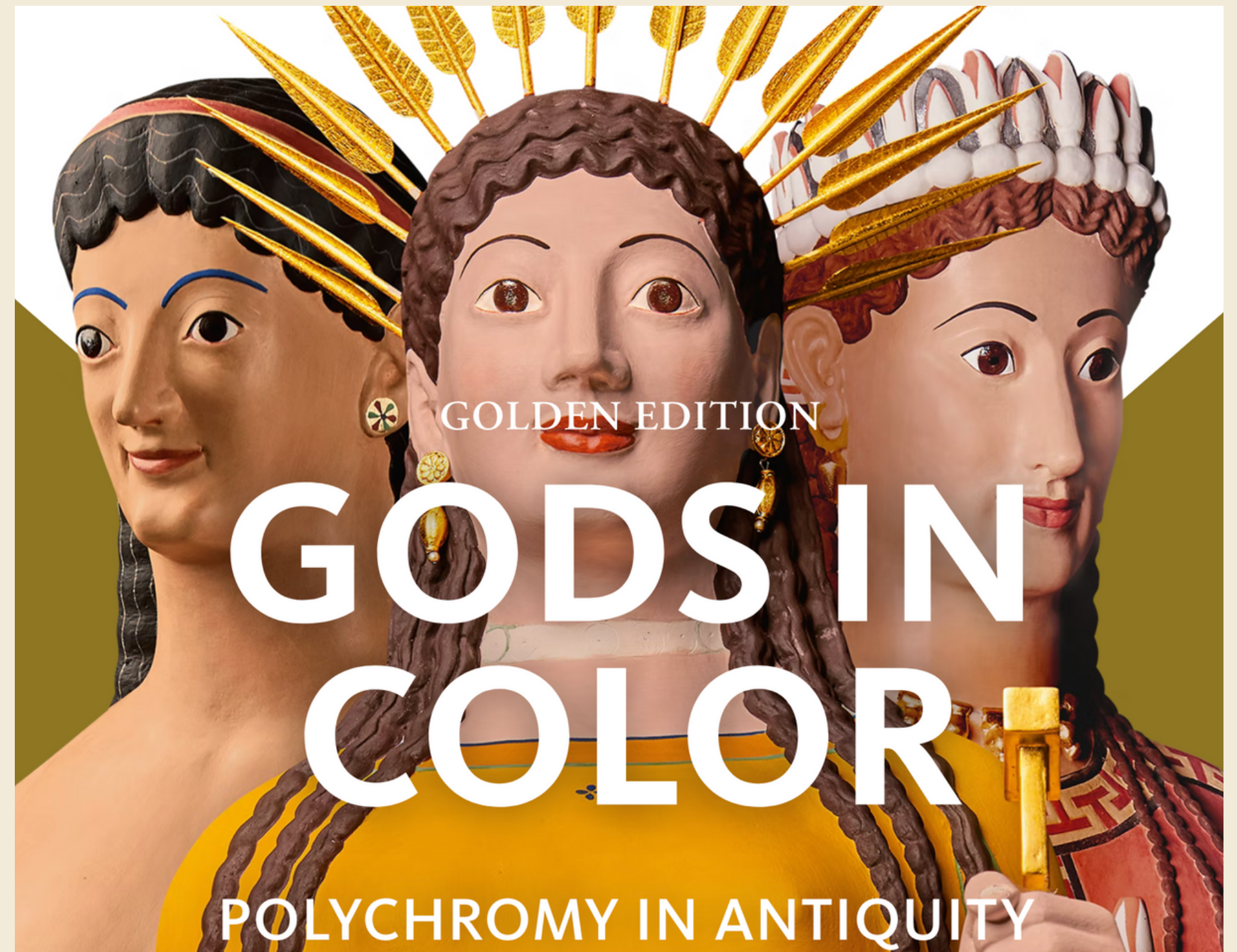


BLASTS FROM THE CASTS
POLYCHROMY IN ANTIQUITY

POLYCHROMY ANTIQUITY

WE ENCOUNTER COLOR EVERYDAY, EVERYWHERE, FROM BILLBOARDS AND POSTERS TO NEON SIGNS AND SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS. THE ANCIENT WORLD WAS NO DIFFERENT, AS IS EVIDENT FROM THE TRACES OF POLYCHROMY, OR MULTIPLE COLORS, FOUND COVERING THE SURFACES OF ANCIENT ARCHITECTURE AND SCULPTURE. BRIGHT, EYE-CATCHING, AND OFTEN BORDERING ON WHAT WE WOULD CONSIDER GARISH TODAY, ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS COLORED THEIR WORLD BY APPLYING PIGMENTS AND DYES TO FINISHED STONE SURFACES.



