

## **GAUNT Pamela (Aus)**

### ***The (E)Merging Of The Decorative In Contemporary Art - paper***

With the sedimentation of certain Modernist trajectories the decorative was excluded as a meaningless, superficial, unintelligent form that signified wealth and excess until its return in Postmodernism. Or was it a return? Some theorists argue that the 'stowaway' decorative always remained disguised at the centre of Modernism in a secret subversive form. The accommodatory nature or *deviance* of the decorative has perhaps enabled it to have a flirtatious relationship with twentieth century Modernism more than most conservative fine artists and theorists would like to think. This paper examines the decorative as a flexible entity that is able to shift between margin (parergon) and centre (ergon). It argues that it is this migratory aspect of the decorative that has made it difficult to define and allowed its continued survival and revival over the many decades of Modernism's exclusive trajectory. In fact it is often between these two spaces of margin and centre that meaning is generated. And it is why Modernism's binary positioning of the decorative as supplementary (lacking meaning) could be sustained for several decades. This is despite a part of Modernism - abstract art – having its genesis in the decorative.

This paper traces the decorative's historical role in a twentieth century Euro-American paradigm through an analysis of modernist and postmodernist attitudes and reflects on the position of decoration within a globalised postmodern culture. It examines the decorative as parerga from a Derridean perspective and dismisses Kantian notions of aesthetics that maintain that the decorative can only be legitimised by rejecting the sensual appeal of its materiality and the privileging formal concerns. In addition, the decorative is examined as a potentially significant agent for the expression of meaningful cultural, social and political concerns in contemporary art practice.

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