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THE MUSEO AND REAL BOSCO DI CAPODIMONTE
PRESENTS

CHIARA MACOR * FABIANA FIENGO

THE BATTLE OF PAVIA

* THE TAPESTRIES OF CAPODIMONTE *

This volume was published on the occasion
of the exhibition

*Art & War in the Renaissance.
The Battle of Pavia Tapestries,*
curated by

Sylvain Bellenger, Carmine Romano, and Antonio Tosini

and organized by
the Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte,
the Kimbell Art Museum,
the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco,
and The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston,
in association with The Museum Box





EIKE SCHMIDT

DIRECTOR, MUSEO E REAL BOSCO DI CAPODIMONTE

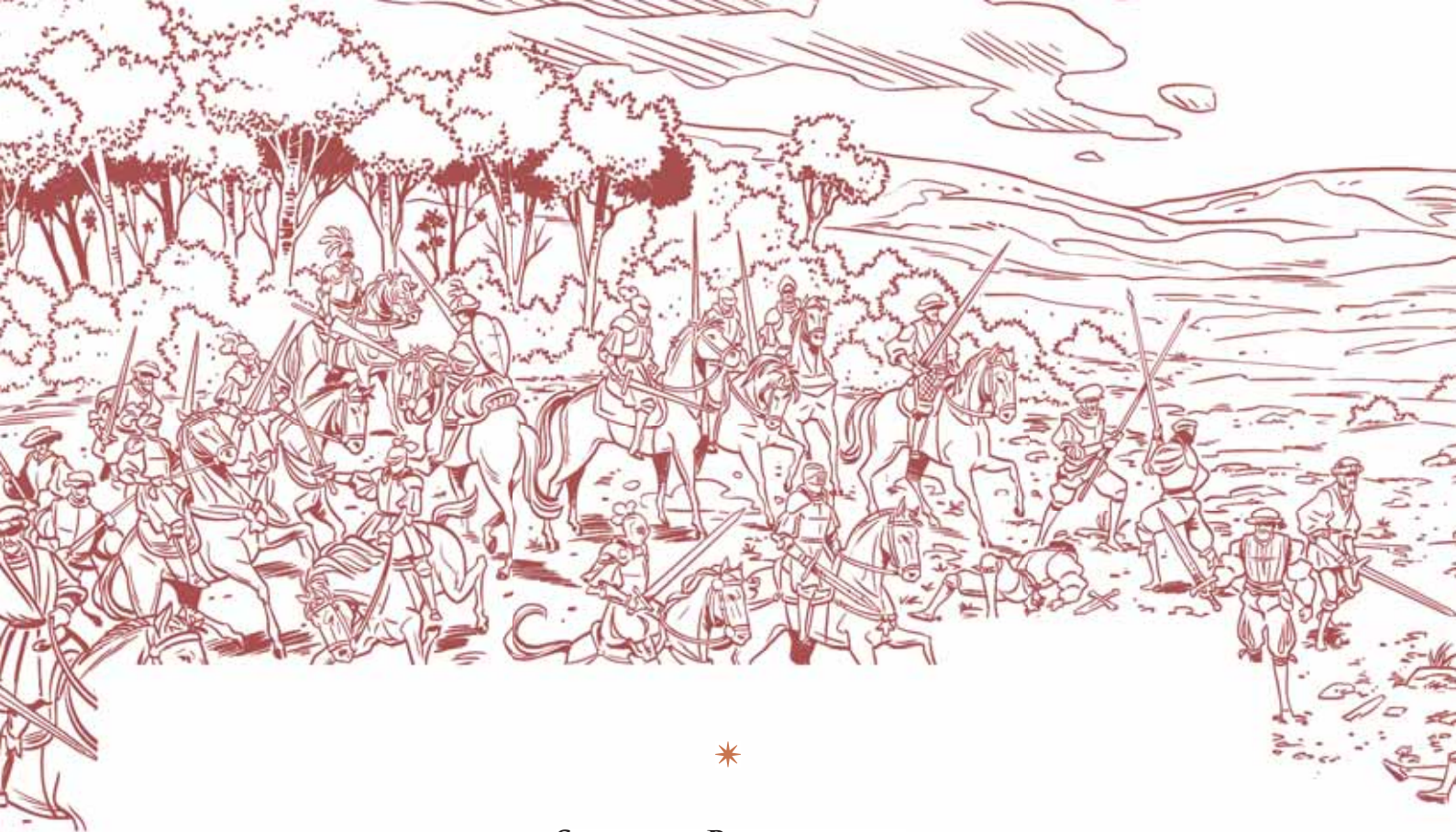
From ancient Egypt to imperial Rome, illustrations of stories were used to decorate domestic and public spaces. In subsequent centuries, murals and framed paintings on the walls of Christian churches told the often illiterate faithful about sacred texts. And then came pictorial tapestries of silk and wool, which were hung in palaces in northern Europe, but also in Italy. These tapestries expressed the wealth and luxury of the Flemish Renaissance. In the 16th century, the guilds that gave rise to the mercantile class served the great powers and noble families of Europe, who for centuries fought over the geographical ruins of the Roman Empire. These included the Dukes of Burgundy, the Habsburgs of Austria and Spain, the Valois of France, and the English Tudors, whose conflicts shaped modern Europe.

