **NARRATOR:**

It was an honor to be one of those who captured the King, and many are identified by name on their clothes or armor.

### **NANCY EDWARDS:**

**[Francis], who's being helped down, his body is sort of twisted; he's in this very heavy armor that's been beautifully portrayed. You can see its highlights: you can see this great helmet with plumage; in fact, the French were easy to pick out because they were so gloriously decorated.**

### **NARRATOR:**

Notice the blood pouring from the horse's wound.

### **CARMINE ROMANO:**

**It is very symbolic, metaphoric, that the blood of the horse is going on one of the rifle of the battle.**

### **NARRATOR:**

The Battle of Pavia marked a turning point in the history of warfare. Aristocratic knights in heavy armor were being defeated by new technology recently introduced to European warfare – firearms.

The tapestry creates a visual contrast between the French king and his retinue, representing the outmoded warfare techniques, on the left, and the two foot soldiers, at bottom right, one of whom has captured a horse, shown in heroic scale.

### **THOMAS CAMPBELL:**

**The scene is a very dramatic one. The king, being lifted from his horse; the imperial troops standing by waiting to take his surrender. But it's also visually dramatic. Over on the right-hand side, we have an enormous horse rearing on its hind legs, we have soldiers running in. We have other soldiers galloping in, in the background. And this scene really embodies the new drama that the artist, Bernard van Orley, brought to**

**the conception of the design of the Battle of Pavia tapestries. Traditionally, Flemish tapestries emphasized surface pattern and decoration. It was difficult for the weavers to create the illusion of depth. But in these designs van Orley really pushes the weavers to the limits. He has big figures in the foreground portrayed in dark colors. He has smaller figures in the distance, portrayed in lighter colors. So, he's using both linear and aerial perspective to create an illusion of depth in these tapestries.**

**NARRATOR:**

The weavers typically used wool for the dark colors and silks for the lighter colors. In the finest tapestries, like these, they also used gold and silver thread.

**THOMAS CAMPBELL:**

**The gold thread was a tiny filament of gilt silver that was wrapped around a silk thread.**

**NARRATOR:**

Both the king and the soldier holding the rearing horse have a lot of gold thread in their armor and clothing.

**CARMINE ROMANO:**

**You should imagine that for every single tapestry, we have something like five kilos, ten pounds, of gold and silver, and that makes them also more (*laughs*) more precious than they are as a work of art.**

**503. CASE 10: FS VITRINE; TWO SMALL SWORDS**

*Jasper Broadsword*, 17th century

*Agate Dagger*, early 16th century

**NARRATOR:**

The tapestries show the importance of weaponry when used in the cut and thrust of war.

In this case are two small swords that would never have seen battle. On the longer sword the blade has delicate decoration and an inscribed motto in the center. We don't know who originally owned this sword, but it must have been highly prized, because the ornate hilt, or handle, is studded with colored gemstones: jasper, garnets, and turquoise.

You won't find slender, delicate swords like this in the tapestries. The other, shorter dagger *is* of a type that would have been common in battle – though this particular example would have been far too precious. Its hilt, or handle, is made of a mineral called agate.

**CARMINE ROMANO:**

**The material that has been used for the handle, the sardonyx agate, is really something that was considered as very, very expensive and very rare at the time.**

**NARRATOR:**

The princely owner of this dagger would have worn it on ceremonial occasions. Both weapons were certainly made for magnificent display.

**CARMINE ROMANO:**

**Of course, women would have used jewels, and men (*laughs*) were using weapons and armor to show their power and their richness.**

#### **504. CASE 11: FS VITRINE; PARADE ARMOR**

Farnese Guard Triple-combed Steel Helmet, first half of 16th century

Attributed to Pietro Paolo Malfettano (Italian, active 16th century) Rotella Shield, ca. 1590

Attributed to Pietro Paolo Malfettano (Italian, active 16th century)

Ceremonial Helmet originally from Canicattì, ca. 1570

#### **NARRATOR:**

These pieces are among the treasures of the Farnese armory. The Farnese family was one of the most important dynasties of Renaissance Italy; they included several Popes among their number and were grand patrons of the arts. Years later, by marriage, the family joined with the Bourbons, a royal dynasty that included rulers of Naples. The collection represents one of the finest armories in Europe.

The shield and helmets displayed in this vitrine case are superb examples of parade armor – that is, armor worn for ceremonial occasions. Carmine Romano.

