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# A COMPANION TO AESTHETICS

*Second Edition*



*Edited by*

STEPHEN DAVIES,  
KATHLEEN MARIE HIGGINS,  
ROBERT HOPKINS,  
ROBERT STECKER,  
AND DAVID E. COOPER

 WILEY-BLACKWELL

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# A Companion to Aesthetics

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# Preface

Welcome to the second edition of *A Companion to Aesthetics*. Like the first edition of 1992, it consists primarily of short entries arranged alphabetically with the aim of covering as many topics and perspectives on aesthetics and the philosophy of art as possible. These include issues and authors prominent in both Anglo-American and Continental traditions and in both Western and non-Western thought about art. The goal is to provide an entrée to whatever issue in this increasingly vibrant field of inquiry a scholar, student, or layperson might desire to explore.

There is also much that is new to this edition and that provides a more systematic understanding of the discipline. Most prominently, there are six overview essays tracing the origins of art in the Paleolithic period and the history of aesthetics in the West from ancient times to the present day. There is also a greatly expanded group of essays on non-Western thought about art including new essays on African, Amerindian, Chinese, Islamic, and Japanese aesthetics as well as an essay on the concept of *rasa*, crucial in Indo-Asian aesthetics. The first edition contained no essays on individual art forms, which is remedied here by 11 new ones. Also new is a table of contents listing all 185 essays so that readers can see at glance what is on offer in this volume and better navigate it.

We have also expanded the list of short entries to reflect recent developments in aesthetics. One of these developments has perhaps shaped this volume more than any other. This is a debate between those who believe that the concept of art is peculiarly Western and relatively recent in origin, arising in the eighteenth century, and those who think that it is found in almost every culture, is ancient in origin, and derives from practices directly tied to human evolution. As well as motivating a new entry on evolutionary aesthetics, the suspicion that the second of these views is more likely true provides one rationale for the scope of the overview essays and the decision to give considerable coverage to non-Western aesthetics. Some proponents of the first view find support for it in the anthropology and sociology of art, while some proponents of the second view appeal to evolutionary psychology. This debate is symptomatic of a wider development in aesthetics, *viz.*, the importation into aesthetics of ideas from the sciences, especially from evolutionary theory, anthropology, psychology, and cognitive studies. This reflects a trend in philosophy generally to take a greater interest in developments in the empirical sciences and to see philosophy as continuous with those disciplines.

A related development since the 1990s is the interaction between aesthetics and other areas of philosophy, including ethics, metaphysics, and the philosophy of mind and language. In part because of this interaction, there have been several “growth areas” in the discipline over the last 20 years, including the ontology of art, the multifaceted role of emotion in art, the role of pretense and make-believe in art, the interaction of ethics and aesthetics, feminist perspectives on art and the role of race and gender in art, environmental and everyday aesthetics, the nature of pictorial representation, and the nature of literary interpretation. There has

## PREFACE

also been a burst of new work on certain art forms, especially music and cinema. Many new entries analyze these developments.

Finally, we should mention that nearly every entry in the second edition is new in some way. Many of those carried over from the first edition have been revised and the rest have been updated to reflect new work done since their original appearance.

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# Historical Overviews

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**art of the Paleolithic** In 1789 John Frere, a Suffolk landowner, wrote to the Society of Antiquities describing stone implements discovered in a quarry at Hoxne. He did not draw attention to their appearance, focusing presciently on the vast age suggested by their position under a layer of sand and sea shells, and below the fossil remains of a large, unknown animal. They came, he surmised, from “a very remote period indeed, even beyond that of the present world” (Frere 1800). These objects are now known as Acheulean hand axes: tools made, in this case around 400,000 years ago (400k BP). Among them is a piece of worked stone, shaped as an elongated tear drop, roughly symmetrical in two dimensions, with a twist to the symmetry which has retained an embedded fossil. In size and shape it would not have been a useful butchery implement, and is worked on to a degree out of proportion to any likely use. While it may be too much to call it an “early work of art,” it is at least suggestive of an aesthetic sensibility.

The origin of art is generally dated later than this: 360,000 years later. While prehistory is defined simply as that period of human habitation of a place for which there is no written record, studies of prehistoric art have tended to focus on the Upper Paleolithic, that period in European prehistory associated with the entry, around 40k BP, of *Homo sapiens*. The period ends with the Magdalenian culture of 18–10k BP that gave us the cave paintings of northern Spain and southern France. These extraordinary and mysteriously situated products of ice age Europe have generated vast art-historical speculation and are popularly represented as marking the dawn of art.

Later we will look back into the more distant past – as well as giving a brief sideways glance at Neanderthal neighbors – to examine the evidence for aesthetic production in the African

Middle Stone Age, and then at stone artifacts as old as 1 million years before the present. Before doing so I will highlight two issues important for an understanding of the origin of artistic activity, and provide a brief account of human evolution.

## BIOLOGY AND CULTURE

There are different kinds of explanations to hand for the innovations we find associated with the growth of art. One view has it that the dramatic changes to artistic and other practices we find in the Upper Paleolithic mark a development in human cognitive capacities consequent on biological change (Klein 2000). Another seeks the explanation in the nonbiological sphere, emphasizing, say, the relationship between increasing group size and such variables as efficiency of innovation or the growth in quantity and quality of children’s pretend play, considered as a training ground for innovative activity. But the simple dichotomy between cognitive and cultural change breaks down if we accept that human cognition is itself partly a function of the environment in which the individual operates; on this view, the functional architecture of mind can change without change in the underlying biology. Michael Tomasello (1999) has argued that the biological difference between a baby human and a baby chimp is small, and that what makes for most of the eventual difference in cognitive power is that the human child is heir to a massive fortune in retained cultural innovation made possible by human tendencies to imitate one another. (Other researchers have recently suggested that chimps have more imitative ability than previously thought, however.) Further, cultural change may itself alter the distribution of genes in a population, as has been the case with increased lactose tolerance among cattle herders. One form that this change