

## **Panel 17**

### **The Visual, Sculptural and Material**

#### **The Artist as Political Thinker:**

#### **Paul Gauguin on Subverting Noble Savagery**

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How might artists contribute to our understanding of the history of political ideas? To what extent are paintings novel expressions of political thought that can be explained in their own context? And how might they add to the literature on imperialism and anti-imperialism in Western political thought, and more specifically the non-European ‘savage’? The article examines these questions by situating Paul Gauguin within a tradition of noble savage thinkers, drawing out a conversation between Gauguin and Denis Diderot. Gauguin’s political thinking took visual forms that moved and persuaded in ways texts alone could not, subverting the epistemic standing of noble savagery in three key respects: by questioning European standards of heterosexual normativity, finding anti-imperialist promise in cultural hybridity, and indicating a path Europeans might take to become ‘noble savages.’ The article demonstrates how political theory can and should broaden its source material beyond conventional thinkers to artists and artworks.

#### **Biography**

Martina Zago is a PhD candidate in Political Science at The University of British Columbia. Her research interests are in political aesthetics and the history of international political thought, with a focus on empire and anti-colonial thought.