

Tomàs Aymat's tapestry factory at the International Furniture and Decoration Exhibition of 1923

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¹ DENGRA, Andreu. *Tomàs Aymat. L'artista. La manufactura*, Museu de Sant Cugat - Casa Aymat, Sant Cugat del Vallès, 2007. This is the most comprehensive publication on the trajectory of Tomàs Aymat's tapestry and rug factory.

² Leaflet, invitation and catalogue of the exhibition from 12 to 23 February 1921, at Galeries Laietanes.

Tomàs Aymat's tapestry factory in Sant Cugat del Vallès

Tomàs Aymat Martínez (Tarragona, 1892–Barcelona, 1944) took up his creative interests at a very young age. In 1912, he contributed to the Fine Art Exhibition of the Art Circle of Tarragona, at which he exhibited several watercolours. That same year, he travelled to Paris where he contacted the Gobelins Manufactory. There, he learned the craft of tapestry-making, knowledge that he subsequently expanded in Madrid, at the Santa Bárbara Royal Tapestry Factory. In 1918, he began work as a teacher of tapestry and rug weaving at the Arts and Crafts School of the Industrial University of Barcelona, where he coincided with Francesc d'Assís Galí, who gave drawing classes.

In 1920, by now a seasoned professional, Tomàs Aymat set up his tapestry and rug factory in Sant Cugat del Vallès, a town close to larger cities with a tradition of textile manufacturing, such as Sabadell, Terrassa, and Barcelona. Francesc d'Assís Galí accompanied Aymat on this great business adventure, taking on the role of the factory's artistic director, as the entrepreneur became technical director.¹

We know that months after setting up in Sant Cugat del Vallès, Aymat and Galí held the first public exhibition of their works. The chosen location was the Galeries Laietanes in Barcelona. Although the published catalogue was very basic, from it we can determine that at this exhibition, which was open to the public from 12–23 February 1921, the following samples of the factory's output were displayed: a high-warp tapestry made with a drawing by Tomàs Aymat, and a hand-knotted rug, commissioned for a Dutch Renaissance-style dining room, and created from a drawing by Francesc d'Assís Galí.²

In an article published in the press, Joaquim Folch i Torres, an art critic and museologist, wrote enthusiastically about the factory and particularly about the exhibited rug. The information is eloquently expressed:

Recently, Galeries Laietanes has exhibited an extremely beautiful rug, hand-made by the new Catalan tapestry and rug factory that two artists of the new generation, Francesc Galí and Tomàs Aymat, have established in Sant Cugat del Vallès.

3 FOLCHI TORRES, Joaquim. “Una manufactura catalana de tapissos i catifes a mà”, in *Pàgina Artística de La Veu*, number 528, 19-2-1921, p. 5.

4 Anuari del Foment de les Arts Decoratives 1923, (1924). Unnumbered pages. Here we can find the coloured design by Santiago Marco, as well as two images of the interior of the tea room. The lacquered panel by Lluís Bracons, of which there is an image in the publication, has formed part of the heritage collections of the Design Museum of Barcelona since 2017.

The exhibited item, made by the emerging Catalan factory, was commissioned by an American magnate, who chose our works after examining the production of various European factories, some founded many years ago, if not with a centuries-old tradition.

Clearly, we can see that the choice was appropriate when we contemplate the splendid work of Galí and Aymat, where the question of colour is resolved marvellously and (given the lack of tradition) in a way that is superior to the eastern manufacturers. This has enhanced the interest of the figurative composition that constitutes the subject of this work, without overlooking the nature of a flat object that a rug must necessarily have, a problem that is certainly extremely difficult. This has been achieved while giving the subject and the craft all its prestige, all its noble presence, and shunning the affected styling of certain manufacturers who draw ornamental elements on a fabric, rather than making rugs.

The success of the new factory is a gem for us, as we have constantly followed the training of our leading tapestry maker, Tomàs Aymat. Our magnates, who place their orders outside of Catalonia, have the duty to help him to flourish.”³

The “tea room” as a standard of modernity

In a short time, Tomàs Aymat’s factory in Sant Cugat del Vallès gained substantial momentum. The decorator Santiago Marco considered the quality of Aymat’s creations when he presented his innovative design for a circular room, known as a “tea room” or boudoir, in the Modern Furniture and Decoration Section of the International Furniture and Decoration Exhibition. The space, which occupied an entire stand, contained two works produced by Aymat’s factory: the tapestry *Diana caçadora* (Diana the Hunter), and a rug that depicted hunting scenes to match the tapestry. The exhibition installed in the Palau d’Art Modern and the Palau d’Art Industrial, known subsequently as the Alfons XIII and Victòria Eugènia palaces, designed by the architect Josep Puig i Cadafalch, opened in Barcelona on id. data 13th September 1923.

