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Inheriting the Pacific:
Can Art History Think an Ocean?

The Pacific Ocean: frontier, boundary, haven, threat, lure. Across the early modern period, as colonial projects took root in the Americas and Asia, the Pacific became integral to global trade in art and commodities. Yet this geography was more than a site of transit. The Pacific fostered new habits of thinking about the limits of knowledge, cultural differences, and the alienability of objects, people, and their land. How this ocean once mattered—to those who called the ocean home or foreigners passing through—is not the reason it matters today. Or is it? With this question as anchor, this talk considers the ways colonial histories of the Pacific remain bound to current thinking about art and its global geographies.