

**AESTHETICS: A  
CRITICAL  
THEORY OF ART**

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Aesthetics: A Critical Theory of Art by Henry G. Hartman

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**HENRY G. HARTMAN**

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**Aesthetics:**  
**A Critical Theory of Art**

# AESTHETICS:

## A Critical Theory of Art

*By*

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## PREFACE

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To the discriminating individual, what constitute the elements of interest in painting, music, or poetry? This question I shall endeavor to answer in the following book, although I aim less specifically to increase art-appreciation than to correct the methods so long in vogue for determining the substance, origin, and value of art. I insist upon a description of the concrete element of the different arts in order to nullify the usual conception of art as something unitary or generic; for no idea has been more inhibitory in the development of aesthetics as a full-blown science.

Furthermore, in the usual conception of art, the psychological or subjective factors have been forced to the front with such one-sided prominence that the material aspect of the arts with all their rich divergency has been reduced to the background, or, even more commonly, wholly eclipsed. The outcome of this line of thought is false not only to art but to psychology. By enforcing the recognition of certain firmly established psychological and artistic principles, I hope thus further to amend existing art-theories.

It matters not, in a survey of the existing art-theories, whether we examine those originating with the philosopher and the psychologist or those originating with the critics of music, painting, and poetry (the proposed limit of my attention), the conviction deepens that art-theory demands a radically new construction, if for no other purpose than to neutralize the stultifying effect of the existing theories. Anyone

who has attempted to apply the science of aesthetics to art-appreciation, knows whereof I speak.

If the criticisms I offer are valid and the constructions sound, the book should rend the veil long-existing between art-appreciation and its appropriate science; it should serve to regulate research and to clarify criticism; and I hope that it will also serve to increase and vitalize the study of aesthetics in our universities and colleges in their new consecration to culture as opposed to "Kultur."

I have attempted to bring the varied aspects of art under one inclusive problem; namely, the formulation of the substance of each of the arts under four general principles—material, conventional, technical, and psychological—in their strict interdependence.

## CHAPTER I

### Beauty and Art

#### I

Beauty may baffle scientific cognition, but its reality remains undisputed. It appears in many avowed and unavowed forms both to civilized and primitive man; and even animals show themselves responsive to its presence. Its refining influence is, also, generally accepted. Responsiveness to beauty is considered not only a mark of culture, but, in the opinion of Emerson and of the Greeks, "beauty is the mark God sets upon virtue." Neither the ubiquity of beauty, then, nor its power and charm, generally awake dispute. It is only when the theorist inquires of *what* beauty consists that we are forced to pause. No phenomenon seems at once more compelling and elusive.

Art, too, exacts a wide acknowledgement of its existence and value. "Take up any newspaper of our times that you please, and you will find in every one a department of the drama, painting, and music. \* \* \* In every large city, huge buildings are constructed for museums, academies, conservatories, dramatic schools for representations, and concerts. Hundreds of thousands of workmen—carpenters, stonemasons, painters, cabinetmakers, paper hangers, tailors, jewelers, bronze-workers, compositors—spend their whole lives in arduous toil in order to satisfy the demand of art; so that there is hardly any other