IMAGING TECHNIQUES

Investigating Color

How did artists create and use color two thousand years ago? Much of the information we have comes from ancient historians, who made observations about the natural world, technology, and trade. But new discoveries are also being made through scientific investigation. Sometimes color on an ancient object is clearly visible — like with the colorful *Fayum portrait* — but in other cases only microscopic traces remain.

In *Investigating Color* you will learn about some of the tools scientists and conservators use to answer questions about how ancient artists painted, dyed, and decorated works of art. Scientific instruments used in chemistry, biology, materials science, and other fields have been adapted to locate traces of color, identify unknown color on artifacts, and help us learn more about artists' materials. As more artifacts are studied, we understand more about how Romans *created* and *used* color.

Case Studies

- Mummy portrait
- Bacchus head

Scientific Techniques for Color Investigation

+ Multispectral imaging (MSI)



Christina Bisulca (left), conservation scientist at the Detroit Institute of Arts, performs fiber optic reflectance spectroscopy (FORS) on the Kelsey's Fayum portrait as Carrie Roberts assists.

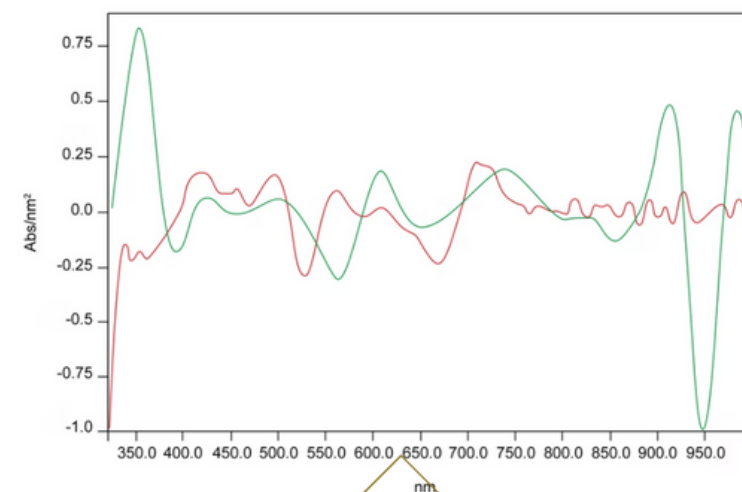
AT EXCAVATION, BITS OF COLOR MAY
BE VISIBLE ON ARTIFACTS, BUT
SURFACE CLEANING AND EXPOSURE
TO AIR AND LIGHT SOON CAUSES THE
COLORING TO FADE, LEAVING IT
INVISIBLE TO THE NAKED EYE. AS
TECHNOLOGY ADVANCES, EQUIPMENT
AND TECHNIQUES ARE DEVELOPED TO
IDENTIFY THE PRESENCE OF
POLYCHROMY ON ANCIENT
MATERIALS.

IMAGING TECHNIQUES

UV-VISIBLE ABSORPTION SPECTROSCOPY

THIS TECHNIQUE MEASURES REFLECTION AND ABSORPTION OF LIGHT DIRECTED AT A SPECIFIC LOCATION ON THE SCULPTURE. THESE MEASUREMENTS GENERATE A GRAPH THAT CAN BE COMPARED TO OTHER KNOWN REFERENCE SAMPLES. FROM THIS INFORMATION THE EXACT COLORS CAN BE DEDUCED.

