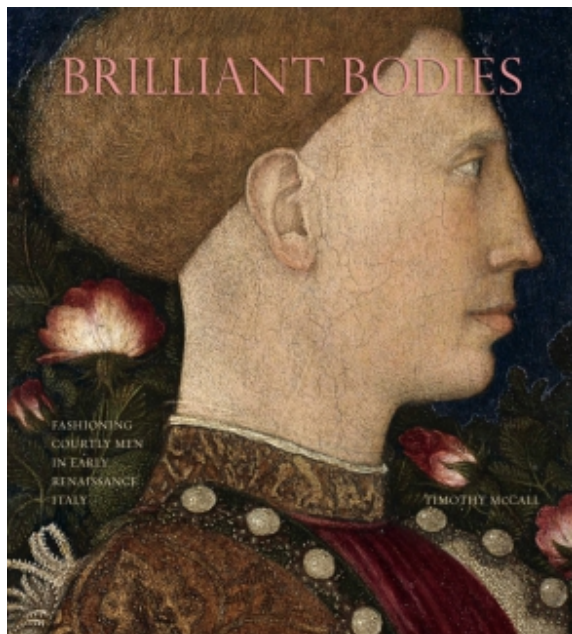


## Review: Brilliant Bodies: Fashioning Courty Men in Early Renaissance Italy

by Timothy McCall. The Pennsylvania State University Press, February 2022. 240 p. ill. ISBN 978-0-271-09060-3 (h/c), \$109.95.

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Galeazzo Maria Sforza, Duke of Milan, is said to have removed his armored doublet before entering mass on December 26, 1476, because it made him look “too fat;” he didn’t make it out alive. Although this utterance may be apocryphal, and the garment would not likely have deflected his assassin’s blows, this episode typifies the high stakes of men’s quattrocento fashion in Timothy McCall’s *Brilliant Bodies*. McCall uses evidence from artwork, correspondence, inventories, etiquette books, and a few extant pieces of clothing to show how Italian lords used their appearance (and decked-out entourages) to project status and authority.

The book is divided into four main themes: the incorporation of metals into men’s attire, including armor and brocades; adornments, such as jewels, pearls, chains, and spurs; the idealized male body, with a focus on how the doublet and hose displayed slender torsos and elegant legs; and how “fairness” was equated with beauty.

Italian *signore* were hyper-conscious of their appearance and were constantly on display; artworks were a way to proliferate and enhance their image. McCall hones in on the details of men’s clothing represented in portraits and wall decorations, providing the reader with new perspectives on many well-known artworks. Techniques for producing various types of materials are explained, as well as how lordly buying habits influenced local and foreign industries. The use of emblems and colors (think two-toned stockings) to broadcast alliances is also elucidated. McCall aims to counter assumptions about beauty being the realm of women

only, and to problematize how fashion has been employed by the powerful to legitimize and maintain their authority. He also explores the racial dimensions of the fifteenth-century obsession with “brilliance,” which included not just gold and jewels but also light hair and skin. Although modern conceptions of race were not yet calcified, the author asserts that Renaissance ideals of whiteness are worthy of critique.

*Brilliant Bodies* expands upon McCall’s past scholarship and joins a growing conversation on the topic of early modern men’s fashion; Elizabeth Currie’s *Fashion and Masculinity in Renaissance Florence* (Bloomsbury, 2017) is one recent example. The book is printed on glossy paper and is generously illustrated, with many high quality full- and half-page color images. It includes a glossary of commonly misunderstood terms, endnotes, an extensive bibliography, and an index. McCall writes in approachable and often entertaining language, and weaves captivating incidents into his analysis. This text would be a valuable addition to collections supporting scholarship in art history, fashion history, and decorative arts and design history, and is appropriate for undergraduate students and above.