# PhD Position, Ghent University

Ghent, Belgium, Sep 01, 2024
Application deadline: May 17, 2024

Elizabeth Merrill

Doctoral Research Fellow .
ERC Project “Copying as Common Practice in Early Modern Architecture”.

The research project Copying as Common Practice in Early Modern Architecture – funded by the European Research Council and directed by Elizabeth Merrill (PI) – is inviting applications for a full-time doctoral researcher from the field of early modern architectural history. The term for this Ph.D. position is 2 years initially but can be extended for a further 2 years based on positive evaluation.

Department of Architecture and Urban Planning
Contract: 2 years, renewable for another 2 years
Required degree: MA or equivalent in a relevant field
Occupancy rate: 100%
Vacancy type: research staff

About the project
The history and theory of early modern architecture is replete with discussions of artistic genius and inimitable creation. This is reflected in the predominant focus given to disegno – a term that refers to both the practice and product of drawing – and more specifically to autograph drawings. In the second half of sixteenth century, a coherent theory of disegno was developed by Giorgio Vasari, in which artistic design was understood as an intellectual endeavour and categorically distinguished from processes of execution. This theoretical apparatus extended to the foundation of the first art academies, institutions in which the activities of artist-architect were programmatically distinguished from those of the technician-engineer, thus paving the way for disciplinary distinctions formally implemented in the eighteenth century.

This ERC-funded research project challenges the Vasarian concept of disegno as a framework for understanding architectural drawings and the practices of early modern architecture. Looking to models of epistemology developed in the history of science, the project advances the hypothesis that techniques of mechanical drawing, and more specifically, drawings that were produced by manual copying and direct tracing, served as a bedrock of architectural education in the period prior to the advent of formal schools of architecture. This proposition confronts history’s normative conceptions of “architecture” and artistic “drawing.” Within the standard histories of fifteenth and sixteenth century architecture, drawings of mechanical subject matter are categorically distinguished from those of ornamental or more “artistic” subjects. Concurrently, drawings that are

demonstratively autograph or individual are celebrated as the embodiment of their creator's singular genius. Copy-drawings, in turn, and those that employ the practice of lucidare or tracing on oiled, transparent paper (carta lucida), have long been considered corrupt or fraudulent. As early as the sixteenth century, theorists explicitly ridiculed copying practices, and particularly mechanical copying, as unbefitting the proper artist and detrimental to the essential practice of disegno. Tracing techniques were thought to provide low-skilled artisans and amateurs with an entrée into artistic practice, and in doing so subjugated art to their pedestrian skill.

The censure of copying and exaltation of disegno – from sixteenth century art theory to the present day – has cemented the idealization of early modern Italy's "great" architects and artists. Equally critical, the dismissal of a substantial volume of "practical" architectural drawings – drawings of mechanical subjects and pattern-book-type traces of canonical models – has impoverished our knowledge of early modern architecture and design practices. By wholly accepting Vasari's proposal for the early modern architect, scholars have dramatically simplified what it was to be an architect in this period. The (frequently anonymous) authors of architectural copy drawings have been ignored, and with this, our understanding of the mainstream cultures of early modern architecture has remained obscure. Moreover, as evidenced in many compendia of copy drawings, the language of architectural drawing remained remarkably heterogeneous into the sixteenth century. The architect's interest in ancient building forms and ornaments was often tied to his appreciation for contemporary building designs, as well as figurative motifs and even mechanical subject matter. This is to say, where sixteenth-century theorists distinguished between the "artistic" and the "mechanical", the "high" and the "low," in practice, these subjects often went hand-in-hand.

Within the study of early modern painting, recent decades have seen an increase in research on techniques of copying and tracing. Yet there remains a critical absence of scholarship that examines, in positive terms, the derivative practices that underscored coeval architectural production. This project relies on the material evidence of surviving graphic material, disregarding the modern (and anachronistic) disciplinary distinctions between "art," "architecture," and "engineering." Considering architectural drawings according to their use and epistemic value, this project seeks to situate their authors – known or unknown – into the practical and cultural cosmos that encircled them.

