

Brendan Dwyer, 2018

https://maywarble.com.au/blog/post/black-paintings.html?fbclid=IwAR11tLc7mnatG_GD_Ddwq1ymL5X58GmJ21rXCyZHiSR25mkZfBBISlsgqDA

Sanné Mestrom's *Black Paintings*, 2014 – exhibited at McClelland Sculpture Park and Gallery in 2018 – were great to experience and worked on manifold levels, referring to Frank Stella's nexus between Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism. Maestro and stellar, both.

Not repudiating the aforementioned cultural inheritance but sublating it¹ (whilst critiquing Clement Greenberg's painting-as-surface theory that underpins it²), the artist highlights that painting always exists in relation to its media counterparts, sculpture and installation (even "life itself"³), while evoking particular textile works⁴ and reiterating the medium's "inherently political nature"⁵.

Modernism is an experimental use of forms of the past to create something new, an allegory of utopic construction. Mestrom's work introduces a science fiction element, suggesting the possibility of a florescence with yesterday's lost values (e.g. feminism was yet to occur), affecting the space-time continuum, not by pretending Stella did not himself build upon his own work, but by accentuating minimal histories such as the welded constructions of David Smith, with a bit of the predominantly female post-Minimalists, all the while contradicting Greenberg by keeping Cubism, Constructivism and De Stijl within the frame (so to speak), then allowing a contemporary audience to experience this duration-writ-large in tension with the phenomenological reading. Or maybe it is just the logic of becoming? As well as the feminist utopia of equality it appears to strive for, there are other teleological currents such as increasing bridging capital as the fragmented-but-porous works suggest, as when your gaze melds with a stranger through Fontana's cut, the romance of the library, desiring others through book-shelf gaps. This is Modernism.

If we take the title "Black Paintings" as more than mere indexical relation to Stella, that is, literally, this widens the scope of the work rather profoundly. Rather than real objects, they would appear to be entering the imaginary realm. Just as paint on canvas traditionally covers up its surface, there is always an imaginary component, these works invert the schema. They show what is traditionally hidden, leaving the "actual" paint in the mythical realm. We dream in monochrome. Post-modernism imbricated within Modernism.

Stella's black paintings were self-reflexive but not pure. Titles reflect subjects such as fascism⁶. Mestrom's in some sense are more pure, but subject matter cannot be totally expunged. Even V's and U's, are synecdoche. It is ironic that reification can lead to its opposite: apotheosis. These echoing diamonds resemble less zebras than owls. Doubly ironic that by eschewing fascism the subject matter is redolent of the symbol for The Illuminati. As the artistic

intention is unknown this is a Foucauldian reading. Why this is interesting is that Communism and Fascism are said to be “fingers on the same hand”, supposedly both controlled by the Illuminati above⁷. Hitler, Stalin, Churchill, members of secret societies, quite possibly the same ones. Perhaps rather than trying to fight the Americans and Communists, a better strategy for Hitler would’ve been to let them fight each other, and usurp them amidst the rubble⁸. This Möbian reading doubles back on the critical fight for souls⁹, of which The Illuminati are supposedly well-informed.

It was interesting that the structures were free-standing, allowing the viewer to see the “front” as well as the “back”, nullifying the distinction. Perhaps this is the point of the artist, that hierarchies can easily be subverted. There is a law of development that societies have all progressed from matriarchy to patriarchy but never the reverse¹⁰. We must not forget that this is a pattern rather than a law and refers to documented societies only: no doubt at some point in time this was true, even if that point is in the imaginary axis of the future.

1 Kaprow, A (1958) – “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock”, ArtNews

2 Greenberg, C (1960) – “Modernist Painting”, The Collected Essays and Criticism Volume 4

3 Kaprow, A (1958) – *ibid.*

4 Manzoni, P (1962) – Achrome, fibreglass on board

5 Butchart, A (2018) – “The Artificial Divide between Fine Art and Textiles is a Gendered Issue”, Frieze, <https://frieze.com/article/artificial-divide-between-fine-art-and-textiles-gendered-issue>

6 Foster, H et al (2004) – Art Since 1900: Modernism, Anti-modernism, Post-modernism

7 Springmeier, F (1997) – [Bloodlines of the Illuminati](#)

8 Robinson, P.A. (2002) – [The Sum of All Fears](#) (film)

9 Foster, H et al (2004) – *op. cit.*, quote by Michael Fried: “Carl Andre and I were fighting for his soul”

10 Fox, R (2011) – [The Tribal Imagination: Civilisation and the Savage Mind](#)