

The Golden Calf in America

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Golden idols are the image of América in the sixteenth-century. And gold from América financed the religious wars of Europe. This paper will investigate the relationship between monotheism, idolatry and greed as it plays out in the Conquest of the Americas. And, it will center on place of gold as a material substance that is at once valued as the highest expression of the divine and the most base form of a universal equivalent. More importantly, gold can be transformed from state to another, just as transubstantiation can move bread into body of Christ. It is by linking these different forms of value with the artistic expression of the sacred that one can begin to recognize the fundamental contradictions that comprise the foundations of colonial religious art.