One of the great theaters of these conflicts was the Battle of Pavia, which entered into political legend and military history thanks to the use of the newest technical inventions of the time, thereby transforming the art of warfare. Pavia saw the introduction of the heavy arquebuses that won Charles V the battle, followed by the fuse cannons of Louis XIV, to the trenches and cannons of World War I, the planes of World War II, and the drones of more recent wars.

War captures the imagination and frightens, provokes horror and condemnation, but also admiration for the valor of the combatants. Its imagery fuels all the arts, from the Bayeux tapestry — an embroidered account of the Norman conquest of England — to needlepoint and loomless embroidery, to modern Afghan rugs, in which fighter bombers and machine-gun-wielding soldiers appear among traditional geometric patterns.

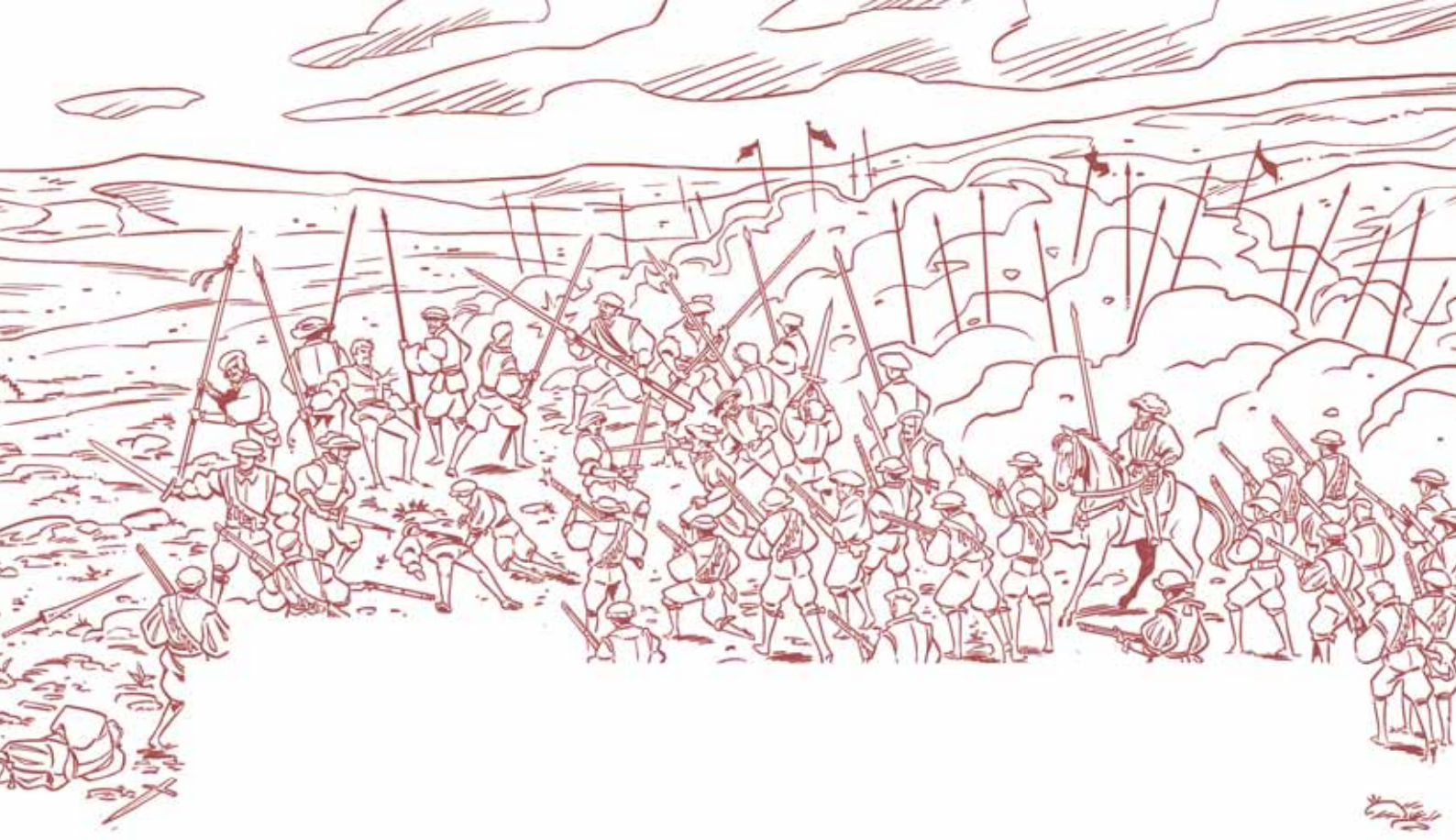
War haunts literature, from Homer to the present day, as well as cinema; think of Sergei Ejzenstejn, Abel Gance, Akira Kurosawa, Stanley Kubrik, and many others. War is also very present in the distant cousin of cinema, the comic strip, with publications by Jacques Tardi of the Maus group, Jean Michel Billioud, and Manu Larcenet, to name but a few.

