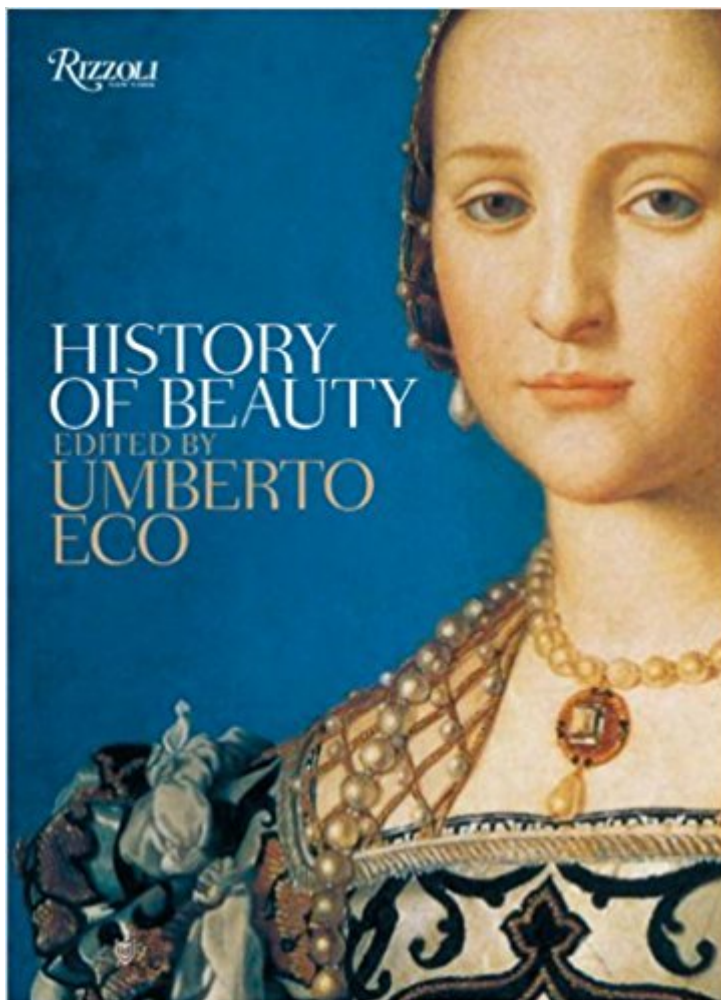




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History Of Beauty



Synopsis

Now in paperback, Umberto Eco's groundbreaking and much-acclaimed first illustrated book has been a critical success since its first publication in 2004. What is beauty? Umberto Eco, among Italy's finest and most important contemporary thinkers, explores the nature, the meaning, and the very history of the idea of beauty in Western culture. The profound and subtle text is lavishly illustrated with abundant examples of sublime painting and sculpture and lengthy quotations from writers and philosophers. This is the first paperback edition of *History of Beauty*, making this intellectual and philosophical journey with one of the world's most acclaimed thinkers available in a more compact and affordable format.

Book Information

Paperback: 440 pages

Publisher: Rizzoli; Reprint edition (September 21, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0847835308

ISBN-13: 978-0847835300

Product Dimensions: 5.9 x 1.1 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.8 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars 39 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #170,980 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #134 in Books > Politics &

Social Sciences > Philosophy > Aesthetics #599 in Books > Arts & Photography > History &

Criticism > Criticism #1150 in Books > Arts & Photography > History & Criticism > History

Customer Reviews

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but it also has a lot to do with the beholder's cultural standards. In *History of Beauty*, renowned author Umberto Eco sets out to demonstrate how every historical era has had its own ideas about eye-appeal. Pages of charts that track archetypes of beauty through the ages ("nude Venus," "nude Adonis," and so forth) may suggest that this book is a historical survey of beautiful people portrayed in art. But *History of Beauty* is really about the history of philosophical and perceptual notions of perfection and how they have been applied to ideas and objects, as well as to the human body. This survey ranges over such themes as the mathematics of ideal proportions, the problem of representing ugliness, the fascination of the exotic and art for art's sake. Along the way, the text examines the intersection of standards of beauty with Christian belief, notions of the Sublime, the philosophies of Kant and Hegel, and bourgeois culture. More than 300

