SENSUAL FABRICS:
SENSES AND TEXTILES FOR TODAY'S AUDIENCES

International workshop, Guimarães, Paço dos Duques de Bragança

January 21-22, 2027

Organisation: **COST Action 24164: Sensing Europe's Court Spaces at the Crossroads of Past, Present and Future (SENSES), IHA-NOVA FCSH / IN PAST, and Paço dos Duques de Bragança, Museus e Monumentos de Portugal, E.P.E., Guimarães, Portugal**

In medieval and early modern courtly interiors, textiles and upholstery played a most prominent role. Covering walls, hanging over windows and doors, on the floor, over tables and daises, dressing the bed, dressing the body, textiles were present in the palace like no other component of its decoration. In some instances, they were so striking that the events they were involved in became known for the textiles used: the most famous example is probably the *Field of the Cloth of Gold*, an ephemeral set up assembled in 1520 to host a meeting between Henry VIII and François I. Understanding the importance of textiles helps clarify why patrons were willing to invest so much in them, from tapestries from Flanders to silk and gilt leathers from Venice among many others, by far the most expensive objects they acquired.

Much work has been done on the iconographic programs chosen for tapestries or embroideries, on the (often global) commercial circuits and their agents, on the techniques and their transformation in time, even on raw materials including fibers and pigments. Their role in major courtly events has been highlighted, much is already known on *mille fleurs* tapestries, series dedicated to the labors of Hercules or the life of Christ.

Funded by the European Union

Textiles, however, had a sensorial impact on courtly life that is more difficult to gauge: they helped control the temperature of a room, either warming it up in the winter of cooling it down (using *guadamecis*) in the summer; they changed the way sound traveled (or didn't) in space; they impacted the way smells either lingered or vanished; during periods of mourning black fabrics were temporarily brought in. In short, they involved a vast array of sensorial effects and responses that are not necessarily immediate to today's observer.

Recently, palace-museums, museums and other similar institutions have been paying attention to this dimension of the life of textiles and have developed a series of strategies aimed at providing their visitors with access to this sensorial world. Some are as simple as making available small samples that visitors can touch or, slightly more complicated, providing full pieces of garment that a visitor can try out, experiencing the complexities involved in putting on a large, 18th-century skirt or the weight of a medieval armor. Samples of scents can be used to facilitate a sense of smell. Today digital technologies are being used to reconstruct entire spaces and the textile programs that changed them.

In this workshop we want to discuss such experiments, those that have been conducted in the past, those that are being carried out right now, or even those that are yet being imagined, in order to provide visitors with an experience of the sensations caused by textiles and upholstery in the courtly residence. We encourage participation of a wide range of professionals, from art and architectural historians to museum and heritage professionals, from textile experts and cultural historians to those specializing in the various branches of the digital world. We also aim at discussing initiatives that have been successful as well as those that have encountered perhaps unanticipated problems and failed so that we can learn from each other's experience. Early career researchers or junior curators are strongly encouraged to apply.

Please submit: an abstract (max 300 words) and a short CV (max one page) **by November 1, 2026** to nsenos@fcsh.unl.pt

Participants must register with **COST** (free of charge). Travel and accommodation costs of accepted speakers will be reimbursed **according to COST rules**. Early career researchers may also apply for Short-Term Scientific Missions.

For more information see: https://www.cost.eu/actions/CA24164/

Organisation

Nuno Senos (Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal), *chair*

Eloy Koldeweij (Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed / Cultural Heritage Agency, The Netherlands)

Uta Coburger (Staatliche Schlösser und Gärten Baden-Württemberg, Germany)

Lledó Ruiz Domingo (Universitat Jaume I de Castelló, Spain)

Partner Institutions

Funded by the European Union