Today, the art of the comic book has entered the museum. The Capodimonte has participated in its consecration by asking Chiara Macor and Fabiana Fiengo to create this new work, which from here on out will be associated with the glorious d'Avalos tapestries, one of the great treasures of this museum.



SYLVAIN BELLENGER

Cartoons or *comic strips* in English, *dessins animés* or *bandes dessinées* (BD) in French, *manga* in Japanese, *fumetto* in Italian; so many names to designate one of the most beloved art forms of the 20th and 21st centuries. It is one of the most universally accessible forms of art. Like the great decorations of medieval religious buildings or of the public buildings of democracies, cartoons tell a story without words, yet without in any way losing a sense of literature, the imagination, or emotions. The comic strip is grounded in the imagery of film, a sequence of images, which is why this format is so appropriate for a reimagining of the seven tapestries known as the d’Avalos tapestry series. It recounts one of the most important military and political events of European history: the Battle of Pavia, when the two greatest monarchs of the time, Charles V and François I, engaged in battle. Does the word “cartoon” have an etymological connection to the tapestry “cartoon,” the large drawing used as a model for a tapestry. Words often carry with them the archaeology of things. When it comes to tapestries and comic strips, we all know that Brussels is their capital. Belgium is the country with the highest number of comic strip authors per square kilometer in the world. Several towns have renamed streets in their honor, and some cartoonists have decorated city walls. In Brussels, for example, the authorities have created the *Parcours de la BD* (Comic Strip Trail) and several metro stations have been decorated with Belgian comic strip characters. There is a parallel circuit, the *tapestry circuit*, with more than 60 sites linked to workshops where



weavers, early entrepreneurs, invested large sums of money. At the time of the Battle of Pavia, tapestry played a leading role in the arts, headed by painters and inventors of compositions, such as Bernard van Orley (1498-1541), Pieter Coecke van Aelst (1502-1550), and Jan Cornelis Vermeyen (1504-1559).

In 1549, Calvete de Estrella, a Spanish nobleman staying in Brussels, then the capital of Brabant, described how “the city is large, densely populated, and very rich. Tapestries are made there in large numbers and are of extremely high quality.” He describes the roles of the various people involved, a veritable chain of production: apprentices, employees, master tapestry weavers, and also close collaborations with people outside the textile industry, such as painters, cartoon painters, and merchants. It is this chain of production that we also find in the cinema and which amazes us when the credits of a movie roll with all the names of the people who contributed to its making. Similarly, although the production of a book is simpler than that of a film or a tapestry, the creation of a comic strip requires a variety of talented people: a screenwriter, designer, colorist, graphic designer, letterer, and art director. This is why the combination of this comic and the tapestries of the Battle represents a little piece of magic in the history of visual storytelling.

