

“Stilled Lives, Still Lives: Reformation Memorial Focus”
James Simpson, Harvard University

This talk begins with aesthetic questions posed to the painting by Pieter Saenredam of the interior of the church of St Bavo in Haarlem, painted in 1628: how do we account for the painting’s stillness? I address that aesthetic question by looking to the ways in which Reformation theology remembers by unremembering: scriptural events are one off events, without real and ongoing presence; in order to remember them, evangelicals need to approach their unique, receding moment. This concerted act of memory requires an aggressive campaign of unremembrance, stripping away the tradition that might bring the scriptural moment improperly into the present. From that theological understanding, I return first to painting, and to the development of the genre of the still life image, and finally to our own still life historiography of the Reformation.