

A COMPARISON OF TRADITIONAL JAPANESE AND WESTERN AESTHETICS

Philosophies about art and life are markedly different between traditional Japanese (9th to mid-19th centuries) and Western cultures (19th century). A comparison of aesthetic characteristics offers insight into both world views. Please keep in mind that the perspectives cited represent generalizations, so there will always be exceptions.

Traditional Japanese Perspectives	Traditional Western Perspectives
<p>Art is a way of life. Art and aesthetics are integrated into all aspects of daily life. Examples include the tea ceremony, Japanese gardens, architecture, and furnishings.</p>	<p>Art is often considered to be elitist, elevated, and separate from most aspects of daily life. Art objects are displayed in museums, galleries, and homes.</p>
<p>Art-making An expression of collectivity, ritual, tradition, and obligation to the group; Ordinary objects for daily use were valued for their perceived beauty.</p>	<p>Art-making An expression of individuality, personal self-expression; Originality, uniqueness, and novelty are valued.</p>
<p>Features of design in art Asymmetrical balance (often on the diagonal); Vertical and atmospheric perspective; Fine lines</p>	<p>Features of design in art Symmetrical and asymmetrical balance; Linear perspective; Chiaroscuro; Mass production impacted design.</p>
<p>World view is non-anthropocentric, regarding humanity as harmonious with nature; Nature is respected as the supreme creation and its principles are revered.</p>	<p>World view is anthropocentric, regarding human beings as the center of the universe; Humanity is respected as God's supreme creation, more important than nature.</p>
<p>Perishability of life and natural materials; Appreciation of specific characteristics of the seasons.</p>	<p>Permanence of ideas, concepts, and materials; Preservation of works of art (such as in museums).</p>
<p>Suggestive Evokes the inner essence of an object; Understated and unassuming, but with quiet presence; Reason is subordinate to perception; Mood is emphasized over realistic depiction.</p>	<p>Naturalistic Realistic depiction; Imitation of nature; Science questions the nature of reality; Social issues, often controversial ones, become subjects of artworks.</p>
<p>Concepts of beauty Incompleteness and the beauty of omission are valued. Empty space allows the imagination to fill in</p>	<p>Concepts of beauty Beauty is idealized by the academic art of the time, but these concepts of beauty were challenged by the Impressionists</p>

what is not depicted.

Simplicity of design

Surface design is emphasized rather than the illusion of depth;
Flat colors, organic forms.

Technical qualities

Immediacy and spontaneity of creation are valued in aesthetic objects (hand patina, brush strokes).

Unity of beauty and function of form Form follows function;

The appearance, significance, and meaning of objects is equally important.

Humility of humanity

Humanity is subordinate to nature; Acceptance of the inevitable.

and others.

Complexity of design

The use of value and perspective to indicate depth;
The illusion of 3-D space on a 2-D surface.

Technical qualities

Idealized perfection;
High level of technical mastery in academic art;
This tradition was challenged by the Impressionists and others.

"Art for Art's Sake"

Novelty and eclecticism of design;
Function was often subordinate to form;
Art was its own form and needed no other reason to exist.

Power of humanity

Nature is subordinate to humanity;
Humanity conquers nature and controls the environment.