

Rome, 15–17 March 2023

WASTEWORK



DECAY, LOSS,
AND CONSERVATION
IN ART HISTORY

Wastework is an international, interdisciplinary conference on the materiality, spatiality, and processing of waste in the early modern workshop. 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? 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?

The conference will 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 test the usefulness of contemporary formulations – secondary product cycles, material fatigue, metabolic flows, sustainability, recycling – while also proposing new categories.

In collaboration with



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