

# Skin Deep: Reading Emotion on Early Modern Bodies



Image: Jacob Ochtervelt: *The Love Letter*, c. 1670.  
Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Mendelsohn, 1980.

**DATE:** Wednesday 11 April 2018  
**TIME:** 6pm–7.15pm  
**VENUE:** Lowe Theatre, Redmond Barry Building, The University of Melbourne, Parkville  
**REGISTRATIONS:** <https://www.trybooking.com/UNEZ>

Based on traditional medical theories, early modern skin was often described as a 'fishing net', something that held the body in place and offered a decorative surface but had no function of its own. At the same time, the body's surface also told you about its interior well-being. Learning to read the body meant both examining the exterior and sampling the interior's waste products ranging from urine to hair and tears.

This approach was as true of animals as it was of people. Manuals described how to read faces and skin, and argued for and against blushing. You could also predict astrological futures by reading the lines on foreheads as well as on hands, a topic known as chiromancy and even predict fate according to the number and site of spots and moles. Even more importantly, however, was the ability to combine all these forms of inspections with the ability to diagnose understanding humoural disorders ranging from love-sickness, a form of melancholy, to an excess of blood leading to anger. In this lecture, we will explore across the many various ways emotion was understood on the body's surface and how this was represented both materially and visually in early modern Europe.

EVELYN WELCH is Professor of Renaissance Studies and Provost (Arts and Sciences) at King's College London. She has been working on how we learn from things that were made in the past for many years. Writing about clothing, politics and social order, she uses sensory information as well as archival documents to explore the 'period body' in Renaissance and Early Modern Europe. Professor Welch is the author of numerous books, including *Art in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford University Press, 2000), *Shopping in the Renaissance* (Yale University Press, 2005), *The Material Renaissance* (Manchester University Press, 2007), *Making and Marketing Medicine in Renaissance Florence* (Rodopi, 2011) and *Fashioning the Early Modern: Dress, Textiles and Innovation in Europe, 1500–1800* (Oxford University Press, 2017). Professor Welch is now leading a major Wellcome-Trust funded project on 'Renaissance Skin', designed to explore how human and animal skin were conceptualised in Europe between 1500 and 1700.