UV-VISIBLE ABSORPTION SPECTROSCOPY



① Example of a spectrum obtained through use of UV-Visible Spectroscopy

INFRARED LUMINESCENCE PHOTOGRAPHY



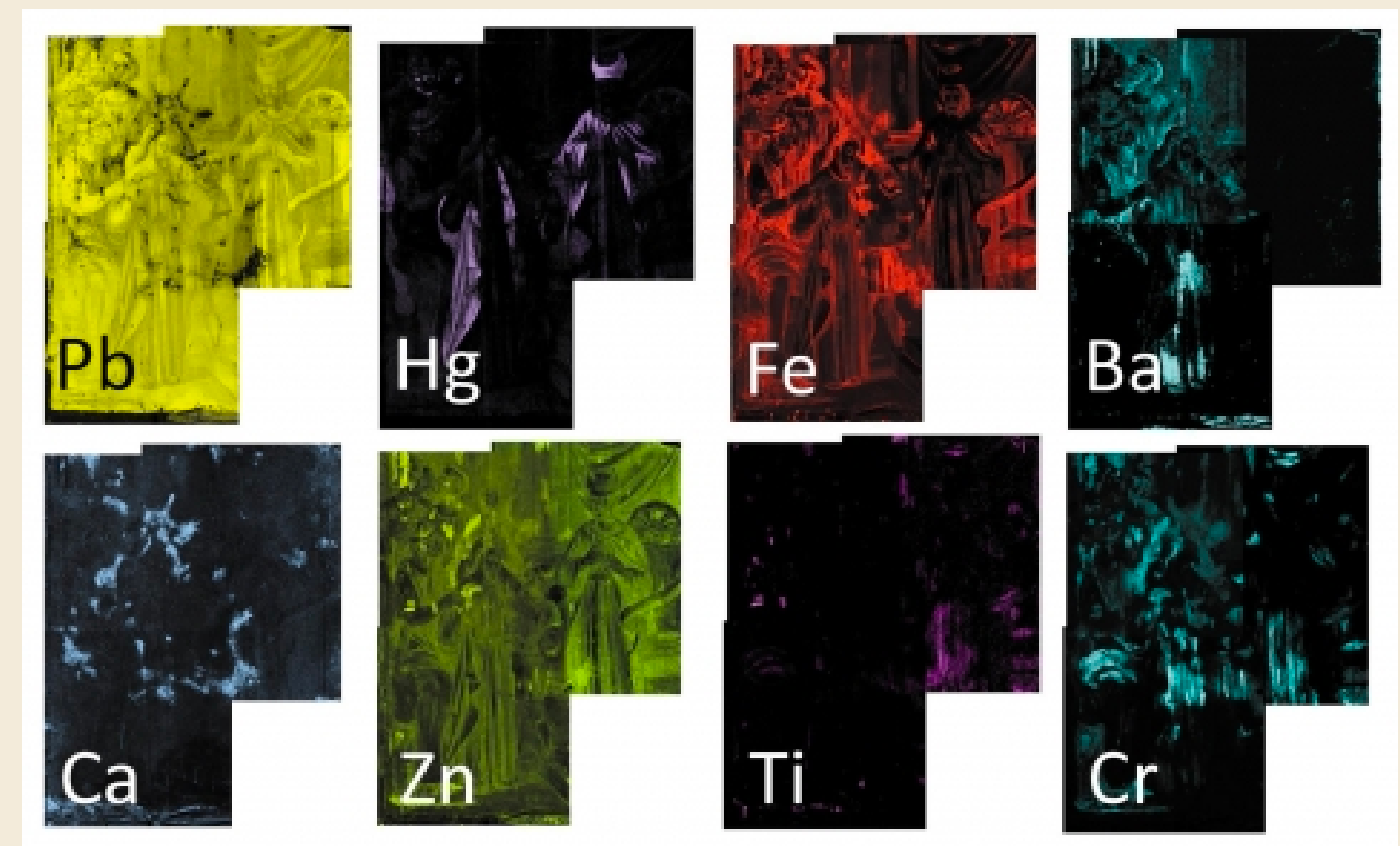
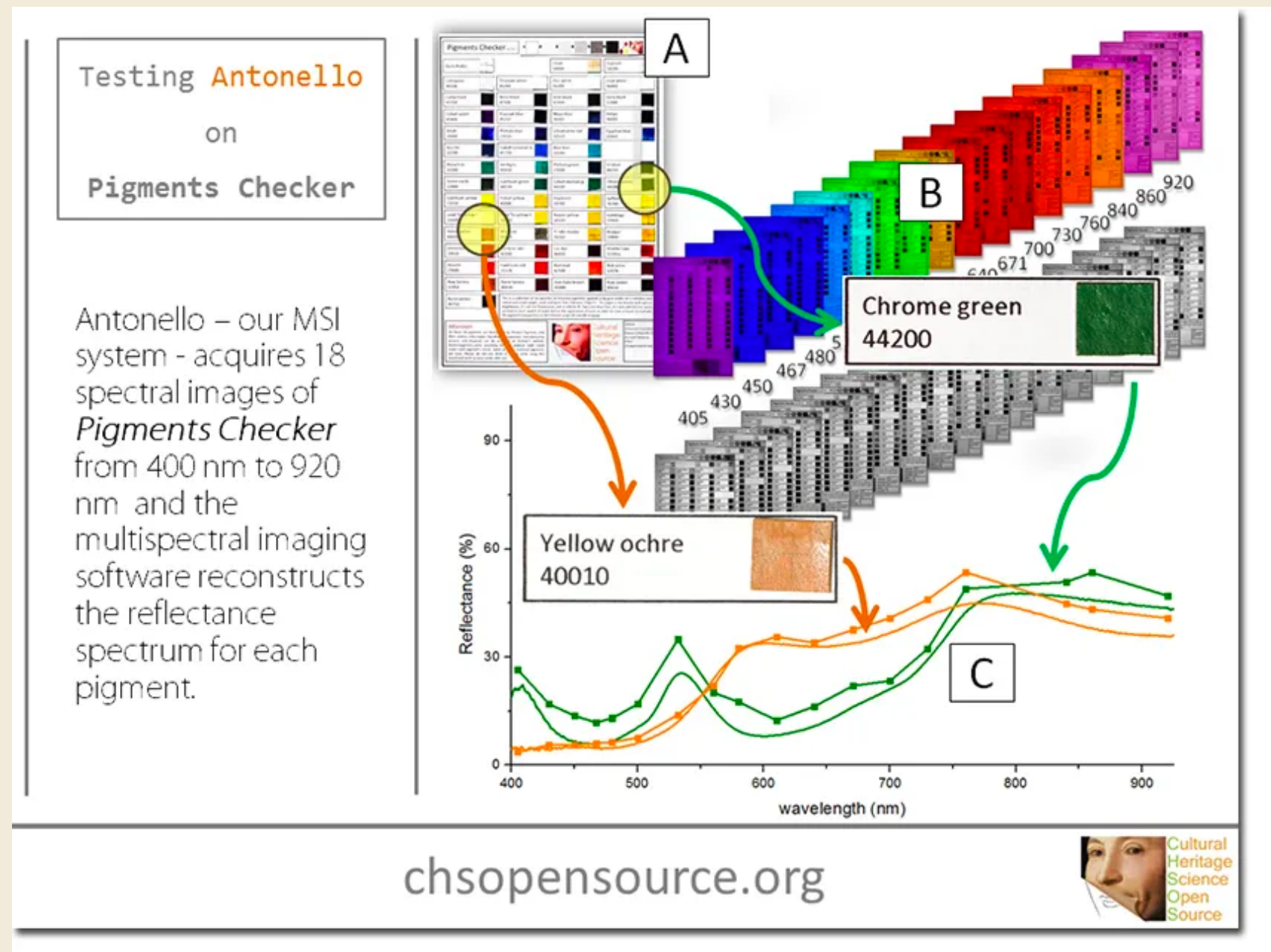
Luminescence of Egyptian Blue visible in infrared light on the seam of the standing muse's mantle

