

## SOME THOUGHTS ON 'BEAUTY'

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'Beauty' is a description of a characteristic or feature we attribute to an object or situation. It is not an attribute of an object or situation itself - like weight or size. The identification of beauty describes our emotional response of wonder or delight to perceptions through our senses of sight, hearing, smell and/or touch. It is a personal response that may, perhaps, be shared with others.

The emotional response to 'beauty' is a feeling of harmony in and between our sense perceptions – perhaps enhanced by related memories. Beauty is a feeling of balance and counterbalance. This applies with sight for two or three dimensional objects – and for variations of these with time. In the visual arts beauty involves a simplicity of line, surface or form providing a directness of communication to the observer. This can apply within painting, drawing and sculpture as well as in music, photography, cinema, exhibition displays, architecture, interior decoration and furniture. It can apply to individually made as well as manufactured items. It can apply at first encounter and may be repeated at further encounters. It is not a matter of 'the simpler the better' - but simplicity can help the appreciation of beauty by the avoidance of irrelevant clutter and distracting information.

Beauty is not a requirement in art. Art covers a wider range of responses than just that for beauty. Art may be needed to create beauty – but beauty is not necessarily art.

Beauty in nature (wild or modified by human activity) and the beauty of individuals includes the above, but is also influenced by emotional relationships. This may involve memories of past experiences and the influence of contemporary culture.

The mechanics of assessment of beauty for commonly experienced objects probably depends on comparison of our immediate perception of an object or situation to some generalised average for that class of object – whether it is say a Georgian house, a landscape, a human body (clothed or unclothed) or a human face. The perception may be close to that average or give pleasure by interesting, or surprising, differences. The attribution of physical beauty to the human body or face has a relationship to expected good suitability for procreation. We have in our society an average image of the attributes of a good 'mate' – body and facial proportions, freedom from defects, etc. We expect, for example, very near symmetry between the right and left sides of the body and of the face. Exact symmetry is not required – that would not be interesting and would lack individual identity! The 'beauty' of humans also includes how they move and react – for example how they smile, how they sound. It is a total package. Beauty in the arrangement of 'things' however may benefit from non-symmetry – because symmetry (or coincidence of alignment) raises the question 'why?' is this so.

Beauty may be constructed or found. In constructed or created items there can be an admiration for the skill or workmanship, the craft, involved as well as in the finished forms. The feeling of beauty in 'found' objects may involve reference to personal or emotional history. Thus the basis for our judgement of beauty is personal and may well change during our lifetime.

There are some parallels between the appreciation of beauty and love – but love is surely a more comprehensive emotional reaction.

