

A History of Textile Cleanliness (Bern/Riggisberg, 27–29 May 26)

University of Bern / Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisberg, May 27–29, 2026

Erika Wicky

A History of Textile Cleanliness: Washing and Perfuming Fabrics from the Medieval to the Modern Period

International conference organized by Moïra Dato (Institute of Art History, University of Bern) and Érika Wicky (Université Grenoble-Alpes/LARHRA)

Programme

Wednesday 27 May

University of Bern, Hauptgebäude, Kuppelraum

13:00-13:30

Arrival and coffee

13:30-14:15

Introduction by Moïra Dato and Érika Wicky

14:15-15:30

Panel 1: Cultural and Social Attitudes to Cleaning and Textile Care (moderation: Torsten Korte, Universität Bern)

Isabella Campagnol (Istituto Marangoni) – “Doing the Laundry in 18th-Century Venice: Washing in a City on Water, but Without Water”

Marie Charvet (Nantes Université) – “Whiteness vs Preservation: Laundresses and Housewives in 19th Century Urban France Public Washhouses”

15:30-16:00

Coffee Break

16:00-18:00

Panel 2: The Scent of Cleanliness (moderation: Érika Wicky)

Océane Fontaine Cioffi (Université de Tours) – “The Scent of Clean: Perfuming Linen Between Health, Sensuality, and Material Care in Sixteenth Century Europe”

Pauline Devriese (Universiteit Gent/Modemuseum Hasselt) – “The Scent of Dress: Tracing the Separation of Scent and Dress in Daily Hygiene and Health Practices from the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries in Western Europe”

Lucille Lefrang (Université Grenoble Alpes) and Olivier David (Institut Lavoisier/Paris Saclay) – “The Contemporary « Toxic » Smell of Clean: The Example of Galaxolide”

18:00 – Aperitif for the conference’s participants

Thursday 28 May

Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisberg

10:00-12:00

Panel 3: Techniques and Practices of Textile Cleaning (moderation: Jean-Alexandre Perras, Sorbonne Université / Cellf)

Vendy Hoppe (University of Manchester/The Delmas Foundation) – “Too Precious to Wash? The Care and Cleaning of Velvets in Early Modern Europe”

Audrey Colonel-Coquet (Université Grenoble-Alpes/LARHRA) – “The Cleanliness of Gloves in the 19th Century: From Home Cleaning to Washable Gloves”

Eloïse Richard (Université de Genève) – “Behind the White Coat: Cleaning and Sterilizing Hospital Textiles in the Early 20th Century”

12:00-13:30

Lunch

13:30-14:30

Visit of the Conservation workshop and storage of the Abegg-Stiftung

14:30-16:15

Panel 4: Cleaning in Textile Conservation (moderation: Regula Schorta, Abegg-Stiftung)

Bettina Niekamp (Abegg-Stiftung) – “Textile Cleanliness – Some Case Studies of Conservation/Restoration Treatments of Soiled Linen Damasks, Burial Textiles, Tapestries and Liturgical Textiles”

Johanna Nilsson (Göteborg University), Jan Pettersson (Göteborg University) and Karin Tetteris (Armémuseum) – “Traces of Environment and Humans: Interdisciplinary Studies of Dirt on Historical Textiles”

Anna Robinson (University of Lincoln) – “In the Usual Fashion – Learning from and Deciphering

19th Century Laundering Instructions”

16:15-16:30

Coffee break

16:30-17:30

Visit of the permanent and temporary exhibition of the Abegg-Stiftung

19:00 – Dinner for the conference’s participants, Bern

Friday 29 May

University of Bern, Hauptgebäude, Kuppelraum

09:00-11:00

Panel 5: The Actors and Knowledge of Cleaning (moderation: Raphaël Morera, CNRS/EHESS)

Olga Arenga (Università degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata) – “From Soap to Scent: Garment Care and Daily Labor in the Barberini Archive”

Sara van Dijk (Rijksmuseum) and Danielle van den Heuvel (Universiteit Utrecht) – “White and Bright: Washing Linens in the Dutch Republic”

Santosh Kumar Rai (University of Delhi) – “From Flowers to Chemicals: Textile Cleanliness and Changes in the Handloom Industry of Colonial North India”

Monica Klasing Chen (Universität Heidelberg) – “Virtue or Science: Washing and Caring for Textiles in Early-Modern and Modern China”

11:00-11:30

Coffee break

11:30-12:30

Panel 6: Religious Rituals and Practices of Cleanliness (Moderation: Corinne Mühlemann, Universität Bern)

Juliette Calvarin (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) – “«lynin cloth of witré colore»: Veronica's Veil, Linen Vestments, and the Laundress”

Patricia Blessing (Stanford University) – “Textile Cleanliness in Islamic Law: From Hadith to Ottoman Fatwas”

12:30-14:00

Lunch

14:00-16:00

Panel 7: Dirt and the Absence of Cleaning (moderation: Sasha Rossman, Universität Bern)

Sylvia W. Houghteling (Bryn Mawr College) – “The Soil of Dyes: Ground, Water, and Scent in the Making of Early Modern South Asian Textiles”

Léon Rochard (Sorbonne-Université) – “«The world is like this cloth, misleading and fake»: Clean, Dirty Textiles and the Question of Representation in the Seventeenth-Century Netherlands”

Alison Matthews David (Toronto Metropolitan University) – “Offenders: Cleanliness and the Scent of Crime”

Julia Guarneri (University of Cambridge) – “Dry Clean Only: Dealing with Unwashable Clothing in the Twentieth-Century United States”

16:00-16:30

Final discussion and closing remarks

Scientific committee :

Olivier David (Institut Lavoisier / Paris-Saclay)

Raphaël Morera (CNRS-EHESS)

Corinne Mühleemann (Universität Bern)

Helen Wyld (National Museum Scotland)

Locations:

University of Bern, Main Building: free admission limited to available places

Abegg-Stiftung, Riggisberg: admission upon reservation at https://www.ikg.unibe.ch/forms/registration/index_eng.html (registration closes on 12 May 2026)

Reference:

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