

Kids garb – some background info and sources of images

Collected by Maggie Forest

Children's clothing in the Middle Ages was generally the same as adult clothing. For every day clothing, the cut and decoration was generally simpler than an adult garment – which makes sense if you consider how quickly kids grow out of their clothes. The exception is of course the very wealthy and royal children, whose clothing was as expensive as the adult's was.

Babies clothing can be difficult, though. Infants in period were generally swaddled, and we are generally pretty reluctant to do that... When not swaddled, babies are generally depicted naked, or at best wearing a little shirt/chemise garment. Crivelli, while painting rather disturbing babies, nevertheless clothes them a bit more, and so his Mary and Jesus images might be an idea to look out for.

Once babies became toddlers, they began to wear gowns. Young children are often depicted wearing some sort of apron – another eminently practical garment. Little coifs or hats rather than veils for girls are also sensible. Boys as well as girls wore 'dresses' – which again makes sense if you have to change them often. The 'breeching' was one of those milestones in a young boy's life.

From that point on children were little copies of their parents, which makes the whole garb issue much easier.

There are some things you do need to think of in designing clothing for kids. On the upside, if you want to try out a design, or have an idea for a simply sumptuous item of clothing, well, here is your very own mini-fashion model! But if the garments are going to be used at a camping event, you probably want something that's easy to wash.

Some suggestions

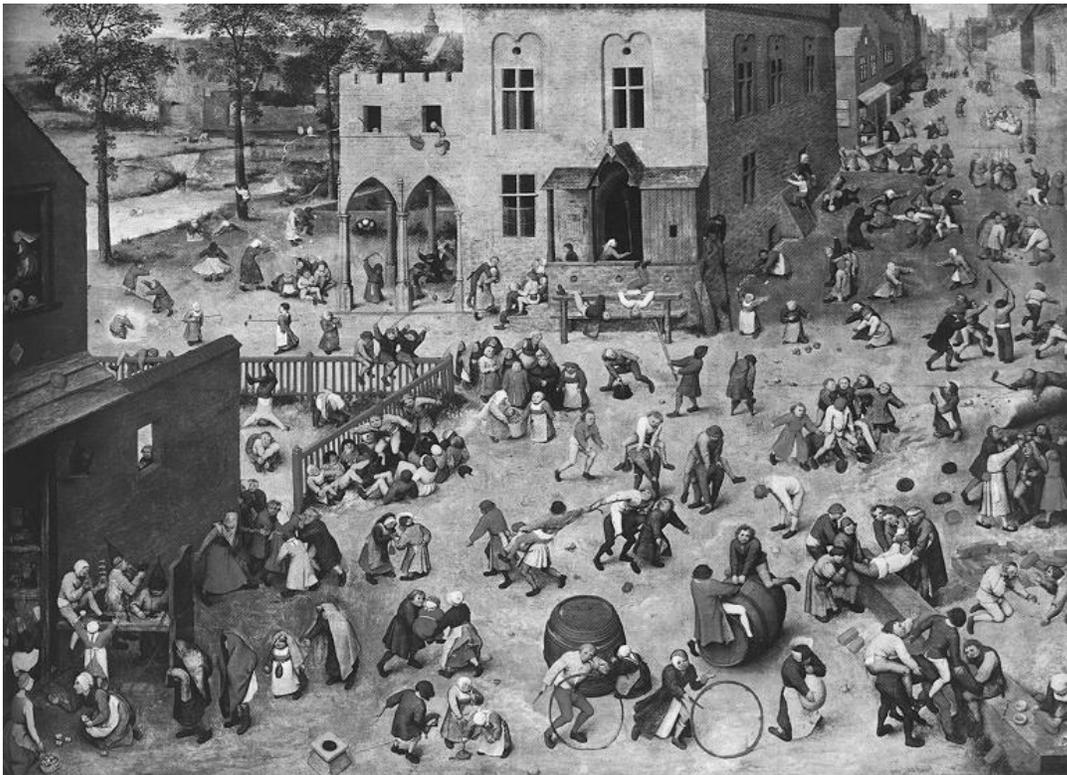
- Make layers of garments in natural fabric. Temperatures vary, and babies get cold or overheat really easily.
- When the babies find their feet, make the garments long - longer than you would normally think. Otherwise, put tights on the baby underneath.
- Remember - babies past the age of four months will put everything they can reach into their mouths. Secure all trim very tightly. Don't use things they can pull off - spangles are right out.
- Make nothing out of fabric that can't handle lots of baby spittle - or be prepared for the baby to eat the pile off the velvet. It won't hurt them, but the garment will never be the same again.
- Make hats. Ear infections are Not Fun (says a mum who hasn't slept in three nights) In summer, heat stroke in babies is even Less Fun.
- Remember that the garb you make will likely only ever be worn once by each baby. They grow incredibly fast.
- Following on to that; don't make garb for an event that's three weeks away and expect it to fit. Either make it too big, or wait until the last minute.
- Babies like moving their limbs. Make the armholes wide.
- Babies' heads are proportionally much larger than an adult's. They don't like having their noses squished when you get them dressed or undressed. Make neck openings either extra wide or make a keyhole neck. Don't give hoods that indentation around the neck, and make sure that the head fits through there.
- Brooches are not safe from a baby that loves to pick things apart (this little one is going to be an engineer!). Use ties or buttons/toggles to close things with.

Illustrations

Children in the Manesse codex:



Brueghel's Child's play:



Some other images:

Boticelli



Madonna of the Magnificat

c.1485

Tempera on panel,
diameter 118 cm
Galleria degli Uffizi,
Florence

Crivelli



Virgin and Child Enthroned

around 1476

Panel, 106,5 x 55,3 cm
Museum of Fine Arts,
Budapest

Fra Angelico



St Lawrence Distributes Food to the Poor

1447-50

Fresco, 271 x 205 cm
Cappella Niccolina,
Palazzi Pontifici, Vatican

Mantegna



The Court of Mantua

1471-74

Fresco
Camera degli Sposi,
Ducal Palace, Mantua

Holbein



Edward VI as a Child
1539
Tempera on wood, 57 x 44 cm
National Gallery of Art, Washington



The Painter's Wife and two Children
1528-29
Tempera on paper later transferred to wood, 77 x 64 cm
Öffentliche Kunstsammlung, Basel



The Virgin and Child with the family of Burgomaster Meyer
1528
Oil on wood, 146.5 x 102 cm
Schlossmuseum, Darmstadt

Unknown?



Henry and Charles Stuart, 1563

Extant children's clothing

The Margrethe gown was re-sized to fit a very small individual. A nine-year-old wears the reconstruction here!



Herjolfsnes 44. The gown was reconstructed by the National Museum of Denmark for an exhibition about children in the Middle Ages.



Gräfin Katharina zur Lippe, 1600

