Before the late sixteenth century, the churches of Florence were internally divided by monumental screens that separated the laity in the nave from the clergy in the choir precinct. Enabling both separation and mediation, these screens were impressive artistic structures that controlled social interactions, facilitated liturgical performances, and variably framed or obscured religious ritual and imagery. In the 1560s and 1570s, screens were routinely destroyed in a period of religious reforms, irreversibly transforming the function, meaning, and spatial dynamics of the church interior. In this presentation, Joanne Allen explores the widespread presence of screens and their role in Florentine social and religious life prior to the Counter-Reformation.

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