



Tracee Ellis Ross's Met Gala outfit drew comparisons to a public art piece by Lorraine O'Grady.

Wallace Ludel May 7, 2019



Tracee Ellis Ross at the 2019 Met Gala. Photo by Kevin Mazur/MG19/ Getty Images for The Met Museum/Vogue.

Susan Sontag's 1964 essay "Notes on 'Camp'" was the apt (though somewhat heady) theme for last night's Metropolitan Museum of Art Costume Institute gala, a.k.a. the Met Gala. Sontag's essay opens as follows:

Many things in the world have not been named; and many things, even if they have been named, have never been described. One of these is the sensibility – unmistakably modern, a variant of sophistication but hardly identical with it – that goes by the cult name of "Camp."

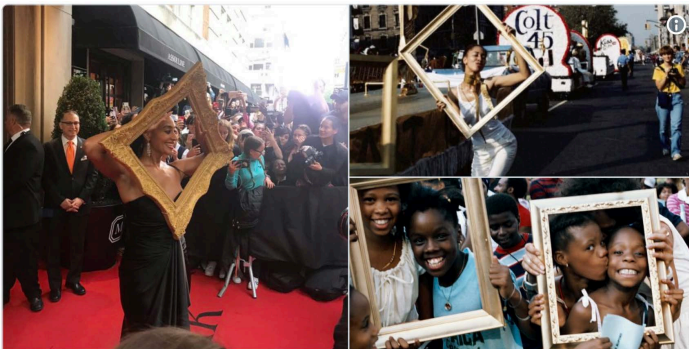
A sensibility (as distinct from an idea) is one of the hardest things to talk about; but there are special reasons why Camp, in particular, has never been discussed. It is not a natural mode of sensibility, if there be any such. Indeed the essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration. And Camp is esoteric – something of a private code, a badge of identity even, among small urban cliques. [. . .] To talk about Camp is therefore to betray it. [. . .] I am strongly drawn to Camp, and almost as strongly offended by it.



Lorraine O'Grady, Art Is. . . (Dancer in Grass Skirt), 1983/2009 Alexander Gray Associates

Later in the essay, Sontag goes on to list “random examples” from the “canon of Camp” which includes Tiffany lamps, *Swan Lake*, *King Kong*, the tabloid *The Enquirer*, and much more. A December 1964 issue of *Time* magazine included an explainer, saying that: “In art, Camp’s exaggeration must proceed from passion and naiveté.”

It's no surprise an essay relishing in this affinity for "artifice and exaggeration" would make a splendid Met Gala theme. (In the venn diagram of camp and kitsch, there is a wide middle-ground, though as Sontag put it, "Camp taste nourishes itself on the love that has gone into certain objects and personal styles. The absence of this love is the reason why [certain kitsch items] aren't Camp.") Such Camp feats at Monday night's gala included Billy Porter's golden, winged outfit and Kacey Musgraves's transformation into a life-size Barbie, but it was Tracee Ellis Ross's outfit that seemed to most directly reference the fine art aspect of campiness.



 **Shelby Ivey Christie** ✓
@bronze_bombSHEL 

So cultural nuance of [@TraceeEllisRoss](#)' look - People used to show up to the African American Day parade in Harlem with frames around their faces! Lorraine O'Grady's 'Art Is' movement.

Centering blackness as beauty. Reclaiming the narrative.
BLACK CAMP! [#MetCamp](#)

♥ 26.8K 8:13 PM - May 6, 2019

 8,844 people are talking about this 

Ross's outfit consisted of a (contextually) understated black Moschino dress with a gold frame attached surrounding the actress' face. Comparisons were quickly made between Ross's outfit and the artist Lorraine O'Grady's seminal 1983 performance *Art Is . . .*, in which O'Grady brought gold frames to an African-American Day Parade in Harlem and prompted performers and parade-goers to pose within them. Ross's look was put together by stylist Karla Welch, who told *InStyle*: "We went camp in a really kind of cerebral, nuanced way . . . It's how we make ourselves art.