

Call for Papers

“Medicine, Museums, and Science Communication in the Nineteenth Century”

INCSA Satellite Conference at the Medical Museion, University of Copenhagen 20 July 2026

The International Nineteenth-Century Studies Association (INCSA) invites proposals for a satellite conference to be held on 20 July 2026 at the Medical Museion, University of Copenhagen. This one-day event takes place in conjunction with the INCSA 2026 bi-annual conference in Washington, D.C. The satellite conference will be held in a partially hybrid format, with participation possible both in person at the Medical Museion and online. The day will conclude with an keynote by Katherine Ott and Lilla Vekerdý of the Smithsonian Institution.

The INCSA 2026 conference is organized around the themes of Revolution, Revelation, and Reconciliation, with a focus on the nineteenth century. This satellite event engages these broader themes through a focused exploration of medicine, medical museums, and science communication. Situated within a medical museum, the conference foregrounds questions of how medical knowledge was communicated to the public through objects, images, exhibitions, and other interpretive practices, including how difficult, contested, or ethically challenging histories are presented and interpreted for contemporary audiences.

The nineteenth century was marked by significant transformations in medicine and the life sciences. New clinical practices, experimental cultures, institutional forms, and visual traditions reshaped understandings of the body, disease, health, and healing. These developments were communicated beyond professional communities through museums, exhibitions, lectures, popular publications, and material collections. Medical museums in particular functioned as spaces where scientific knowledge, public education, cultural values, and experiences of pain, harm, and vulnerability intersected.

We invite papers that explore the communication of medicine and the life sciences in the nineteenth century, with particular attention to museums and other public facing institutions. Contributions may consider how medical knowledge was translated into objects, images, narratives, and displays, how audiences engaged with these forms, and how museums functioned as sites for negotiating authority, education, cultural meaning, and the legacies of medical practices in the present.

Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Medical museums, collections, and exhibitions in the nineteenth century
- The visual and material culture of medicine and the life sciences
- Public medicine, popular science, and medical education
- Practices of collecting, classifying, and displaying medical objects
- Communication of medical risk, uncertainty, and expertise
- Medicine, museums, and imperial or transnational contexts
- Ethical questions and controversy surrounding medical display
- Gender, race, class, and the body in medical communication
- The legacies of nineteenth century medical museums and science communication

We welcome proposals from scholars, curators, museum professionals, historians, educators, and researchers working across disciplines. Comparative, interdisciplinary, and practice oriented perspectives are encouraged.

Presentations may be delivered in English or Danish.

Submission guidelines

Abstracts of up to 300 words should clearly outline the proposed paper's argument, sources, and relevance to the conference themes. Please include a short biographical note of up to 100 words.

Deadline for abstract submissions is **31 March 2026**. Decisions regarding acceptances will be communicated shortly thereafter.

Submission Form: <https://forms.gle/n3L5gkycWXnegcrD6>

Conference details

Date: 20 July 2026

Venue: Medical Museion, University of Copenhagen + online

Languages: English and Danish

Confirmed keynote presentation by Katherine Ott and Lilla Vekerdy

Understanding 19th Century Embodiment Through Medical Material Culture

This virtual component of the conference is a live stream from the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, featuring 19th century medical instruments from the collection. Dr. Ott will explore the sensory world of human health as experienced by medical practitioners and those seeking care that is revealed through the study of the objects they used.

Dr. Katherine Ott is a curator in the Division of Medicine and Science at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. She is the author or editor of three books and has published widely on the history of medicine, the history of disability, and the use of material culture. Dr. Ott has worked at the museum for over twenty years and collected a range of artifacts, from artificial skin and assistive devices to hypodermic syringes, veterinary instruments, and acupuncture needles.

Lilla Vekerdy has been the head of the Special Collections Department at the Smithsonian Libraries and Archives since 2008, where she oversees rare materials in 16 library research centers, and also serves as the curator of Physical Sciences Rare Books. She earned master's degrees in Literature & Linguistics as well as in Library Sciences in Budapest, Hungary in 1984, and completed her doctoral coursework in Medieval and Renaissance History at Saint Louis University in St. Louis, Missouri in 2005. Her research interest and publications are in the history of science and medicine, as well as in rare book and manuscript studies, and often cover the overlay of both realms.

Questions? Contact Nanna Katrine Lüders Kaalund, nanna.kaalund@sund.ku.dk