

# A Thousand Flowers

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The medieval senses, as our own, always delighted in the sight and scent of the "flowery mede," the lush meadow jeweled over all with bright flowers. Textile art in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries represented this "flowery mede" with a rather abstract background convention known as "millefleurs", or "a thousand flowers."

The group of French tapestries most famous for this design are generally believed to have been woven in the Loire valley around 1500. This cannot be proved; the belief has grown from the fact that many of these tapestries were used in castles in this region. The tapestries are characterized by use of either a red or dark blue-green background, densely scattered with woven flowers. Flowers commonly found in millefleurs design include pinks, poppies, foxgloves, hearts-ease, and daisies. Tapestries featuring pastoral scenes frequently include small birds, dogs and sheep as well.

The millefleurs design is only the backdrop of the tapestry. As central figures, or subjects, one finds **heroic figures** such as Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons or Hercules; **pastoral scenes** featuring nobles in peasant dress engaging in country life activities: fruit gathering, weaving cloth, sheep shearing, dancing; **scenes of courtly life**, with activities such as a romantic stroll, the pageantry of the start of the hunt, reading, embroidering (the embroidery piece itself being of millefleurs design), bathing, musical performance; and the famous Lady with the Unicorn series, a set of six allegorical tapestries the five senses with the final tapestry being the dedication to the lady for whom they were commissioned.