

# Renaissance Decorative Arts and Culture 1400 – 1650

One of three specialisms taught on the acclaimed RCA \ V&A History of Design programme, 'Renaissance Decorative Arts and Culture: 1400 to 1650' provides a rich historical understanding of the formation of the concept and practice of design in early-modern Europe. This specialism offers a unique opportunity to pursue postgraduate study in the context of one of the world's outstanding collections of Renaissance decorative arts.

The Victoria & Albert Museum's unparalleled holdings of Renaissance material provide the backdrop to the taught programme, and students are introduced to Museum objects through seminars, handling sessions, store visits and a placement within a curatorial department. The academic and intellectual framework is provided by the Royal College of Art, and the MA examines a broad range of theoretical approaches to the study of objects and design.

While Italy provides a natural focus for this specialism, the course also addresses the Renaissance in Britain and Northern Europe. Teaching provides a thorough grounding in the study of the designed object across this geographical range during the Renaissance period. The scope of the specialism broadens over the three terms of the first year, from the analysis of individual objects, through the historiography of the decorative arts, to the application of theory.

Students on the MA programme focus on a wide range of material culture, ranging from clothing and pottery to architecture and urban ritual. Of particular interest are such issues as technology; trade and cultural exchange; the role of the craftsman and artist; and the articulation of gender, ethnicity and other identities through the making and use of objects. In defining their own research subjects, students can develop an interest in a particular field of study, or they can develop a broad expertise in the culture of the Renaissance.

The History of Design course has run for over 25 years and is the leading programme in its subject area. It brings together two important South Kensington institutions – the RCA and the V&A. It is the only full-time, two-year MA course available in Britain in the subject area and it offers a unique opportunity to study the world of design and material culture at an advanced level. The course benefits from the unique resources of the V&A which, along with its collections, houses the National Art Library and a collection of Renaissance-period objects of unparalleled richness and variety, as well as from the highly creative environment at the RCA.

This two-year course combines a rich taught programme and considerable opportunities for original research. Students are introduced to a range of approaches to the subject and develop considerable research, writing and analytical skills. All classes are taught in small-group, seminar format.

The departments of the Victoria and Albert Museum provide a remarkable opportunity for direct study of items in the collections. An intensive week-long study visit, held during the first year of the course, focuses on a single city or region as a centre for design, production in the Renaissance period, and takes the group behind the scenes in museums, archives and workshops.

The programme welcomes applications from potential students, particularly those with an undergraduate degree in a field related to the study of the Renaissance, or more generally within European languages and the humanities. The great majority of graduates of the course at MA level find employment in closely related fields or go on to further research degrees. Graduates of the course can be found as curators in museums around the world, academics teaching in universities, writers and researchers in the media and design consultants.



Plate by Baldassare Manara.  
Faenza, Italy, 1534



Ewer by Bernard Palissy.  
France, 1580-1600



*Leda and the Swan*, by  
Bartolomeo Ammanati.  
Florence, Italy, c.1535



Silver spoons  
Great Britain, c.1500



## Further Information

### Bursary details / financial support

Students from England, Wales and Northern Ireland are eligible for the extensive student bursary scheme administered by the Royal College of Art. These bursaries provide a maintenance grant and part of the fees. Applicants from other European Union countries may apply for a 'fees-only' award. Full details are published on the RCA Website.

In addition to the bursary scheme, individual scholarships are funded by the Friends of the V&A and the Oliver Ford Trust. These are open to Home and EU applicants.

### Research Degrees

The History of Design programme also supervises research degrees (MPhil and PhD). Staff research interests and areas of supervision are described on the History of Design section of the RCA Website.

### Contact Details

Full details of the course structure, the staff team, graduate destinations and the course facilities can be found at [www.rca.ac.uk](http://www.rca.ac.uk)



For further details contact the Course Administrator, V&A Museum, South Kensington, London SW7 2RL  
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Front Cover: Chandelier, attributed to Giuseppe Briati. Venice, Italy, 1736-72

Overleaf: Medal with a portrait of Beatrice D Este, wife of Ludovico Sforza, Duke of Milan. Italy, 15th century

Above: Pendant in the form of a ship. France, c.1600

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Design by Tom Wilson

RCA \ V&A  
History of Design

## Renaissance Decorative Arts and Culture 1400 – 1650

A full-time MA Degree with student bursaries



Royal College of Art  
Postgraduate Art and Design

V&A