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**ISABELLA  
STEWART GARDNER  
MUSEUM**

**Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum Returns Tapestry Room  
to its Original Glory and Configuration**

*New Wing Enables Relocation of Programming and Concert Series  
that Have Outgrown the Historic Galleries*



**MARCH 30, 2011—BOSTON, MA** • For the first time since it opened in 1914, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum’s 4,000-square-foot Tapestry Room is being restored to its original glory and will once again take its place as one of the nation’s great tapestry halls. The restoration of this beloved space will return the Tapestry Room to its original configuration for the first time since a temporary stage, chairs, and other modern elements were added to accommodate formal concerts in the early 1970s.

Historically, the Tapestry Room has been both a gallery and home to many of the museum’s programs, including the popular *Sunday Concert Series*. Now, as part of the Gardner Museum’s Extension and Preservation Project, the museum’s world-class concerts will be relocated to an intimate new performance hall in the Renzo Piano-designed addition, and the Gardner will be able to restore the space to its historic appearance, enabling visitors to see and enjoy the Tapestry Room for the first time in nearly 40 years. No event programming is scheduled for 2011 in the Tapestry Room; programming will resume in 2012 in the new wing and the gallery will remain open until then so that visitors can view the conservation and preservation work taking place. The reinstated Tapestry Room will be highlighted as part of the museum’s *Grand Opening* for its new wing in January 2012.

“One of the most important goals of the new wing is the relocation of programming which has outgrown the historic galleries,” says Anne Hawley, the *Norma Jean Calderwood Director* of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. “The Tapestry Room is perhaps the most dramatic example of that as it had become the hub of the museum’s largest and most popular programming and had lost its focus as a gallery. This effort returns the space into a beautiful gallery for viewing tapestries—something an entire generation of visitors has not experienced.”

The new 70,000-square-foot wing designed by Renzo Piano includes purpose-built spaces for many of the activities formerly held in the Tapestry Room, such as lectures, visitor orientation, and the *Sunday Concert Series*. While occasional smaller musical performances and talks will continue in the reinstated space, the Tapestry Room will serve primarily as a grand gallery for viewing tapestries and other works of art.

Curatorial and conservation staffs have planned the preservation and reinstallation of the Tapestry Room based on historic photographs from the museum's archives, which were taken in 1915, 1916, and 1926 by photographer T.E. Marr and Son. The photographs reveal a piano placed in front of the late 14<sup>th</sup>-century French fireplace and an arrangement of furniture and objects in the center of the gallery.

“The Tapestry Room is one of the few galleries affording room to wander freely,” says Gianfranco Pocobene, *Head of Conservation* at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, who is overseeing the restoration of the Tapestry Room objects and gallery to their original grandeur. “The sense of space and openness that visitors will discover in the restored Tapestry Room will be amazing—and unexpected for many—and a celebration of Gardner’s original vision.”

Conservation treatment will encompass cleaning, restoration, and reinstallation of many parts of the gallery—including its Mercer-tiled floors and French medieval stone fireplace, select art and furniture objects, and new lighting. The historic arrangement of furniture in the center of the gallery and other vignettes around the windows as depicted in early photographs also will be restored. Two of the most striking areas will be the conservation of the massive fireplace and the painting of *The Archangel Michael* by Pedro García de Benabarre (ca. 1470) that hangs above it, and an arrangement of ten side chairs upholstered in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Netherlandish painted leather that will be reinstalled around a 17<sup>th</sup>-century Dutch table in the center of the gallery. Additionally, lighting upgrades will enhance the gallery’s historic atmosphere, reduce harmful light on the collection and improve visibility. Eighteen textile projects are included in the room refurbishment plans. They include conserving original textiles, re-upholstering furniture, and replacing missing, damaged, or inappropriate furnishing textiles. Two tapestries will be reinstated to their original 1926 positions.

**ABOUT THE TAPESTRY ROOM** • In 1914, eleven years after the opening of the museum, Isabella Gardner embarked on a major renovation. She altered the two-story Music Room and built two floors of galleries to create not only her grand Tapestry Room but also to construct the East and Spanish Cloister, Spanish Chapel, Chinese Loggia, and a Chinese Room. In the expansive 4,000-square-foot Tapestry Room, she displayed two tapestry cycles which once hung in the Barberini Palace, Rome: scenes from the Story of Abraham (Flemish, Brussels, 1550-1600), and scenes from the life of Cyrus the Great (Flemish, Brussels, 1535-50). The architecture, and size of the room with the commanding fireplace at one end, recalls the great tapestry halls of Europe. In her lifetime, Gardner placed a piano in the gallery and used the room to present concerts and other assemblies and events. According to archival documents, Gardner began to show friends her plans for the space as early as 1908.

**PROJECT FUNDING** • Tapestry Room restoration and other projects associated with the new wing—including preservation work in the exterior Monks Garden, on the South façade of the historic museum, and in other gallery areas—are funded through the *Campaign for the Gardner*, the Institute for Museum and Library Sciences (IMLS), and The Richard C. von Hess Foundation.

**ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM** • 280 The Fenway Boston MA 02115 617 566 1401 • [www.gardnermuseum.org](http://www.gardnermuseum.org)  
Modeled after a 15th-century Venetian palazzo with an interior courtyard garden, the Gardner Museum houses a collection of fine art spanning 30 centuries and featuring Titian, Rembrandt, Botticelli, and Sargent, as well as changing contemporary and historic exhibitions, classical concerts, lectures, and special events. The museum will open its new wing designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Renzo Piano in January 2012. Building on a Legacy website • [www.buildingproject.gardermuseum.org](http://www.buildingproject.gardermuseum.org)

**IMAGE** • *Tapestry Room, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Photo by T. E. Marr and Son, 1926*

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#### **MEDIA CONTACTS**

**Matt Montgomery** *Director of Marketing Communications* w. 617 278 5184 [mmontgomery@isgm.org](mailto:mmontgomery@isgm.org)

**Katherine Armstrong Layton** *Public Relations Director* w. 617 278 5107 c. 617 956 2565 [klayton@isgm.org](mailto:klayton@isgm.org)

*Please contact the press office to arrange a tour of the Tapestry Room as it undergoes restoration or interviews with museum Director Anne Hawley, Head of Conservation Gianfranco Pocobene, or other members of the restoration team.*

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