The Tasks of the Ph.D.
As a member of the ERC research group and the Ghent University Department of Architecture and Urban Planning, the Ph.D. will work together with the international team under the supervision of the PI. The Ph.D. will bring their own ideas to the topic and help shape the investigation on the practices and material evidence of tracing in early modern architecture. The Ph.D. will be responsible for executing archival-based research on drawings and will catalogue their research findings in the project database. The Ph.D. will have the opportunity to pursue additional training in the study of drawings, and the history and conservation of paper. Based on this research, the Ph.D. researcher is expected to (co)author scientific articles, disseminate results at international seminars and conferences, complete a Ph.D. dissertation, and lend support to other project and departmental activities. While pursuing the project objectives, the Ph.D. will be encouraged to develop their profile, enhance their skills, and involve themselves in other activities of interest to them, especially in the Department and the University.

Requirements
– MA in Art or Architectural History, or in a closely related field (to be completed by the start date of the position)
– Motivation and ambition in research
– Capacity to produce high-quality written work
– Proficiency in reading Italian and German, as well as in writing academic English
– Willingness to communicate and collaborate actively as a team member
– Willingness to travel and complete archival-based research
– Interested in the possibilities and methods of digital humanities and online databases

Working Conditions
– The contract will run for a term of 24 months, which can be extended for another 24 months following positive evaluation.
– The start date will ideally be 1 September 2024, although this can be negotiated
– The remuneration will be determined by salary scale WM1.
– All expenses for research-based travel will be covered by the project budget.
– You will work in a dynamic, stimulating, and supportive environment in Ghent, as part of a new research group in the history of architecture.
– Arrangements can be made for some remote work and flexible hours to encourage healthy work-life balance
– All Ghent University staff members enjoy a number of benefits, such as a wide range of training and education opportunities, 36 days of holiday leave (on an annual basis of a full-time job) supplemented by annual fixed bridge days, a vacation allowance and end-of-year bonus, yearly accumulation of seniority with automatic pay indexation, compensation for public transport or a biking/walking allowance, and eco vouchers. Click here for a complete overview of all the staff benefits.

Application
To apply for this position, please send the following documents as a PDF to Prof. Elizabeth Merrill (elizabeth.merrill@ugent.be) by 17 May 2014:

- A cover letter: an application letter wherein you explain how you fit the criteria and why you should be considered for this Ph.D. position.
- A detailed CV: containing an overview of your study, work, and other relevant experience.
- Diploma: a copy of your MA degree, if already held. In case you possess a foreign degree in a language other than a Belgian national language (Dutch, French, German) or English, please add a translation in one of these. If your MA degree is not yet in hand, then submit evidence of its imminent completion (such as an attestation by your supervisor confirming its issuance by the start date).
- One recommendation letter: submitted under separate cover by an advisor, collaborator or employer who can speak to your academic credentials and personal character.
- Other Documents: a recent publication or a chapter of your MA thesis.

Selection timeline
– Applications should be submitted on or before 17 May 2024.
– All candidates will be notified by 1 June whether they proceed to interview

– Shortlisted candidates will be interviewed (virtually or in person) in early June 2024.
– Final candidates will be informed of the outcome before the end of June 2024.

About Ghent University
Ghent University is a world of its own. Employing more than 8,000 people, it is actively involved in education and research, management and administration, as well as technical and social service provision on a daily basis. It is one of the largest, most exciting employers in the area and offers great career opportunities. With its 11 faculties and more than 80 departments offering state-of-the-art study programs grounded in research in a wide range of academic fields, Ghent University is a logical choice for its staff and students.

More information
For informal queries, please contact the PI: Elizabeth Merrill (elizabeth.merrill@ugent.be)

Reference:
JOB: PhD Position, Ghent University. In: ArtHist.net, Mar 19, 2024 (accessed Nov 24, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/41466>.