VISIBLE INDUCED INFRARED LUMINESCENCE (VIL)

A TECHNIQUE USING VISIBLE AND INFRARED LIGHT THAT MAKES EGYPTIAN BLUE (ONE OF THE FIRST SYNTHETIC PIGMENTS) APPEAR TO GLOW IN PHOTOGRAPHS

IMAGING TECHNIQUES CONTINUED

MULTISPECTRAL IMAGING (MSI) – CAPTURING IMAGES OF THE ITEM IN QUESTION UNDER A VARIETY OF LIGHTING SET-UPS AND SOURCES



MACROSCOPIC X-RAY FLUORESCENCE (MA- XRF) – ILLUSTRATES ELEMENTS SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION AND CREATES AN ELEMENTAL MAP

POLYCHROMY & POPULAR CULTURE

RESULTS FROM THESE TECHNIQUES ALLOW SCIENTISTS, ARTISTS, AND ART HISTORIANS TO COLLABORATE ON THE RESTORATION OF POLYCHROMY TO ANCIENT SCULPTURE – THEIR COLORFUL RESTORATIONS ARE ON REPLICAS RATHER THAN THE ORIGINAL OBJECTS! – AND THEIR CREATIONS FORM POPULAR MUSEUM EXHIBITS, SUCH AS GODS IN COLOR WHICH HAS BEEN TOURING THE WORLD SINCE 2003. (EXAMPLE ON THE RIGHT!)

UNCOVERING ANCIENT POLYCHROMY IS A CRUCIAL STEP IN CORRECTING POPULAR IMAGININGS OF ANCIENT SCULPTURE AS PURE WHITE. THIS MISCONCEPTION HAS WRONGLY CAST THE ANCIENT WORLD AS DEVOID OF COLOR IN BOTH ITS POPULATION AND ITS ART, PERPETUATING THE STEREOTYPE THAT WHITE IS SUPERIOR – THIS MYTH OF ETHNOCENTRIC WHITENESS CONTINUES TO FUEL THE ARGUMENT OF WHITE SUPREMACY TODAY.



WHERE DID THIS MYTH COME FROM?



DURING THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE ANCIENT SCULPTURES, DEVOID OF OBVIOUS POLYCHROMY AFTER CENTURIES BURIED IN THE DIRT, WERE REDISCOVERED IN THE COURSE OF GROUND EXCAVATION FOR URBAN EXPANSION. SCULPTORS, LIKE MICHELANGELO, THEN LOOKED TO THIS NEWLY RE-EMERGED, ANCIENT PAST FOR INSPIRATION IN THEIR OWN WORKS. BY ATTEMPTING TO RECREATE WHAT THEY SAW AS AUSTERE, LILY-WHITE ANCIENT ART THEY ACTUALLY INTRODUCED SOMETHING NEW TO THE WORLD: THE UNCOLORED SCULPTURE.

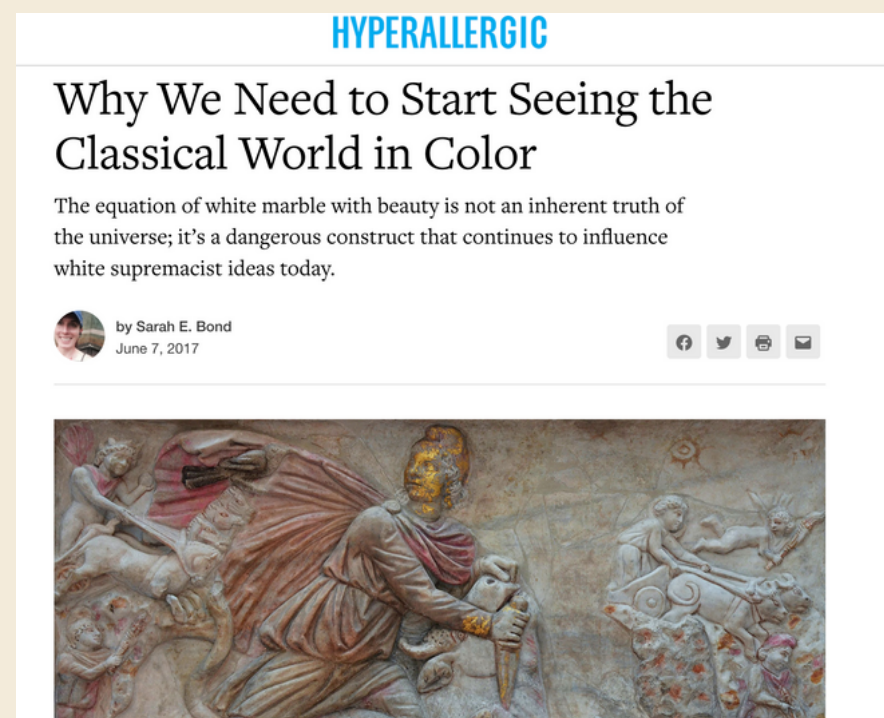
LATER, 18TH CENTURY GERMAN ARCHAEOLOGIST AND ART HISTORIAN JOHANN JOACHIM WINCKELMANN, WHO IS WELL KNOWN FOR HIS VOLUMES ON ANCIENT ART, CLAIMED WHITE MARBLE STATUES LIKE THE APOLLO BELVEDERE WERE THE EPITOME OF BEAUTY.