THE BATTLE OF PAVIA TAPESTRY SERIES



CARMINE ROMANO

The Battle of Pavia was a significant event in European history. Fought between the two greatest powers of the time for territorial, economic, and political interests, their armies were made up of soldiers of various nationalities: French, Swiss, German, Spanish, Italian, as well as Flemish, Scottish and a few English soldiers, comprising a total of over fifty thousand men. The battle marked the culmination of a conflict between the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V—who reigned over Spain, Naples, Sicily, and Sardinia, and controlled the Netherlands, Franche-Comte, and the Habsburg Austrian territories—and François I, King of France, who controlled the Duchy of Milan. The emperor wished to take control of the Duchy of Milan, the key to Italy, as well as Burgundy, in order to completely encircle France. For his part, François I aimed to conquer the Kingdom of Naples and thwart the Imperial threat. In October 1524, François I entered Italy at the head of his powerful army, determined to reconquer Lombardy, which had recently been taken by the Spanish-Imperial forces. Trying to avoid a head-on battle against the French due to their numerically inferior forces, the Imperial army abandoned Milan and retreated to Lodi, while leaving a strong garrison behind within the city of Pavia. With this move they hoped to slow the unrelenting French advance and gain the necessary time needed to build a new army. The defense of Pavia was entrusted to Antonio de Leyva, one of Charles V's most faithful leaders, who commanded nearly a thousand Spanish troops and five thousand German Landsknechts—mercenary pikemen. Instead of pursuing and destroying the remains of the retreating Spanish-Imperial forces, François I decided to lay siege to Pavia, confident that he could easily take the city. Instead, the siege lasted for many months, from October 1524 to February 1525, when the two armies finally faced each other on the battlefield. The final battle lasted no more than two hours; Charles V's victory was resounding. After falling from his horse, the king of France was captured, a decisive moment not only for the outcome of the battle, but for the entire war. The French forces lost between six and eight thousand men, including many illustrious members of the French nobility, while thousands more were imprisoned. The Imperial forces, on the other hand, lost fewer than five hundred men. The battle confirmed the superior skills of the



Spanish-Imperial commanders and the mediocre capacities of their French counterparts, aristocratic knights still maintained a feudal mentality. The decisive advantage that led to Charles V's victory at Pavia was the technological superiority of the Spanish infantry, equipped with state-of-the-art firearms. The Spanish arquebusiers sowed death not only among the anonymous masses of foot soldiers, but also, and more importantly, among the French knights. The new firearms changed the face of warfare, marking the transition from the Middle Ages to the Modern Era. To celebrate the Habsburg victory, a cycle of seven tapestries based on the drawings of Bernard van Orley was created in the workshop of Willem and Jan Dermoyen—all leading figures of Belgian tapestry production at the height of their fame. In 1531, the tapestries were offered as a diplomatic gift to Charles V by a delegation of the Provinces of the Low Countries during an official meeting at the Coudenberg Palace in Brussels. Following a series of events, the suite of tapestries entered into the possession of the powerful d'Avalos family, Neapolitans of Spanish origin whose ancestors Ferrante and Alfonso d'Avalos had fought with great honor in the Battle of Pavia. In fact Ferrante, a great military leader who was married to the famous poet Vittoria Colonna, was mortally wounded in the battle and eventually died in December 1525. In 1862, after more than three centuries, Alfonso V, Marquis of Pescara and the last descendant of the d'Avalos family, donated 335 objects to the Italian State. This endowment represented a part of the d'Avalos collection which dated to the sixteenth century, and included the seven tapestries (valued at 5500 ducats each), the painting of Apollo and Marsyas by Ribera (valued at 800 ducats), and many other works. Exhibited at the beginning of the twentieth century in the Palazzo degli Studi of the National Museum of Naples, the tapestries were then brought to the Reggia di Capodimonte in 1957, where the great Capodimonte galleries were being inaugurated. Careful restoration work has returned the tapestries to their original splendor, including their decorated borders and their yarns, adorned with lavish amounts of gold and silver. In 2022 the seven works were displayed for the first time in a way that unites and reconstructs their landscapes, which serve as a background, offering a sweeping view of the events of the battle.

FEBRUARY 24, 1525,
6.30 A.M.

