



Pretty: Film and the Decorative Image (Film and Culture Series)

Rosalind Galt

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Film culture often rejects visually rich images, valuing simplicity, austerity, or even ugliness as more provocative, political, and truly cinematic. Although cinema challenges traditional ideas of art, this opposition to the decorative continues a long-standing aesthetic antipathy to feminine cosmetics, Oriental effeminacy, and primitive ornament. Inheriting this patriarchal and colonial perspective along with the preference for fine over decorative art, filmmakers, critics, and theorists tend to denigrate cinema's colorful, picturesque, and richly patterned visions.

Condemning this exclusion of the "pretty" from masculine film culture, Rosalind Galt reevaluates received ideas about the decorative impulse from early film criticism to classical and postclassical film theory. The pretty embodies lush visuality, dense mise-en-scène, painterly framing, and arabesque camera movements—styles increasingly central to world cinema. From European art house cinema to the films of Wong Kar-wai and Santosh Sivan, from handmade experimental films to the popular pleasures of *Moulin Rouge!* and *Amelie*, pretty is a vital element of contemporary cinema, using visual exuberance to communicate distinct sexual and political identities. Inverting the logic of anti-pretty thought, Galt firmly establishes the decorative image as a queer aesthetic, a singular representation of cinema's perverse pleasures and cross-cultural encounters. Creating her own critical tapestry from perspectives in art and film theory and philosophy, Galt reclaims prettiness as a radically transgressive style, woven with the threads of political agency.

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