The stand was accessed through a curtain between two black marble columns. On the right, following the guidelines for the decorative design published in the press of the period, was a sofa embedded between two black marble pilasters, at the head of which was exhibited a lacquered panel with geometric elements entitled *Sant Genís dels Agudells*, by Lluís Bracons.⁴

Design for the “tea room” or boudoir, by Santiago Marco for the International Furniture and Decoration Exhibition of 1923. Image: Anuari del Foment de les Arts Decoratives.



The panel *Sant Genís dels Agudells*, by Lluís Bracons, decorated the section of wall dominated by a sofa. 108.3 x 83.3 cm. MDB 1.431. Museu del Disseny de Barcelona. Photograph © Estudio Rafael Vargas.





In the tea room, the *Diana the Hunter* tapestry, between two marble pilasters, as well as the rug from Casa Aymat, were highly prominent. Image: Anuari del Foment de les Arts Decoratives



Two black marble columns flanked the entry to the stand that reproduced Santiago Marco's decorative design. Image: Anuari del Foment de les Arts Decoratives.

5 VENTOSA, Silvia. "Tapís Diana caçadora", in *Extraordinary! Collections of Decorative and Author-Centred Art*, Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2014, p. 382-387. This is the most detailed, comprehensive and monographic article on the *Diana the Hunter* tapestry.

Then, a glazed door preceded the *Diana the Hunter* tapestry, flanked by two black marble pilasters. On the circular rug were four spectacular floor lamps on pedestals, designed by Santiago Marco and decorated with lacquer and applications of eggshell by Lluís Bracons. There were also three original arm chairs and a low table. The ceiling, in the form of a dome, spectacularly displayed its striking gold colour, which contrasted with the black background of the rug, and the four marble pilasters and two columns, crowned by their respective capitals.

Diana the Hunter was made with wool threads and a Turk's head knot, using the same technique as the rugs; if necessary, it could also be used for this function.⁵ However, it was described as a tapestry, given its situation and strictly ornamental use. In the upper left part, the quadrangular tapestry bears the inscription *T. AYMAT*, and on the right *Sant Cugat*. The scene of Diana, a young red-haired woman holding a bow and arrow, symbols of her status as goddess of hunting, and surrounded by plants and animals of clearly Mediterranean inspiration, is framed by a border comprised of alternating squares and rhomboids. It is a work with great visual and colouristic strength, a clear example of the *Noucentisme* art of the period, which is also connected to the emergence of Art Deco. We believe that the author of the tapestry drawing must have been Aymat himself, in collaboration with Galí. Notably, Galí created the image that would be used for the English version of the poster advertising

The *Diana the Hunter* tapestry is a clear example of the perfectionism and creativity of Tomàs Aymat's factory. 263.5 x 236.5 cm. MADB 16.816. Museu del Disseny de Barcelona. Photograph © La Fotogràfica. [See detail.](#)



the International Furniture and Decoration Exhibition, which depicted a half-nude figure of a young red-haired lady. At the bottom of the scene is a pavement or rug that alternated rhomboid and square elements, in a very similar way to the tapestry's border.

We can see some similarities between the rug exhibited in the Galeries Laietanes and that which formed part of Santiago Marco's decorative design. In addition to containing strictly ornamental motifs, the Galeries Laietanes rug also contained figurative and three-dimensional elements, like the hunting scenes rug. Such elements are not always easy to incorporate into a rug given its nature as a flat object, as Joaquim Folch i Torres had observed.

The circular rug, created with thick strands of wool and Turk's head knot, shows hunting scenes that complement the narrative of the *Diana the Hunter* tapestry. The drawing for the rug must have involved Santiago Marco in some capacity, perhaps in collaboration with Tomàs Aymat or even Francesc d'Assís Galí. The design has circular, concentric iconographic registers, on a



The original rug with hunting scenes synthesised the aesthetic of Noucentisme, with the incipient and ephemeral Art Deco. 503 x 477.5 cm. MDB 892. Museu del Disseny de Barcelona. Photograph © Ignasi Prat. [See detail.](#)

black background that is characteristic of Art Deco. The background is most noticeable in the centre of the rug, where the sky and clouds are represented geometrically, despite being figurative elements. Nature, clearly inspired by the Mediterranean, is present in the next register, where there are numerous animals such as birds, rabbits and wild boar as well as four hunters standing as if preparing to shoot, surrounded by agave plants. We can also identify the carline thistle (*carlina acaulis*), which is a highly characteristic species in Catalonia. In the past, this thistle was planted at the entrance to country houses to ward off evil spirits. At the edge of the rug is a magnificent border decorated with schematic, geometric representations of plants that nod to Art Deco. In the same way as *Diana the Hunter*, and in harmony with the tapestry, the rug has a wide colour range.