#### **CARMINE ROMANO**

**It's ... it's an incredible vitrine. (*Laughs*) It's really an incredible vitrine. It's a ... it's a kind of trophy of really the best of the best.**

#### **NARRATOR:**

The shield is made from burnished steel that has been embossed, chiseled, and inlaid with gold and silver. Looking at its elaborate design, you get a sense of the refined workmanship that went into creating this extraordinary piece.

#### **CARMINE ROMANO:**

**We have to understand that to realize one armor, you really need almost one year working with your complete atelier every day for many hours a day.**

#### **NARRATOR:**

The mythical scene on the shield shows the Roman hero Horatius Cocles, who is holding back attackers so that his fellow soldiers could disable a bridge leading into the city. Interestingly, though, the architecture is clearly not that of Rome, but of Palermo, in Sicily, where the shield was made. It was once part of a Sicilian princely collection. In the early 1800s, it was given to Ferdinand IV, the Bourbon King of Naples, when he retreated to Palermo following the French occupation of Naples.

The two helmets are equally fine. One employs the same decorative techniques as the shield and shows two scenes from Roman history.

The other is known as a “triple-comb” helmet: you can spot the 3 ridges or combs along the crown. Notice, too, the fleur-de-lis – a symbol of the Farnese family.

So, these pieces really communicate the prestige and power of the type of royal and aristocratic leaders we see in the tapestries, extended over the centuries.

### 505. TAPESTRY 3

*The Advance of the Imperial Army and Counterattack of the French Cavalry Led by King Francis I*

#### **NARRATOR:**

This tapestry shows the early stages of the battle, before the surrender of the French king.

To set the scene: Francis I of France had invaded Northern Italy, claiming Milan. By late 1524, French troops traveled southward and laid siege to the town of Pavia, which was held by an imperial garrison. The French set up camp in the walled park of nearby Mirabello castle. By February 1525, reinforcing imperial troops representing Charles V – who was in Spain at this time – converged on Pavia. On the eve of the battle the imperial army broke through the walls and hid in the woods. Now, at dawn on February 24<sup>th</sup>, they advance on the French army – and you can see them in the upper left, advancing stealthily.

In response, the French launch a massive cavalry charge led by the king himself. Nancy Edwards.

#### **NANCY EDWARDS:**

**In this tapestry Bernard van Orley has focused very dramatically on the center and foreground of the composition. We see the King of France, charging forward at great speed, accompanied by other members of the French aristocracy on horseback.**

#### **NARRATOR:**

Look closely and you can see that the heavy armor worn by the French is brilliantly woven with gleaming metallic threads. The extravagant use of gold and silver make these luxurious tapestries far more precious than paintings.

The French riders are caught in a trap: they're forced to advance but are vulnerable to the foot soldiers who are carrying not only pikes but firearms.

At the bottom right corner, the group of three foot soldiers gives us the chance to focus in on this new weapon of war, a gun called an arquebus. The arquebus operated by a matchlock mechanism – that is, the gunpowder was lit by means of a flammable cord. Notice that the soldiers wear flasks for powder and pouches for shot at their waists, and ammunition belts across the torso. They would work in groups – one firing while another stepped back to reload. In a case nearby, you can see examples of similar firearms of the period from the Farnese armory. They include an arquebus with a wheel-lock mechanism made for Alessandro Farnese's son Ranuccio – it's been described as the most beautiful gun in the world.

First, though, let's look again at the tapestry. Capturing the details of a contemporary battle in woven form was an extraordinary achievement. Thomas Campbell explains the process.

**THOMAS CAMPBELL:**

**To understand the rarity and the importance of the Pavia tapestries, we really have to take a moment to think about how they were physically made.**

**Tapestries were woven by hand on a loom. To start making the tapestry, the weavers stretched plain threads, made from wool, that were called the warp threads. And the warp threads were as long as the tapestry was going to be wide. So in the case of these tapestries, you're talking about warp threads that were about 27 feet long. They were stretched tightly, and to start making the tapestry, the weavers took colored thread called weft thread that were wound on small bobbins about the size of a modern pen, and they would pass the colored threads in and out of those plain warp threads, building up a web of color. Of course, to do this in a way that creates a convincing image, required weavers who were incredibly skilled.**

**Now, the weavers weren't improvising. They were following very precisely a very detailed design that was the same size as the tapestry that they were creating. And this design was called a cartoon. And the cartoon was prepared by an artist and his team, painted in watercolor on paper, so a huge piece of paper, made up of lots of smaller pieces of paper stuck together. And when the weavers were ready to make the tapestry, the cartoon was cut into strips about three feet wide. And these strips were placed right under the plain warp threads. The weaver would be looking through the plain threads at the cartoon below and then reproducing that design in colored threads.**

#### **506. TAPESTRY 4**

*The Imperial Attack on the French Cavalry, Led by the Marquis of Pescara, and on the French Artillery by the Lansquenets under Georg von Frundsberg*

#### **NARRATOR:**

In this tapestry, we meet a man who played a hugely significant role not only in the battle, but in the story of the tapestries: Fernando Francesco d'Avalos, the Marquis of Pescara, also called Ferrante.

