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Iconisation at work: Malevich's Black Square, the modern icon at Tate Modern

The exhibition *Malevich* at Tate Modern in London (July 16 - October 26, 2014, curated by Achim Borchardt-Hume) is analysed in an attempt to discern how Kazimir Malevich's artistic trajectory was presented as "groundbreaking, iconic, innovative" and his painting *Black Square* (1915) was emphasised as "an icon for a modern age." It is pointed out what was underlined and what was understated at the exhibition; how Malevich's work was de-contextualised, exempted from the context of the eventful Russian avant-garde, and re-contextualised into the neater development of Western modernist painting. The use of vocabulary pertaining to the images of a holy person is shown to be congruent with the modernist history of modern art, and the question is raised how come Malevich and not, for example, his rival Vladimir Tatlin, on account of his corner counter-reliefs, should be foregrounded as the hero of the Russian avant-garde, if "radical abstraction" alone is the criteria on the basis of which one is accepted into the pantheon of the icons of modern art.