

Quodlibet

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The idea of the neutron bomb, as I understood it, was that it killed the people and left the buildings intact. In my imagination – it’s a long time ago – the neutron bomb achieved its cruel ends in a very tidy way. The people, and presumably their animal and vegetable companions, were simply vaporised, leaving perhaps a little silvery dust, but no more. It was instant and painless. But I may have made this up; I liked the idea of the neutron bomb because I’m keen on architecture.

All sorts of inorganic things – ‘crafted’ or industrially made, appeal to me hugely. And I like arrangements of them, intentional or artless, where they can score off each other and the whole is much more than the sum of the parts.

Mainstream, modish taste in interiors is equivocal on all this. We are coming out of a period when the key orthodoxy was a sort of Post Post-Modernist revival of modernist influenced popular things (the Eames, ‘Mid-Century Modern’, etc.) all of them relatively evolved and charmingly corrupted. But along with that went an – understandable – rejection of the degraded revivals of 1980s taste and a war against clutter, against bits, collections, tchokes and all the rest of it.

David Hicks’ wonderful 1960s invention ‘tablescapes’ – collections of smart objects on the tops of side tables – are profoundly **wrong** in this world-view, as is trompe-l’oeil and decorative painting generally.

I came late to quodlibets thinking, but it comes naturally to me; the idea of acknowledging collections of inorganic stuff on flat surfaces and then rendering them, even celebrating them, in the perfect flatness of the picture plane.

It’s with this engaging thought in mind that I present below some potential quodlibets, starting with what’s immediately in front of me as I write. The things that cluster

round the black Angle-poise and the black Tizio lamp (I have two, they remind me of my friends' earlier enthusiasms) on my work table (made from two 90s Conran shop table bases in the splayed leg Expo style with their glass tops replaced by plain white-painted wood). There are two small black marble half spherical bowls (ie. together making one little sphere with flattened ends), like small mortars. There's a small Deco-looking clock of recent manufacture' as they say in auction catalogues. It's a rectangular brick of grainy black-stained wood with a diamond shaped chromium clock face set within it. But Quartz.

There's a tiny picture of our friend James Le Bon, stalwart of the Buffalo set, taken by my friend Angel Bacon. James died about 3 years ago, and all Blitz world was at his funeral. There is my see-through calculator, a lovely present, in red plastic with a spring-loaded cover that sets it at a useful angle. Then there's one of those Victorian heavy glass stem-holders, a thing that once sat unseen at the bottom of a vase holding a pompous flower arrangement in place but does brilliant service now holding pens and pencils (I would like another).

Then there are a number of very utilitarian miniature wire basket things – from Ikea, I think, holding scissors, Magic Markers and a magnifying glass. There's a small vaguely Thirties-looking polished aluminium box with canted sides, whose top says 'clips', and that's what it's for.

(A friend who made reproduction Victorian, Edwardian and between-wars things in India said that it was easy to do and often very convincing because the old Birmingham materials and methods of fabrication still existed. There was convincing-looking early brass with the right fixings and finishes. It just came naturally.) There's also a paper-weight, a stone painted as a fish with big red lips in a naive manner.

Other quodlibet-ish things have transferred to a battered Regency pedestal 'breakfast' table to my left. They include:

- Four Gents Relish pots showing fish, two game birds and a 19th Century illustrator’s country street scene (Gentlemen’s Relish pot editions include various William Nicholson favourites, I had two of them, but gave them to a friend who lives in Nicholson’s former house in the country).
- A glass cabinet containing very mangy – once colourful – small stuffed birds – eight in all – clinging to a sort of branch affair. Are they past repair?
- There’s a variety of other small boxes, one made I think from alabaster and carved in a sort of David Hicks-ish Asian Geometric way, a flattened oval brass box, which could either be Early English – I think it really is – or clever Indian. It has a battered uneven surface and little compartments inside.
- Then there’s a small plastic novelty clock with a pediment, given me by a friend, it has an alarm with soothing words from Stephen Fry.
- There are four pairs of candlesticks – three modest Victorian ones, the other plainer, more modern.
- Plus a ‘real’ Roberts radio (it belonged to my aunt) in ‘teak’ finish from the early 70s
- And a collection of small pictures wanting employment, stacked up flat. The first two are 19th Century steel engravings of dogs. They’re cut-out book plates. ‘Our Two Puppies’ and ‘Such a Clever Little Dog’. The others are modest prints – Regency Brighton, the re-building of St. Paul’s and Charterhouse Square.

There are two extra-nice things on this table, a copy of ‘Our Special Summer’ written and illustrated by Jacqueline and Lee Bouvier in the 1950s, to celebrate their European holiday and beautifully produced as a book in 1974. And then there’s a lovely dark blue and white ‘art-pottery’ beaker, made by some latter-day Bernard Leach for my aunt. I’d love to know who.

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