Copying and Imitation in Early Modern Architecture (Brussels/Ghent, Jun 23)

Brussels/Ghent
Deadline: Jul 15, 2022

Elizabeth Merrill

Practices of Copying & Imitation in Early Modern Architecture (1400-1700)

Organizers
Nele De Raedt, Elizabeth Merrill

Concept
This research project takes as its premise the notion that practices of imitation and direct copying were integral to architectural design and production in early modern Europe. Architectural theory of the time posited that architecture was an art in constant evolution based on the practice of imitation. In such theories, the imitation of models, in order to create new designs, necessarily included an element of invention, which allowed architecture to evolve and perfect itself. Central to this discussion were questions such as the choice and number of models, and the license one could take adopting them. Yet how was imitation performed in practice? How were models studied, copied, used, and transformed in creating new designs? In other words, how did the practice of direct copying and imitation in both the workshop and on the building site shape the production of architecture in the early modern period?

By focusing on specific techniques and instances of copying and imitation, this research project critically expands upon the existing scholarship, in which extensive focus is granted to the Italian Renaissance, and specifically the conscious imitation of classical architecture, and the intellectual discussions surrounding the parallels between literary and architectural theory. Within this, the literary concepts of invenzione, capriccio, mescolanza, licenza, and decorum have been extensively studied in relation to contemporary thinking on architecture. By contrast, this research initiative directs attention to actual practices and material documentation of imitation in the workshop and on the building site, and how this evidence sheds new light on the production of architecture. The project hypothesizes that the strong focus on invention in the theoretical discussions on imitation has drawn attention away from more mundane and everyday practices of tracing, the casting of models, and the reproduction of ornamental details, which were often routine and direct, driven by needs of economy, efficiency, and scale. The project thus supposes that the rich and varied architectural culture of the period was undergird by the ties forged by direct replication and imitation. It aims to bring to the fore the very practice of copying and imitation as a driving force behind the production of architecture in the early modern period.

In terms of its approach and methodology, the project encourages research that extends the tradi-

tional boundaries of architectural history of the Early Modern period, granting attention to overlooked projects, places and archives, structures and designs of utilitarian nature, and material that is otherwise contained with the history of construction and technology.

Individual papers might address the following subjects/themes:
- Workshop traditions, including the use of drawings, technical manuals and plastic models
- Those aspects of architecture that are routinely studied, copied and imitated (for example: the architectural orders, building plans, ornamental details)
- The relationship between imitation, building materials, and construction methods
- The relationship between model and imitation; examples of specific buildings that were perceived as being conceived or built “in imitation of” another building
- The organization of the building industry and degree to which the building industry contributed to architectural production based on copying and imitation

Details & Organization
In terms of intellectual production, the project’s aims are twofold: the hosting of an international conference in Ghent or Brussels, scheduled for June 2023, and the publication of a peer-reviewed edited volume. The working group will include approximately 10-12 scholars active in the fields of Architectural History, Art History, and the History of Science and Technology.

In November 2022, members of the group will meet via Zoom to introduce themselves and their projects, and exchange preliminary ideas for the conference and edited volume. In May 2023, participants will be asked to circulate complete drafts of their papers. The actual meeting of the group will take place over the course of two days in June 2023. The first day will be organized as an open conference, during which participants will present their papers. During the second day, the working group will meet alone, to further discuss the content of individual papers, the project’s major themes and the production of the publication. Participants will receive an allowance for travel expenses and accommodation.

Paper Proposals
Please submit abstracts of research papers (500-1000 words), along with paper title and C.V. to Elizabeth Merrill (elizabeth.merrill11@ugent.be) and Nele De Raedt (nele.deraedt@uclouvain.be).

Deadline for the submission of paper abstracts is 15 July 2022.

Preliminary Project Timeline
- 15 July 2022: deadline for paper abstracts
- 15 August 2022: confirmation of working group participants
- early December 2022: virtual introductory meeting
- May 2013: due-date for circulation of papers
- June 2023: conference in Brussels or Ghent, venue TBD
- August 2023: submission of book proposal
- October 2023: (internal) due date for revised papers
- Spring 2023: submission of manuscript to press
- 2025: publication of edited volume

Reference:

CFP: Copying and Imitation in Early Modern Architecture (Brussels/Ghent, Jun 23). In: ArtHist.net, May 5, 2022 (accessed Nov 14, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/36613>.