ALMOST LIKE PLANTS
BUT NOT UNLIKE CLOTH:
ON THE CURIOUS STATUS OF HAIR
IN THE RENAISSANCE

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ALMOST LIKE PLANTS, ALMOST LIKE PLANTS: ON THE CURIOUS STATUS OF HAIR IN THE RENAISSANCE
Benozzo Gozzoli, Lorenzo de Medici, early 1460s. Florence: Palazzo Medici-Riccardi
Augustus' silver denarius. Rome: private collection
Giorgione, Portrait of a Lady (Laura?), 1506. Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum
HAIR = HUMORAL OFFSHOOT
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"Life is infinite in all the world’s things [...] and can be clearly seen in trees and grass, which are like the world’s hair and body hair."

(Marsilio Ficino, De Vita, 1489)
French manufacture, Ivory comb, last decade of the 15th century. Florence, Museo del Bargello
“CHIOMA”

- Hair
- Tree’s foliage
Ricciardo di Nanni, Apollo and Daphne, c. 1470. Camarillo, CA: Doheny Memorial Library, ms 38.63
Michelangelo, Aminadab and the Bride, 1510-12. Rome: Sistine Chapel
Leonardo, Studies of Hairstyles, c. 1505. Windsor: Royal Collection
“Making it [the brush] really stiff and pointed so that the tip protrudes just a tiny bit from the shaft.

Then dip a small part of it in the mordant and work up your decorations and the outlines.

And as I tell you, make sure that the brush is never overloaded. Why? So that your handiwork will come out like fine hairs, which is the most beautiful work.”

(Cennino Cennini, The Painter’s Handbook, 15th c)
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Botticelli, Detail from the Birth of Venus, c. 1485. Florence: Uffizi