

Giovanni Battista Bracelli, Bizzarie di varie figure: di Giovanni Battista Bracelli, pittore fiorentino - all'ill. mo S. Don Pietro Medici, 1624



Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice
Department of
Philosophy and
Cultural Heritage

January 9-10 2025
Online Workshop

Link Zoom:

<https://unive.zoom.us/j/82669315873?pwd=MgpRhUxeilhYWUWcDk3FDe2cbzUUnS.1>
Meeting ID: 826 6931 5873
Passcode: UWBGk9

The Beauty in the Machine: Symbolic Machines, Automata, and Precious Gears in the Early Modern Period

Renaissance machines and their representations have been central to scholarly inquiry at the intersection of the history of science and technology, economic and art history. Due to the pivotal role of machinery in shaping our world over the past four centuries, scholarly interest has often been genealogical, focusing on the utilitarian functions of these devices— particularly those related to warfare, engineering, hydraulic and industrial technologies, and timekeeping. However, as art historian Eugenio Battisti demonstrated, Renaissance machines were more than mere mechanical instruments for achieving practical goals; they also carried profound symbolic meaning. For example, in the mid-16th century, transparent rock-crystal cases made the inner workings of clocks fully visible, transforming cogs and springs into objects of both symbolic and aesthetic value. Gears became wonders, encased in precious, transparent materials,

akin to holy relics. In decorative contexts—such as the frieze of the Ducal Palace of Urbino, heraldic devices, presentational books of Renaissance engineers, “theatres of machines,” representations of the Machina Mundi, and clockmaking—gears and machines emerged as symbolic artifacts, embodying a culture that intertwined multiple narratives around these mechanical elements. To the modern eye, this may be difficult to grasp, as toothed wheels, once meticulously crafted by skilled artisans, are now primarily associated with mechanization and mass production. This workshop offers contributions that go beyond traditional historiography to explore Renaissance machines as symbolic objects. We aim to reflect on the contextualized history of machines, considering antiquarianism, ingenuity, mathematical magic, and politics through their material, ekphrastic, rhetorical, and visual representations.



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 101025015.

Day 1: January 9, 2025 (expected duration: 4 hours)

CET 15.00-19.00 | EST 9.00-13.00 | PST 6.00-10.00

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INTRO

MACHINAE EX LIBRIS: Machines for and from the Library

Pamela O. Long

Independent Scholar

Thinking with the Machines of Jacques Besson

Paola Bertucci

Yale University

Renaissance Machines for Enlightened Minds

Mattia Mantovani

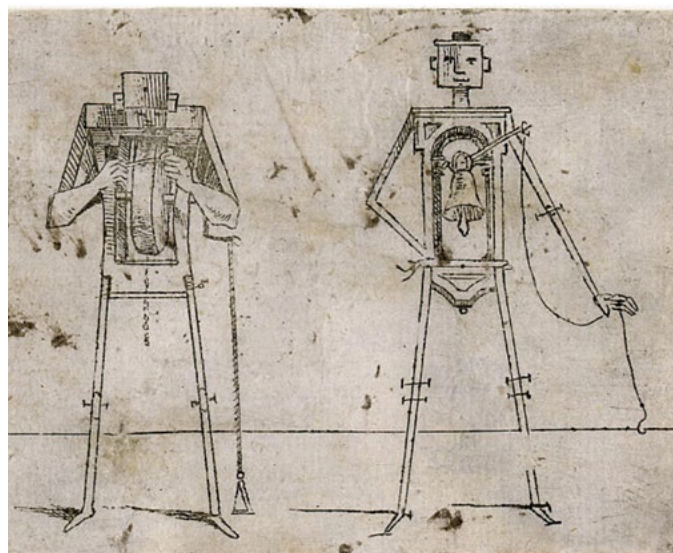
KU Leuven

The Iconography of the Animal Machine

Elly R. Truitt

University of Pennsylvania

Bell, Book, Candle, and Clock



ROYAL MACHINES: Machines as Symbols of Power

Dietrich Matthes

Independent Scholar

Made to Be Seen - Horology as an Instrument of Legitimation at the Ducal Court of Burgundy