One of the four floor lamps, designed by Santiago Marco, lacquered by Lluís Bracons, which stood on the rug by Tomàs Aymat. 190 x 46 Ø cm. MDB 25. Museu del Disseny de Barcelona. Photograph © Estudio Rafael Vargas.



6 The work by Santiago Marco won the first Grand Prize for Modern Art. In addition, Tomàs Aymat, as owner and director of the rug and tapestry factory that bore his name, won a Grand Prize. The lacquerer of the four floor lamps with pedestals and the decorative panel won the same award.

The Queen's *boudoir* at the Palau de Pedralbes

After the closing of the International Furniture and Decoration Exhibition on id. data 2n December 1923, Santiago Marco apparently found the way to give continuity to his original work, which had received many awards.⁶ The decorator was working at the time on several designs for the Palau de Pedralbes, the new Barcelona residence of the Spanish monarchy, represented by King Alfonso XIII and his wife Victoria Eugenie of Battenberg. Due to this circumstance, Santiago Marco had the opportunity to install his creation in spaces for the Queen's personal use, adjacent to her bedroom and bathroom. Although the same objects were present, the arrangement differed from that of the original designed exhibited at the International Furniture and Decoration Exhibition, which had just ended. The most notable change was the new position of the *Diana the Hunter* tapestry, now placed between the two black columns. The space that was originally designed by the decorator as a tea room, hall, or *boudoir*, ended up as the latter in the Palau de Pedralbes. However, it did not have a dressing table; a piece of furniture that was essential in a room designed for this purpose. In fact, the Queen already had a large, comfortable room situated beside the *boudoir*, dominated by a dressing table and in which there were also a walk-in wardrobe and a three-piece mirror.

The Palau de Pedralbes was first occupied when Alfonso XIII and Victoria Eugenie visited the Catalan lands in Spring 1924. The Palace, like many residential buildings, underwent various alterations with the passing of time



When the International Furniture and Decoration Exhibition of 1923 had closed, Santiago Marco's design was incorporated into the Palau de Pedralbes, as the Queen's boudoir. Photograph © Arxiu Mas.

7 LYCEVM, 31 (1924), p. unnumbered.

8 This tapestry, presented in the tea room area of the International Furniture and Decoration Exhibition of 1923 and transferred in 1924 to the Queen's boudoir in the Palau de Pedralbes, as well as the rug and the four floor lamps with pedestals, which were held by the Barcelona Museum of Decorative Arts, form part of the heritage collections of the Design Museum of Barcelona. There is a very similar version of the tapestry, which may have been created in 1924, which has the inscription *AYMAT Sant Cugat* in the upper right part and is conserved in the Museum of Sant Cugat - Casa Aymat.

9 CASANOVA, Rossend. "Las lámparas de pie de Santiago Marco en la Exposición Internacional del Mueble de 1923", p. 53-63; CAPSIR, Josep. "La alfombra de Tomàs Aymat y el *boudoir* de la Reina en el Palau de Pedralbes en 1924", p. 65-74 in *Art Déco. Història, materials i tècniques*, Associació per a l'Estudi del Moble - Museu del Disseny de Barcelona, 2018. These articles document the works presented on the stand designed by Santiago Marco at the International Furniture and Decoration Exhibition of 1923.

and as its users saw fit. Unfortunately, in the summer of 1926 the Queen's boudoir, an oasis of modernity among the vast number of spaces decorated according to historicist criteria, was radically transformed into a small sitting room in the style of Louis XVI, with Louis XV furniture.

We do not consider that Victoria Eugene, a woman of her time who followed fashions, would have been indifferent to the boudoir; she is likely to have admired Santiago Marco's decorative design. Rather we are inclined to think that the rigid protocol to which she was subjected would have advised the transformation of the "*boudoir of the Queen, highly imaginative and in a modern style, which is reminiscent of lavish Persian architecture and decoration*", as defined in the press of the period, into a more classical space that projected a formal, regal image, becoming of the sovereign.⁷

In the summer of 1926, the only element of the former decoration that was kept in the same space was the *Diana the Hunter* tapestry, which no longer presided over the room but was moved to the floor where it would be used as a rug.⁸ The rest of the items of furniture were dispersed and placed in other rooms in the palace. Documents indicate that the floor lamps were used to decorate the former daily dining room, which had been made into a sitting room.

Unfortunately, Santiago Marco's proposal to give continuance to this magnificent creation that had aroused so much admiration at the International Furniture and Decoration Exhibition was not successful. In this case, Art Deco, which was often sandwiched between *Noucentisme* and the avant-garde, was surprisingly overthrown by historicism.⁹ ●