Riding in at the left of the tapestry, he is identified by the inscription on his horse's neck. His arm, in its red sleeve, is raised as he points his lance toward the battle.

#### **CARMINE ROMANO:**

**On the left side of the tapestry, we have the depiction of Ferrante d'Avalos, with his magnificent gold and dark armor and he's depicted as ... really as a conqueror, holding his pike.**

#### **NARRATOR:**

The d'Avalos were a Neapolitan family of Spanish origin. Ferrante was one of the highest ranked commanders at the battle. Despite his victory, he was severely wounded and died soon afterwards.

#### **CARMINE ROMANO:**

**It's very interesting the fact that the body of Ferrante just after his death is preserved in Naples in a coffin, and he's still dressed very much like the way he's depicted in this tapestry with his specific Spanish hat, in gold, and with the dark suit and the part of the armor like it is depicted on the tapestry.**

#### **NARRATOR:**

This victorious portrait of Ferrante gave the tapestries great significance for the d'Avalos family. It was Don Carlos, grandson of Charles V, who bequeathed the set to the descendants of Ferrante d'Avalos. The noble family kept them until 1882, when they were transferred to the Neapolitan government. And that's how they came finally to their home at the Capodimonte Museum in Naples.

Ferrante was a key figure in the battle. He is balanced, on the right side of the tapestry, by another important leader on the imperial side: the German commander Georg von Frundsberg. He stands facing us, behind a cannon, his white and red sash over his breast, holding his halberd upright and waving his troops forward. He commanded the lansquenets – the colorfully dressed mercenaries you'll see recurring in the tapestries. One stands at center foreground, his halberd on his shoulder. Nancy Edwards.

**NANCY EDWARDS:**

**There weren't uniforms during this period. But they began to adopt these very actually expensive and flamboyant costumes that consisted of bright colors that are called slash and puff. You see these big sleeves – the more cloth there is in what you're wearing, the more expensive it is. And they've been slashed; that is, patterns have been made so that the underlying cloth can be pulled through in these puffs. And likewise, their breeches often balloon or puff out. So, they take a lot of space, so to speak. And it was a kind of dandified and flamboyant, often outrageous but swaggering kind of costume.**

**507. CASE 9: FS VITRINE; D'AVALOS ARMOR II**

*D'Avalos Armor Helmet with Visor, ca. 1550*

*A Knights of Malta Breastplate, late 16th–early 17th century*

**NARRATOR:**

This helmet relates closely to one of the leading figures of the Battle of Pavia: Ferrante d'Avalos, the Marquis of Pescara; you can hear more about him in the previous stop. If you look at the sides of the helmet, you can see the d'Avalos family crest of a sheaf of wheat.

The breastplate displayed alongside is decorated with a Maltese cross, on a chain – a reference to the military order of the Knights of Malta.

Some of the armor we've seen on display was very much for show: it was worn for ceremonial occasions as a display of power.

**CARMINE ROMANO:**

**This is not one of the armor like the Farnese were, just pieces of art, all made completely decorated. These ones were really used, and so it was like fashion and the prêt-à-porter. I mean it's (*laughs*) ... that's the difference between the two.**

**NARRATOR:**

There's clear proof that the breastplate was used – either in battle or as test armor.

**CARMINE ROMANO:**

**Sometimes, in the chest, there is a hole. You really can see (*laughs*) ... that they have been used, and fortunately they worked! (*Laughs*)**

**508. TAPESTRY 5***The Invasion of the French Camp and the Flight of the Women and Civilians***NARRATOR:**

By this stage in the battle, the French army has become demoralized. At the left of this scene, the imperial cavalry charges in to invade the French camp, while foot soldiers attack with pikes.

There's so much going on here! ...try to find a spot where you can see the whole tapestry.

In the center, the besieged French troops are in the trenches they've dug around the camp. You can see their artillery positions, with protective wicker cages and cannons in between.