Víctor Pérez Álvarez

Independent Scholar

Miniaturizing the Wheels: Ring Watches in the Political Scene

Valentina Conticelli

Ministry of Culture - The Uffizi Galleries in Florence

The Fresco Machines of the Medici

Wenjie Su

Princeton University;

CASVA, National Gallery of Art

Worlds outside the Weltmaschine: From a Pastor's Cosmic Model to an Embassy's Gift for China

Day 2: January 10, 2025 (expected duration: 4 hours and 30 min)

CET 15.00-19.00 | EST 9.00-13.00 | PST 6.00-10.00

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MACHINA MUNDI: Machines as Mimesis of the Cosmos

Giancarlo Truffa

Independent Scholar

*A Moving Sky: Mechanical Celestial
Globes of the Renaissance*

Monika Frazer-Imregh

Károli Gáspár University of the
Reformed Church in Hungary:
Budapest, HU

*Theatrum Mundi: Two Astrological
Clocks Made for Lorenzo de' Medici and
King Matthias Corvinus*

Sara Tagliagalamba

University of Urbino Carlo Bo
*Gears, the Orb of the Moon and a Putto
Ringing a Bell. A Clock Made by Andrea
Verrocchio and the Young Leonardo*

MENS MACHINARIA IN CORPORE MACHINARIO: The Mechanization of the Human Body and Mind

Elizabeth King

Virginia Commonwealth University
*How They Moved: Four Sixteenth-
Century Walking Androids*

Stefano Gulizia

Ca' Foscari University of Venice
*Computational reasoning
and 'machine learning' before
Leibniz's ars combinatoria, 1613-1666*

WUNDERMASCHINEN: Machines as Instruments of Scientifically Programmed Fear & Surprise

Casper Briggs-Mønsted & Louise Kjærgaard Depner

University of Copenhagen
*The Peculiar Case of the Danish
Wetting Trap Chair*

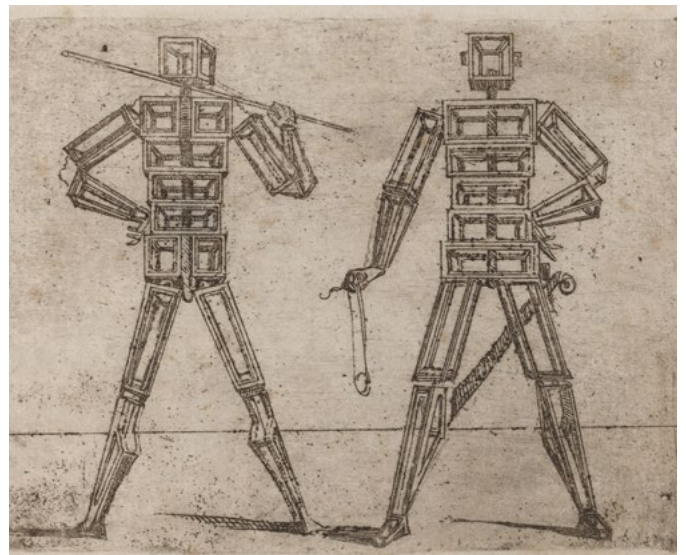
Ruggero Pace Gravina

University of Milan
*From Búcaros de Indias to
Caltagirone's Popular Majolica:
Hydromechanical Machines at the
Peripheries of the Empire*

Nadia Ambrosetti

University of Milan
*The Automata Cave: The Trap of
Machines and Human Resourcefulness*

FINAL DISCUSSION



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pwd=MgpRhUxeilhaUWCdG75FDe2cbzIU
nS.1](https://unive.zoom.us/j/82669315873?pwd=MgpRhUxeilhaUWCdG75FDe2cbzIU nS.1)

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Organizer

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