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Bringing Matter to Life: Materiality, Embodiment and Making in the Long Renaissance

Short description

As scholars and curators we engage daily with bringing matter to life. By coming to terms as embodied beings with the materiality of things we use our senses to apprehend and animate them. By asking how artefacts come about – physically, socially, politically, culturally, epistemologically – we interrogate and trace their biographies. By exploring, interpreting and communicating their meaning as made objects we restore them to life. This seminar aims to activate questions about materiality, embodiment and making during the period c.1400-c.1650, a time frame which allows for a fertile dialogue with a complex set of ideas surrounding the animate nature of matter and materials and the agency and intentionality of artisanal practices in design and making.

We will engage critically with key object-based and phenomenological research methodologies, and combine curatorial approaches to objects with the historical investigation strategies offered by material culture studies. During the course of the module we will alternate seminar discussion and student presentations with experiential approaches, including handling objects in the Bern Historisches Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum's collections and through making under the guidance of an expert practitioner.

Learning outcomes

Students will deliver a presentation during the course of the module and write a 3-5,000 words essay which will demonstrate at least two of the following:

1. A critical understanding of relevant historiographical approaches and methodologies to object-based and phenomenological research
2. A familiarity with relevant aspects of Renaissance debates about of materiality, design and making
3. An demonstrable ability to bridge historical understanding with experiential approaches to objects

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