Idols in America: Art and Iconoclasm in Late Colonial New York

In the decade prior to the American Revolution, New Yorkers raised a half-dozen public monuments celebrating their political liberties and honoring two architects of Britain’s eighteenth-century empire: King George III and William Pitt the Elder. In 1776-1777, all of these monuments came violently crashing down in acts of political iconoclasm.

This lecture explores the English discourses of idols and idolatry that informed these rituals of monument-making and monument-razing in late colonial New York – and suggests how notions of aesthetic enchantment continue to shape the material afterlife of iconoclasm.