**THOMAS CAMPBELL:**

**They're useless because already the imperial troops are over the drawbridge and into the French camp. We see, in the distance, a big tent with a fleur-de-lis on it. That might well be the tent of the French king. There's a huge explosion just in front of it, where something's blowing up. And in the foreground, we see the civilians fleeing from the French camp.**

**NANCY EDWARDS:**

**One of the most amazing figures is the woman on horseback; or rather, she's on a white mule. And she is beautifully dressed and it's incredible how in a tapestry he's able to show this very expensive clothing: the gown and these great puffed sleeves...**

**CARMINE ROMANO:**

**This is really the tapestry of the fashion. There are a lot of details that are just amazing: this wonderful lady dressed in red that must have been dressed in velvet. Even if the tapestry is in wool and silk, it's giving the sense of the velvet in the depiction of her clothes. Even if it is a two-dimensional work of art, in many cases the tapestry can really give the sensation of three-dimensionality.**

**THOMAS CAMPBELL:**

**The mule's got very fancy trappings and we can imagine that this may be one of the wives or the courtesans of one of the French generals.**

**But there's total disarray. People are heading in different directions; there's total confusion. Over to the left, there's a beautiful white dog bounding away. And right behind her, another young woman cradling a little dog in her arms as she also flees.**

**NARRATOR:**

The focus on colorful clothes and accessories begs the question of how these tapestries would have looked when they were first presented to Charles V.

**THOMAS CAMPBELL:**

**When these tapestries were first displayed, they would unquestionably have had much more intense coloration than we see today. And the gold thread would have gleamed. But silk and wool are very vulnerable to the impact of light, and, over the centuries, these tapestries have become more muted and faded. Fortunately, enough color still survives that the designs can be read very clearly, and they still make a very dramatic impact.**

### **509. CASE 2: PLATFORM; FULL SUITS OF ARMOR**

*"Medallion" Armor Garniture, ca. 1575*

Pompeo della Cesa *"Volat" Armor Garniture, 1590*

#### **NARRATOR:**

These two complete suits of armor represent the peak of Renaissance craftsmanship.

#### **CARMINE ROMANO:**

**Those are among the most important armors in Farnese Collection, especially because they are complete and have every single part.**

#### **NARRATOR:**

Let's look first at the armor known as the Medallion garniture: it's the one with decorative gilt and engraved bands contrasting with polished steel. The duke Alessandro Farnese had this armor made for him in Milan around 1575. Alessandro was a distinguished military leader, but he was also highly educated in the humanities: the oval medallions on the bands include allegorical and mythological figures – decoration that emphasizes his cultural upbringing. He clearly prized the armor, as he wore it for more than one official portrait.

A "garniture" is a complete suit of armor composed of exchangeable parts adaptable for infantry, equestrian, or tournament use. The other set of armor on the platform, known as the *Volat* garniture, was also made for Alessandro Farnese. If you look at its breastplate, you'll see at top center the allegorical figure of Fame, shown as a woman with outstretched arms, standing on an eagle. Slightly lower down, enclosed in a rectangle, is the Latin motto '*Volat*' meaning '*He flies*'.

#### **CARMINE ROMANO:**

**It's really like I'm so powerful, I can fly. It's like showing the power.**

#### **NARRATOR:**

This *Volat* armor was made by one of the most celebrated armorers of the Renaissance period, Pompeo della Cesa. The neckline and back are adorned with small ovals engraved with the name "POMPEO."

#### **CARMINE ROMANO:**

**Armors were like fashion of the time, and as we have now Gucci or Valentino, you know (*laughs*) then at the time there were incredible armor makers like Pompeo della Cesa who was realizing this amazing armory for the Farnese family.**

#### **NARRATOR:**

Of course, few people could afford armor like this.

**CARMINE ROMANO:**

**Absolutely, fabulously expensive outfit. (*Laughs*) It was an incredible investment; you would have spent something like one or two million dollars because it's 900,000 euros. That was the cost of the time of one set of armor. So, you didn't want to use it really. (*Laughs*)**

## 510. TAPESTRY 6

*The Sortie of the Besieged Imperial Troops from Pavia, and the Rout of the Swiss Guard*

### **NARRATOR:**

We're nearing the final stages of the battle.

At top left, over the castle drawbridge, imperial troops emerge into the fray. For several months, their garrison has been under siege from the French army. Now, they come out fighting.

In the left foreground, Swiss foot soldiers of the French army clamber over the wall in their haste to escape the attack. Nancy Edwards.

