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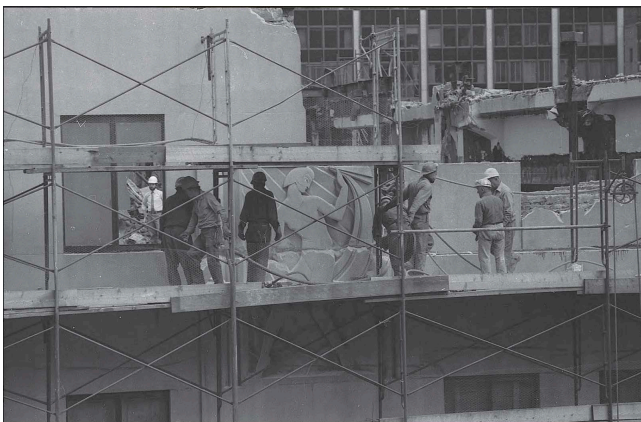
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Emma McMillan

Ornament and Crime

March 4th - April 1st, 2018

Opening reception: Sunday March 4th, 6 - 8 pm



We have outgrown ornament. We have fought our way through to freedom from ornament.

- Adolph Loos, "Ornament and Crime" (1908)

Adolph Loos's purist manifesto linking ornamentation with crime has special relevance for the age of Trump. It's not just that the machismo modernism of Trump Tower involved the destruction of the old Bonwit Teller building, with its ornate art deco doorway and limestone panels, but that such destruction portended so much more than anyone could possibly have foreseen when it happened, back in 1979. Ten years later, having fought his way through ornament, Trump turned his purist eye to the Central Park Five and took out that full-page ad in the Daily News pleading for protection "from those who would prey on innocent lives to fulfill some distorted inner need." Theories abound about what distorted inner need drives Trump to destroy so many innocent lives today, and "aversion to ornament" is probably not one you hear so much about. And even though there are plenty of art deco buildings in Queens, the association of the art deco style with old-money Manhattan aristocracy is fairly strong. Strong enough to make a crass, nouveau-riche, nouveau-racist daddy's boy from Queens knock down a landmark Manhattan building? Hard to say. That's because it's hard to see inside Trump, just as it's hard to see inside Trump Tower. Black glass means something, in this case, unless Trump himself lets us-or the cameras-in, whereupon we are treated to a vision of faux-Versailles extravagance somewhere between Louis XIV and Victor Yanukovych. This over-the-top Las Vegas hotel lobby style that Peter York has usefully dubbed "Dictator Chic" shows that Trump is not averse to ornamentation after all; or, rather, he is only averse to ornamentation when it is restrained, stylish, and tasteful-like art deco. Art deco emerged, in part, as a clean counter to the more involved style of art nouveau, with its fin-de-siècle associations of decadence. Art deco was not *décadent*; it was *moderne*, but, even so, it was not pure enough for the likes of Loos. Evidently, it was too pure for the likes of Trump, or, again, too stylish, too tasteful. Knock it down, build a towering black ziggurat in its place, and then pack a matchbox palace inside and call it home. You cannot, of course, go inside the Bonwit Teller building today, but if you go inside any other art deco building in New York, what do you see? More art deco. The style is consistent, inside and out: the exterior harmonizes with the interior. Not so Trump Tower: the shiny, modernist outside is clean and free of both ornamentation and crime. But as we know because Trump wants us to, if we go inside the gleaming black tower we encounter that incongruous Louis Quatorze interior-a level of baroque ornamentation so extravagant as to seem criminal. Almost certainly, it is. Trump helps us to understand the connection between crime and ornament, and, more important, to understand that the alternative to ornament, as Loos says, might very well be freedom.

-David Weir

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Emma McMillan

Emma McMillan
Born Atlanta, Georgia. 1989
Lives and works New York City

Education

Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, School of Art.
2012

Selected Exhibitions

2017

Dollhouse of a Poem. Praterstrasse 32/308. Viei.1na, Austria.
June. Organized by Christopher Viaggio. Rockaway Park, New York. Live
Burial, Bad Reputation. Los Angeles .California.

2016

No Hope, No Fear. Istituto Svizzero di Roma, Rome Italy.
Skin of a Drum. Taylor Macklin, Zurich Switzerland.
Under the Volcano, LOMEX, New York, New York.
Hard Times, What? Alyssa Davis Gallery.

2015

Mental Christmas, 10-01 44th Rd., Long Island City, New York, New
York.

Permanent Collection

Museum fur Moderner Kunst. Vienna, Austria.
Albertina Museum. Colby, Maine. on behalf of Alex Katz Foundation.