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Smith, Pamela H., project dir.

The Making and Knowing Project.

New York: Columbia University, 2014. Accessed 14 August 2023.

Edition640.makingandknowing.org.

The Making and Knowing Project is a collaborative research and pedagogical initiative of the Center for Science and Society at Columbia University, sponsored by grants from the National Science Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Henry Luce Foundation. The project's principal goal since its founding in 2014 has been the creation of a digital critical edition of a sixteenth-century French manuscript. Since February 2020, visitors to the project's website have been able to access the remarkable product of the work of this interdisciplinary team of scholars, students, and craft practitioners led by historian of science Pamela H. Smith: *Secrets of Craft and Nature in Renaissance France: A Digital Critical Edition and English Translation of BnF Ms. Fr. 640*. Users of all levels of expertise in Renaissance studies or the digital humanities will benefit from this digital edition and its extensive critical apparatus that includes multimedia annotations, a glossary, research essays, and additional resources.

Reading Ms. Fr. 640

The starting point for discovering the unique manuscript at the core of the Making and Knowing Project is an engaging visual introduction provided by a brief video on the project's home page. As she opens Ms. Fr. 640 and flips through its pages, Smith gives an overview of the more than 900 entries compiled in this work by an anonymous author and craft practitioner in Toulouse, France, beginning in the 1580s. These entries describe techniques for crafting a range of products from natural materials, including instructions and sketches for making life casts of animals, techniques for creating paint colours and crafting counterfeit coral and imitation gemstones, metal working instructions, and recipes for medical remedies, to cite just a few examples. In an introductory essay, Smith explains the scholarly value of this record of early modern experiential knowledge for historians of science, art historians, and others in related fields. The interdisciplinarity of the Making and Knowing Project is made possible by the pre-disciplinarity of the Renaissance; this text

offers insight into a time period in which craft making was also a means of producing scientific knowledge about the natural world.

The website's "How to Use" page provides easy-to-follow instructions for reading and browsing *Secrets of Craft and Nature*. Ms. Fr. 640 is presented in a dual-pane display that allows users to read, side by side, any of the four available versions of the manuscript—facsimile images of the manuscript pages, verbatim and normalized transcriptions in French, and an English translation—created by the project team. The "About" page describes how these transcriptions and translations were created by graduate students in a series of paleography and text workshops. To facilitate the navigation of the manuscript, the project team encoded the entries with semantic tags organized into 26 categories that are described on the "Resources" page, along with visual representations of the data in table and graph form that show the percentage of entries in which the category appears. The most frequently treated category in Ms. Fr. 640 is "casting," demonstrating the preoccupation of the author-practitioner with techniques for creating life casts or molds of natural objects. The digital edition includes a glossary of distinctive terms used in the manuscript as well as a bibliography of primary sources cited in the text, often accompanied by a link to the source itself. Further clarification and context for entries are provided by links to scholarly research essays throughout the manuscript.

Research essays

Users can access over 100 peer-reviewed essays in English and French by students and scholars through the links in relevant entries or on the "Research Essays" page, where they are organized into five subject categories: "An Introduction," "Art and Its Making," "Knowing Nature," "Society and Culture," and "The Making and Knowing Project." The scholarly articles in "An Introduction" give background on the physical construction of the manuscript, the artisans working in late sixteenth-century Toulouse where it was written, and Philippe de Béthune, who acquired the manuscript for his collection in the seventeenth century. Some also provide comparisons to similar texts from the period. Many of the articles in the "Art and Its Making," "Knowing Nature," and "Society and Culture" sections were written by students enrolled in a series of laboratory seminars in which they conducted experiments to reconstruct the crafting techniques described in the manuscript. Scholars and craft practitioners

were invited to participate in these seminars to contribute their expertise. The essays often include images and videos from these experiments, bringing this early modern knowledge to life. The final group of essays in “The Making and Knowing Project” section detail the processes of encoding, transcribing, translating, and digitizing the manuscript undertaken by the project team. They include reflections on the pedagogical aspect of the project as well as perspectives of craft practitioners and participating scholars on successes and failures. All of the essays were reviewed by members of the Making and Knowing Project team as well as by external scholars. As this is an ongoing project, the body of research essays continues to grow.

Interdisciplinary research and pedagogical resources

The contribution this project makes to the digital humanities and to Renaissance studies goes far beyond providing the first transcription, translation, and critical edition of an important French manuscript. For users who have never worked with an early modern document, the website provides a visually engaging step-by-step guide to unlocking the secrets of the text. For those new to the digital humanities, everything about the design of the Making and Knowing Project is intended to guide others interested in undertaking a similar project with their own colleagues and students. Work on a research and teaching companion to *Secrets of Craft and Nature* is also underway. It will include lesson plans, syllabi, and other resources developed in the course of the project. Also in progress is a collection of students’ field notes and photographs documenting the different steps of their research. This project is a valuable model for interdisciplinary collaboration, and it will continue to be an important resource for a broad range of users.

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