### **NANCY EDWARDS:**

**One of the aspects of the tapestries is that there's such variety in the way that he composes the works. In this case, heavily in the foreground, we see the Swiss – who have been defeated and who now are fleeing the grounds. So, we see them in the foreground, and we see a number of figures, and a lot of movement. Van Orley has been very innovative in the way that each of the figures is posed in a different way, with a lot of dynamism.**

### **NARRATOR:**

In the center of the tapestry, both soldiers and civilians emerge from trenches that are no longer safe. Thomas Campbell.

### **THOMAS CAMPBELL:**

**We see French troops jumping out of the dugouts where they've been dug in over the winter to protect themselves from the defending artillery; including, in the middle, there's a woman being helped out of one of the dugouts. And to the right, we see the French army fleeing across the river.**

### **NARRATOR:**

But their escape was much more difficult – because their own forces had demolished the getaway route.

### **NANCY EDWARDS:**

**The pontoon bridge had been destroyed by the Duke of Alençon, who had escaped. And so, the Swiss have to either sink or swim, and in fact, many, many of the Swiss infantry died and were found later on in the river. So, it was really horrific.**

### **NARRATOR:**

The background of this tapestry is exceptional. It gives us the clearest view of the walled city of Pavia, with its rising towers, churches, and Visconti castle – but it's a view that's been rearranged by the artist.

**CARMINE ROMANO:**

**It's very ... it's very strange. I mean ... Pavia is really depicted as a combination of several still existing buildings: like the cathedral; like the bridge on your right side; or like the castle on the left side. They're all there; but the way they have been put together in the tapestry is really unusual. So, you see that's Pavia; but if you would have seen Pavia at the time, it would not have been as it is depicted on this tapestry. It's very much what happened in many paintings and artists of the time. And maybe it's probably because there were prints that were sold that were representing one single buildings. So, they know the building, but they didn't know how the building was connected to the rest of the city; and that's why it's an imaginary city but still recognizable. So, it's ... it's very interesting. I ... I like it.**

**511. TAPESTRY 7***The Flight of the French Rear Guard under the Duke of Alençon***NARRATOR:**

The action of this tapestry flows from left to right.

At bottom left, members of the French army are trying to escape across the river.

**CARMINE ROMANO:**

**You can see how skilled they were, realizing the tapestries, because there is this body under the water, and they succeeded to depict a body under the water even if it's not a painting. I mean, this is incredible for a tapestry. That says a lot about the high level of the tapestries. And it's also sad because you can see a lot of hats: people who died, and only the hat – they only left the hat, you know, on the water.**

**NARRATOR:**

If you move to the center, a soldier of the French army, dressed in red, is destroying the bridge with a halberd. This was done on the orders of a leading commander in the French army, the Duke of Alençon: he is at the far-right edge of the tapestry, on the other side of the riverbank, the small figure on a horse with his back to us.

**NANCY EDWARDS:**

**He was the brother-in-law of the French king and he realized that the imperial forces were winning the battle. And so, he refused combat, and escaped. To prevent the imperial forces from following and pursuing them, he instructed the French pikemen to destroy the pontoon bridge.**

**THOMAS CAMPBELL:**

**Subsequently, this was interpreted as almost treasonous behavior. This was not the behavior of a true chivalric knight. But for the victorious imperial army, this was the image of French fearfulness that perfectly epitomized the message that they wanted to convey through these tapestries: the ignominious defeat of the French, the rout of the French and the cowardice of the French.**

**Taken as a whole, this set of seven tapestries is one of the most dramatic demonstrations of the way that tapestry was a medium of propaganda at its time. Huge, expensive, magnificent and depicting with great clarity the issues that the patrons of the day wished to portray. There was nothing comparable at the time, to the power, to the visual impact of a great set of gold woven tapestries.**

**NARRATOR:**

It was the inspired genius of the artists to display this grandeur in such a compelling and captivating way – through sweeping compositions enhanced by utterly convincing details.

**CARMINE ROMANO:**

**What I really like in this tapestry, just in the right corner on the top: I mean you see the battle. You see also other French that are dying. But then there are some cows who are just eating in the landscape like nothing happened. That's one of my favorite detail ever about the tapestries.**

**NARRATOR:**

Here's a final word from Kimbell director Eric Lee.

**ERIC LEE:**

We hope you have felt, as we all do, the profound visual power of these resplendent tapestries and the arms and armor that accompany them. Before you leave the exhibition, please take a look back into the gallery at the sweeping panorama these talented Renaissance artists have created and think about their imagination and skill in recording a defining moment in European history. Thank you for coming to the Kimbell—and for allowing us to share with you this truly unforgettable experience.