illustrations trace the history of Western art as it relates, in the broadest sense, to the topic of beauty. Yet despite its wealth of information, *History of Beauty* is an odd and unsatisfying book. Beginning with ancient Greece and ending with a too-brief chapter on "The Beauty of the Media," the text focuses exclusively (and unapologetically) on the Western world. Ultimately, it seems that "beauty" serves simply as a sexy peg on which to hang an abbreviated history of Western culture. Readers expecting a sophisticated treatment of the subject will be surprised at the textbook-like design, with numbered sections and boldfaced words keyed to small-type excerpts from writings by thinkers ranging from Boethius to Barthes. The main narrative (or perhaps the translation from the Italian?) can be ponderous and awkward. Only nine of the 17 chapters were written by Eco; the remainder are by lesser-known Italian novelist Girolamo de Michele. All in all, it looks as though someone had the bright idea of translating a textbook for Italian students into English, hoping to coast on the fame of Eco's name. --Cathy Curtis --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This inspired book begins, after a little throat-clearing, with 11 verso-recto "comparative tables" — sets of contact-sheet-like illustrations that trace representations of "Nude Venus" and "Nude Adonis" (clothed sets follow) as well as Madonna, Jesus, "Kings" and "Queens" over thousands of years, revealing with wonderful brevity the scope of the task Eco has set for the book. What follows is a dense, delectable tour through the history of art as it struggled to cope with beauty's many forms. The text, while rigorous in its inquiries, is heavy on abstractions, which get amplified by stiff translation: "In short, the question was how to retable the debate about the Classical antitheses of thought, in order to reelaborate them within the framework of a dynamic relationship." The selections, however, are breathtaking — 300 color illustrations, from Praxiteles to Pollock — and they grant the text the freedom to delve into their complex mysteries. Eco's categories for doing so (e.g., "Poets and Impossible Loves") and his historical breadth in elaborating them are creative and impressive respectively. Long quotations ranging from Plotinus and Petrarch to Xenophon and Zola allow each era to speak for itself, while Eco links them with his own epoch-leaping connections. Seen in terms of a timeless debate on the form and meaning of beauty, masterpieces like Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love* or Cranach's *Venus with Cupid Stealing Honey* seem, if possible, even more immediate, and related to our own amorous profanities and thefts. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A well written and interesting book but you had better have very good eyes. The largest text is about 1/16 inch high but some is even smaller this, both sizes are used throughout the book, (perhaps 12 and 10 point). Not easy to read, especially in the (extensive) sections where its colored light blue. What would have possessed anyone to do this i have no idea, though I am referring to the paper back version, maybe the hard cover is a larger format.

The book receives five stars for the selection of very good color reproduction. The text as many others have pointed out is ponderous. Before buying the book have a look at 's own review of this book. They for instance note that only half of the book is written by Eco. The book is a fairly irreverent description of beauty. The book is really a description of female beauty in the western world through the centuries. I find the pictures and the text elaborating on the pictures interesting. The other part of the text is too tedious for my taste. I am not particularly interested in reading lengthy sections of other people's writing that the author considers important. Eco has also written "The Infinity of Lists: An Illustrated Essay" in the same series. That book is actually rather impossible to understand (two stars), but it also has beautiful pictures. The current book is worth four stars; barely.

It takes the patience of a saint to read this, especially for an old reader. The small light type on super shiny paper is hard to read, even with a magnifying glass. Because of this impediment, I can't comment on the content I can't read. The paper facilitates lovely reproductions of the art work. However, I was looking for more on a theory of contemporary beauty as portrayed through advertising and commercial media.

A beautiful book. I misplaced mine (loaned it to someone? or it's someplace where it will show up or?) and so missed having it around to just pick up and peruse from time to time that I replaced it with this used copy in like-new condition. I don't do that often and is probably the strongest evidence I can offer of the pull of this volume. I also own Eco's companion book on Ugliness -- purchased many years after the first HoB. Hope I don't lose it, because I enjoy having it, too, but would be less compelled to replace it. Besides the visuals, Eco's text is a pleasure.

I got the paperback version. It is useless. The type is much too small and takes an enlarging glass to read. Who is the idiot or idiots that allowed this thing to be printed?

This is a beautifully bound book, even next to its original hard cover release. It's nice and compact without compromising the quality of the photographs. Even though I got this for research purposes, I've decided not to mark the pages with my notes so that I can have this sit on my coffee table. A must for all Eco fans !

Lectura obligada para entender la construcción del concepto de belleza en occidente. Compelling reading to understand the construction of the concept of beauty in the West.

One of the great books from Eco, you need to own it if your interested on history art, and the evolution of beauty and ugliness.

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