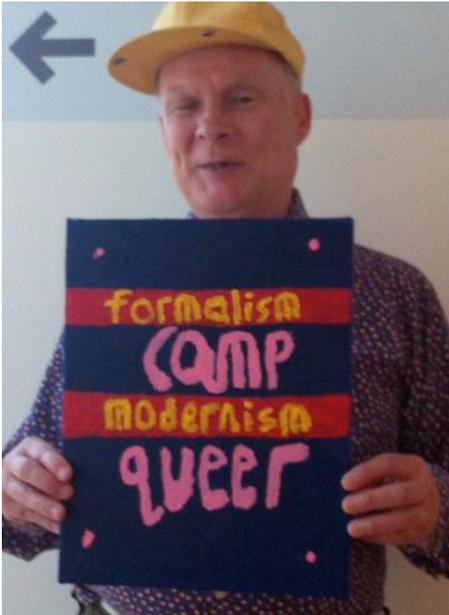


Formalism Camp Modernism Queer



Good evening. Please allow me to introduce myself.

I am a queer artist who loves modernism. Repeat: I am a queer artist who loves modernism.

Does that strike you as oxymoronic? Maybe yes? Maybe no?

Please allow me to posit an equation.

Formalism is camp.

Repeat, formalism is camp.

Now, how could that be possible?

Isn't camp all about surface and the superficial? Isn't camp all about style, and against interpretation?

Isn't formalism all about interpretation? Isn't formalism dreadfully earnest, and all about the essence of the thing and so on? Doesn't formalism have a puritanical distaste for excess? Yes, but formalism is excess. It is not natural: it is anti-natural. Formalism is an affectation. Look at formalism's cousin minimalism. Michael Fried was quite right when he complained that minimalism is theatrical. Minimalism is theatrical. It is a performative intervention against neutral space - the white cube.

Let's talk about colour field painting. Now, colour field painting is where high or fine art meets decorative art. That fascination with pure colour - purity of colour - such intensive layering - this is the vocabulary of not only interior decorators. Granted, it would be wonderful if colour field painters were to expand their palettes - include colours such as Canary Yellow or Lime Green or Flaming Pink; but I guess one can't have everything. Or... maybe one can. One of the most sublime viewing experiences of my life was right in this very gallery - the AGO. I was looking at a Rothko painting - I can't

remember the title do Rothko paintings even have titles? This painting combined a sort of custard yellow - not canary yellow or banana yellow - with an orange becoming tinged with brown as orange tends to become when it moves away from brightness. Now, brown is not one of my favourite colours, brown is a dull, functional colour, while I love orange. But this brown-tinged orange set off the yellow so perfectly that I could stare at this painting forever. Time stood still - a guard had to ask me to leave. It was not unlike anonymous sex that lasts forever - in a dark space where you don't know the other people and you don't want to know the other people or any distracting details and you want it to never stop. It is, dare I say, a mystical experience, and back to mysticism later.

The philosopher D.M. Winnicott opined that artists oscillate wildly between needing to proclaim, be seen and declarative; and needing to hide - be covert or anonymous. I know what he means here - the hidden or anonymous certainly does not refer to any closet but to the need for the artist to get out of their own work. Sure the artist - the intellect - has the idea and sets the work in motion but during the making or execution has to let go, get out of the way. The form itself begins to dictate the next move, the next colour, the next edit. It is parallel to automatic writing or automatic painting or automatic editing. It is an out of body experience. It is mystical.

And, in the words of a musical philosopher The Artist formerly known as The Artist, mystics love to come.

MYSTICS LUV 2 CUM!