Wastework (Rome, 15-17 Mar 23)

Bibliotheca Hertziana - Max Planck Institute for Art History, Mar 15–17, 2023
Deadline: Sep 15, 2022

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Art students today know the rules: no solvents in the trash, no clay down the drain, and don't forget to cure that resin before you toss it! Early modern craftsmen had their own rituals of disposal, too – albeit ones driven more by economies of thrift than by environmental regulation or fire safety. This international, interdisciplinary conference invites papers on the materiality, spatiality, and processing of waste in the early modern workshop, broadly conceived. It proposes to examine acts of disposal, displacement, removal, and abeyance – in short, the getting rid of unwanted things – and the consequences these carry for the study of early modern material culture.

Marble dust, scrap metal, broken glass, dried oil… How did the apparent formlessness of this discarded matter – the residues, the shavings, the piles – generate new ideas for forms or find new life through changes in state engendered by slaking, burning, distilling or casting? Who were the actors trading in workshop waste, and how can we map their networks, both local and global? How were materials stored and recycled between artistic acts? What disposal flows led household waste – egg shells, stale bread, stove ash – to enter the space of the studio as artistic material or cleaning product? How did the presence, accumulation and containment of waste – its conduits and repositories – condition the environment and location of the workshop? In research today, how can waste pits be used as sources for both the footprints and layouts of workshops and for the information they provide on technological and stylistic change? More broadly, how is waste archived, and are all archives just waste heaps of history?

We welcome papers that respond to these questions with historical case studies, wider-reaching theorisations, or methodological reflections. While our focus is on practices and spaces of art-making, we also seek contributions from beyond the history of art. Building on the home-economics framework of Simon Werrett's Thrifty Science (2019); the emerging field of Discard Studies; and histories of pre-industrial recycling by Reinhold Reith and of medieval waste by Susan S. Morrison, this conference will serve as a forum for generating new narratives of waste, thrift, and re-use in the early modern arts that go beyond the well-researched category of spoliation. We foreground waste as the material expression of practices of ordering and classification by which people adjudicated between collection and disposal, wanted and unwanted, salvation and loss. In reimagining the discarded past we intend to test the usefulness of contemporary formulations – secondary product cycles, material fatigue, metabolic flows, sustainability, recycling – while also proposing new typologies and categories. A series of pre-conference visits to local workshops and heritage collections will launch the event. Travel and accommodation costs will be covered for speakers.

This conference is organized by Dr. Ruth Ezra and Dr. Francesca Borgo within the framework of

the Lise Meitner Research Group “Decay, Loss, and Conservation in Art History” at the Bibliotheca Hertziana - Max Planck Institute for Art History. For more information see our webpage: https://www.biblhertz.it/3272322/research-group-borgo

Please send your CV (including current position and affiliation), a 250-word abstract and paper title to john.rattray@biblhertz.it by September 15, 2022. Proposals will be considered for inclusion in a planned special journal issue on waste in the early modern workshop.

Reference:

CFP: Wastework (Rome, 15-17 Mar 23). In: ArtHist.net, Jul 12, 2022 (accessed Nov 18, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/37112>.