



## The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art (The Paul Carus Lectures Series 21)

By Arthur C. Danto

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Danto simply and entertainingly traces the evolution of the concept of beauty over the past century and explores how it was removed from the definition of art. Beauty then came to be regarded as a serious aesthetic crime, whereas a hundred years ago it was almost unanimously considered the supreme purpose of art. Beauty is not, and should not be, the be-all and end-all of art, but it has an important place, and is not something to be avoided.

Danto draws eruditely upon the thoughts of artists and critics such as Rimbaud, Fry, Matisse, the Dadaists, Duchamp, and Greenberg, as well as on that of philosophers like Hume, Kant, and Hegel. Danto agrees with the dethroning of beauty as the essence of art, and maintains with telling examples that most art is not, in fact, beautiful. He argues, however, for the partial rehabilitation of beauty and the removal of any critical taboo against beauty. Beauty is one among the many modes through which thoughts are presented to human sensibility in art: disgust, horror, sublimity, and sexuality being among other such modes.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Charting the disappearance of beauty as a primary artistic value in the 20th century, Danto (*The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, etc.) offers a hot-and-cold mix of philosophical musings and autobiographical reflections that attempt to restore a place for beauty as an "option for art" and a "necessary condition for life as we would want to live it." To that end, the veteran art critic and Columbia University philosopher discusses and, at various points, disagrees with Hume, Kant and Hegel, building a view of beauty as one among many modes through which artworks may present thoughts to human sensibility. He distinguishes between natural and artistic beauty, between beauty and sublimity, and between beauty internal to an artwork and external to it. Although Danto clearly defines an artwork as an "embodied meaning," he does not as clearly define what he means by beauty, making much of his discussion unnecessarily vague. It is also unnecessarily meandering, too often feeling like notes from assorted lectures, which is how most of the chapters originated. "Read it as an adventure story," he says, "with a few philosophical arguments and distinctions [brought back] as trophies." But good adventure stories need a strong narrative, and there isn't one here. Still, there are trophies: philosophical insights of genuine value to anyone interested in beauty, art or the connections between the two.

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Review

This is a brave thesis in the context of the analytical tradition in which it is being presented. -- *Philosophy in Review*, July 2005

About the Author

Arthur C. Danto is Johnsonian Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at Columbia University. He is the art critic for *The Nation* and author of more than 20 books.

### Users Review

**From reader reviews:**

**Meagan Shaffer:**

Reading can called head hangout, why? Because when you find yourself reading a book specifically book entitled *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art (The Paul Carus Lectures Series 21)* your thoughts will drift away trough every dimension, wandering in every single aspect that maybe not known for but surely will become your mind friends. Imaging just about every word written in a reserve then become one type conclusion and explanation this maybe you never get just before. The *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art (The Paul Carus Lectures Series 21)* giving you a different experience more than blown away your head but also giving you useful information for your better life on this era. So now let us demonstrate the relaxing pattern is your body and mind will probably be pleased when you are finished studying it, like winning a casino game. Do you want to try this extraordinary paying spare time activity?

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