

Fake it 'til you Make It: Imitation in Early Modern Clothes and Accessories

REFASHIONING THE RENAISSANCE WORKSHOP

10–12 March, Aalto University

How could people dress up within their financial, social, and cultural means? Can snail shells and silver leaf combine to create a convincing fake pearl? Were imitation gems and fabrics attractive alternatives for people who could not afford or were not legally allowed to wear the real thing? The Refashioning the Renaissance team and three external historians of art and economics will be exploring these questions and more during this three-day workshop on imitation in early modern fashion.

This workshop will combine research presentations and discussion with hands-on experimentation, to see what we can learn by reconstructing imitation clothing and accessories that we read about in early modern texts and see in museum collections. In Aalto University's dye kitchens and Biofilia science labs, we will test recipes to create imitation damask, add spots to furs, craft pearls from shell or clay, make amber from varnish, and dye fabrics in seemingly rich hues. These recipes have been selected from Italian, French, and German 'how-to' books and manuscripts that were written with increasing frequency from the mid-sixteenth century, appealing to people across the social spectrum who were interested in how natural materials could be transformed and pushed to their limits through artisanal craft and skill.

By reconstructing these recipes, we will be closely reading them to see what 'imitation' might have meant to those who made and wore materials that mimicked other substances and to ask what materials and skills were required of makers of imitation finery. These experiments and discussions are part of a larger focus on imitation in early modern clothing for the Refashioning the Renaissance project, that will result in conference papers and publications.

Accepted participants and their topics

- Sophie Pitman (imitation textiles)
- Paula Hohti Erichsen (imitation colour)
- Michele Robinson (imitation pearls)
- Anne-Kristine Sindvald Larsen (imitation in Danish records)
- Maria Cristina Ganga and Federica Boldrini (imitation gems)
- Timothy McCall (imitation gold and gems)

Image: Manuscript Leaf with Coat of Arms, from a Book of Hoursca, c. 1500, Metropolitan Museum of Art 32.100.475a.



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This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 726195.

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Practical details: aprons will be provided, but please wear appropriate clothing (especially on Day 2, when legs and feet must be covered)

Tuesday 10 March: Imitation Textiles and Colours

Venue: Dye Lab (experiments) and BIZ V114 (talks)

09:00–09:15	Sophie Pitman: Introduction and welcome
09:15–09:45	Sophie Pitman: Presentation on Imitation Textiles
09:45–10:15	Paula Hohti Erichsen: Presentation on Imitation Colours
10:15–13:00	Experiment: Imitation Damask
13:00–14:00	Lunch
14:00–17:00	Experiment: Imitation Colours
17:00–18:00	Discussion of day's experiments

Wednesday 11 March: Imitation Gems and Furs

Venue: Biofilia (experiments) and BIZ V114 (talks)

09:00–12:00	Experiment: Imitation amber
12:00–13:00	Lunch
13:00–15:00	Experiment: Imitation Fur
15:00–15:30	Coffee
15:30–16:00	Timothy McCall: Imitation Gold and Gems
16:00–16:30	Maria Cristina Ganga and Federica Boldrini: Imitation Gems
16:30–16:45	Sophie Pitman: Dyeing with lead
16:45–18:00	Discussion of day's experiments
19:00	Dinner

Thursday 12 March: Imitation pearls and finding imitations in sources

Venue: Dye Lab (experiments) VÄRE R205 (presentations), BIZ 0007 (end discussion)

09:00–09:30	Anne-Kristine Sindvald Larseni: Imitation in Danish records
09:30–10:00	Michele Robinson: Imitation Pearls
10:00–13:00	Experiment: Imitation pearls
13:00–14:00	Lunch
14:00–15:00	Discussion of day's experiments
15:00–17:00	Discussion: What is imitation in clothing? Publication next steps
17:00	Imitation champagne to end!



IMAGES

Enameled gold and paste ring, 1600-1650. Victoria and Albert Museum.

Wool velvet piece, 16th–17th century, Italian. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Copper gilt border, ca. 1700. Victoria and Albert Museum.