AND, MODERN PORTRAYALS OF ANTIQUITY HAVE DONE LITTLE TO HALT THE MISCONCEPTION: MUSEUMS AND TEXTBOOKS CONTINUE TO MARGINALIZE COLOR WHILE VIDEO GAMES AND MOVIES, SUCH AS GLADIATOR AND 300, CONTINUE TO IGNORE COLOR AND PERPETUATE XENOPHOBIC STEREOTYPES.

WHY WHITE?

RECENTLY, CLAIMS REGARDING THE GREEK AND ROMAN ROOTS OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION HAVE BEEN USED TO BOLSTER WHITE NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS ACROSS THE UNITED STATES. THE LONG ASSOCIATION BETWEEN CLASSICAL SCULPTURE AND THE MYTH OF WHITE SUPERIORITY HAS PROVIDED A BASIS FOR SOME OF THESE ARGUMENTS, LEADING PROFESSIONALS IN HUMANITIES FIELDS TO FOCUS ON COUNTERING THE NARRATIVE WITH ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES BASED ON HISTORICAL EVIDENCE.

AMONG THE MOST ACTIVE VOICES IS THAT OF HISTORIAN SARAH BOND, WHO HAS REPEATEDLY EMPHASIZED THE PERVASIVE ROLE OF COLOR IN ANCIENT SCULPTURE AND THE WAY IN WHICH 19TH-CENTURY SCHOLARSHIP – AND PRACTICES LIKE CAST-MAKING – CAUSED US TO SEE THE CLASSICAL WORLD AS A “WHITE” AND “PURE” ONE. INITIALLY SUCH STATEMENTS PROVOKED BACKLASH AMONG SOME WHO THOUGHT THAT THIS WAS TOO POLITICAL AN APPROACH TO ANCIENT ART, BUT HAS SINCE LED TO AN ONGOING AND PRODUCTIVE DISCUSSION REGARDING THE PLACE OF CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY IN OUR VIEW OF MODERN AMERICAN SOCIETY.



LILY COX-RICHARDS

FEATURED ARTIST: LILY COX-RICHARDS

In July 2019 at the Blanton Museum of Art, artist Lily Cox-Richard opened her installation *She-Wolf + Lower Figs*, featuring a polychrome replica of the Capitoline Wolf sculpture made from digital imaging of the original, as well as several of the Battle Casts wrapped in colorful tulle. Cox-Richard explains that this exhibit was not only an opportunity to challenge the widespread myth of white antiquity, but an opportunity to address questions on the very notions of preference or “taste” — especially of Western taste — in the study of the “classical” legacy. The exhibition received significant **media** and **institutional attention**, and the artist has opened new doors for the reuse and adaptation of the casts.

[View Project →](#)



THIS DISCUSSION HAS BEEN ADDRESSED BY A VARIETY OF SOURCES INCLUDING BOND'S 2017 ARTICLE, "WHY WE NEED TO START SEEING THE CLASSICAL WORLD IN COLOR," VINZENZ BRINKMANN'S 2017 BOOK, GODS IN COLOR: POLYCHROMY IN THE ANCIENT WORLD, AND LOCALLY IN TEXAS BY ARTIST LILY COX-RICHARD'S 2019 EXHIBIT, SHE-WOLF + LOWER FIGS, INSTALLED AT THE BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART

BLANTON

Artist Lily Cox-Richard on "She-Wolf + Lower Figs." On View at Th...



Watch later



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SHE-WOLF + LOWER FIGS.

JULY 27 - DEC 29, 2019

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**COURTESY OF THE BLAST FROM THE
CASTS LEARNING RESOURCES PAGE**