DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY & ART CONSERVATION

Fall Term 2019

ARTH 485/840
Studies in Italian Renaissance Art: A Material History of Italian Renaissance Sculpture

INSTRUCTOR: Prof. Una D’Elia
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OFFICE HOURS: TBA

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
This course will explore the materials of Renaissance sculpture, both such well-known and prestigious media as marble and bronze and cheaper materials, such as clay, wax, cloth, stucco, cork, and wood. We will also focus on gilding and tempera and oil paint, as most Renaissance sculptures were vividly coloured, masking the sculptural materials beneath with fictive flesh. Artists experimented with media, often mixing materials, by, for example, covering a sculpture made of wood, cork and tow with gesso, painting it, and then clothing it in fabric dipped in more gesso. Jewels and colored glass were inserted into bronze and marble sculptures and painted panels, and sculptures made of tinted wax were given human hair. We will explore such questions as the ways in which cost of materials, their geographical sources, and methods of manufacture relate to meaning, examining how the heterogeneous stuff of Renaissance art conveys notions of class, gender, physical beauty, and spiritual power. This course thus challenges the traditional idea of the Renaissance as a succession of realistic perspectival paintings that create a window onto the world, in which the materiality of the work is irrelevant. We will explore instead a messier, more physical side of Renaissance art. Integral to this course will be the collaborative creation of an online virtual exhibition, which will be researched, written, and curated by the students and published at the end of the course.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:
A detailed list of readings and requirements will be available at the first class. In addition to discussion of readings and individual research projects (including the online exhibition), we will be visiting Art Conservation studios, The Agnes Etherington Art Centre, and other sites, and trying various techniques in order to study diverse materials first hand. Materials fee: $30