

2 Sessions at HNA (Boston, 14–17 Jul 26)

Historians of Netherlandish Art Conference 2027, Boston, Jul 14–17, 2027

Deadline: Sep 15, 2026

hnanews.org/hna-conference/

ArtHist.net Redaktion

[1] Material Identities: Textiles and Dress in the Early Modern Netherlands.

[2] Dressing the Saints in Netherlandish Art.

[1]

Title: Material Identities: Textiles and Dress in the Early Modern Netherlands.

From: Catherine Powell-Warren.

Chairs: Adam Sammut (University of York) / Catherine Powell-Warren (KU Leuven).

Netherlandish art is a veritable encyclopaedia of early modern textiles and dress, through which cosmopolitan identities were fashioned and projected. The fur-trimmed silk velvet tabard in the Arnolfini Portrait marks out the – possibly Italian – merchant as a man of wealth and taste. In Van Dyck's portrait of Genoese noblewoman Elena Grimaldi Cattaneo, she is dressed 'alla Spagnuola' in a richly brocaded black dress. The same artist portrayed Sir Robert Shirley wearing the robe of honour he received from ʿAbbās I of Persia, enhancing his credibility as the Shah's self-appointed emissary. Meanwhile, costume books and genre paintings illustrate sartorial habits from across society. Whether silk, fur, leather or lace, the material repertoire of dress expanded in tandem with the Industrious Revolution and an increasingly global textile trade. As a result, dress stood at the intersection of class, wealth and gender like never before in history.

This panel seeks new perspectives on Netherlandish fashion and dress, as objects designed, made, worn, and represented. We ask, what role did they play in defining social identity, both with and against the normative grain? What can academic art historians and museum curators learn from the study of materiality of textiles and dress? Paper topics could include, but are not restricted to:

- ☐ Fashion and dress in portraiture and genre scenes
- ☐ The translation of textiles and dress into other media
- ☐ Theatrical costumes and their influence on visual art
- ☐ The labour of fashion and textile production
- ☐ The importance of accessories, e.g., jewellery, arms and armour
- ☐ The local versus the global
- ☐ Sumptuary laws and class
- ☐ Gender, sexuality and cross-dressing
- ☐ Race and religion

Topics that engage interdisciplinarity are particularly welcome. We encourage early-career scholars to app-

ly. Please send abstracts (max. 250 words) and 2-page CVs to Adam Sammut (adam.sammut@york.ac.uk) and Catherine Powell-Warren (catherine.powell-warren@kuleuven.be). The deadline is September 15, 2026.

[2]

Title: Dressing the Saints in Netherlandish Art.

From: Sarah Moran.

At the dawn of the late-medieval 'first globalisation', Netherlandish artists contended with the ever-expanding 'world of things' by depicting exotic material objects in their religious scenes, creating new visual languages to describe the earthly and the divine, Christian and pagan, ancient and modern, and European and foreign. Textiles and garments played a central role in this process, particularly in the clothing of saints, who appeared in costumes that differed markedly from those of the lay donors they often accompanied, marking them out as belonging to a different period in time and the spiritual realm. Early hermits might appear in plain woolen robes, while virgin martyrs and the Virgin Mary might be swathed in ornate, fantastical brocades and embroideries.

The task of this session is to explore the clothing worn by saints in early modern Netherlandish art, asking how pictorial descriptions of their dress created or maintained truth claims. We particularly seek to shed light on how artists 'transferred' clothes from the secular world to religious realms, as well as how painted or sculpted imitations of textiles could be markers of sanctity, identity, social status or transcendence – in other words, how saintly costume could become "supremely semiotic in its supplementarity and arbitrariness" (Nagel and Wood 2010: 89).

While the period leading up to the mid-sixteenth century might be described as the era with the most flamboyant saintly couture, later artistic representations, and their relationships to changing discourses around materiality and salvation, are also of interest. We invite papers that investigate saints' dress from interdisciplinary perspectives, drawing, for example, from textile history, theater history, anthropological theory, contemporary theological, artistic, and sartorial discourses, and archival sources like guild records and contracts with artists.

For consideration, please submit an abstract of 200-250 words, along with an academic CV listing PhD institution and date expected or received, as well as recent publications, to Ragnhild Bø (r.m.bo@teologi.uio.no), Samantha Smith (s.l.smith@teologi.uio.no), and Sarah Moran (sarah.moran@teologi.uio.no). The deadline is September 15, 2026.

Reference:

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