



The Artful Species: Aesthetics, Art, and Evolution

Stephen Davies

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The Artful Species explores the idea that our aesthetic responses and art behaviors are connected to our evolved human nature. Our humanoid forerunners displayed aesthetic sensibilities hundreds of thousands of years ago and the art standing of prehistoric cave paintings is virtually uncontested. In Part One, Stephen Davies analyses the key concepts of the aesthetic, art, and evolution, and explores how they might be related. He considers a range of issues, including whether animals have aesthetic tastes and whether art is not only universal but cross-culturally comprehensible. Part Two examines the many aesthetic interests humans take in animals and how these reflect our biological interests, and the idea that our environmental and landscape preferences are rooted in the experiences of our distant ancestors. In considering the controversial subject of human beauty, evolutionary psychologists have traditionally focused on female physical attractiveness in the context of mate selection, but Davies presents a broader view which decouples human beauty from mate choice and explains why it goes more with social performance and self-presentation. Part Three asks if the arts, together or singly, are biological adaptations, incidental byproducts of nonart adaptations, or so removed from biology that they rate as purely cultural technologies. Davies does not conclusively support any one of the many positions considered here, but argues that there are grounds, nevertheless, for seeing art as part of human nature. Art serves as a powerful and complex signal of human fitness, and so cannot be incidental to biology. Indeed, aesthetic responses and art behaviors are the touchstones of our humanity.

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