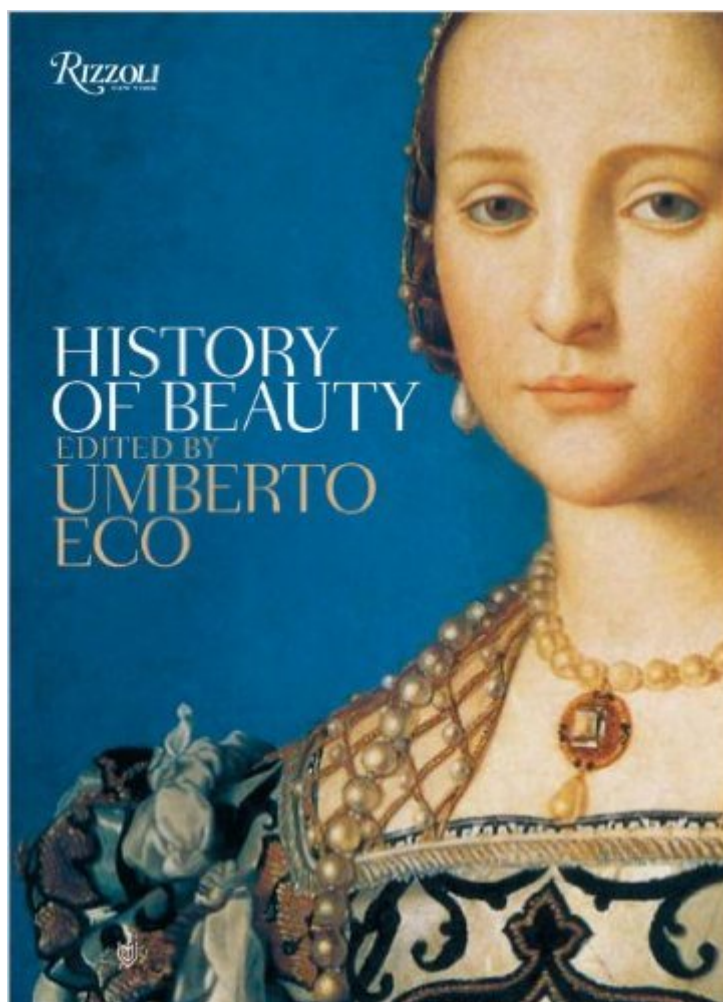


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# History Of Beauty



## 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

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Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (35 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #67,329 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #29 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Aesthetics](#) #334 in [Books > Arts & Photography > History & Criticism > History](#)

## Customer Reviews

Dostoyevsky once observed that "beauty is the battlefield where God and the devil war for the soul of man". In *History of Beauty* Umberto Eco provides an historical context to how that battlefield has changed over the past 3000 years or so. This is a sumptuous, unusually high quality coffee table book. While its over 400 photographs are extremely engaging, the introductions and essays Eco provides are absorbing and just as illuminating as the pictures. Eco lists himself as editor, but that is false modesty. His writing here is excellent, erudite and informative and provides a lot of food for thought as one peruses the visuals. As is to be expected from Eco, his essays cite philosopher that run the gamut from Aristotle and Plato through to Xenophon (though I did not see any Dostoyevsky references though that dark soul was seemingly compulsive about the mesmerizing qualities of beauty) and thusly provide an all encompassing review of differing concepts of what is beautiful by

both geographically and chronologically. This is a rich, beautiful book that will please the dedicated reader as well as the casual surfer who might flip through it. If you want to upgrade the ambiance of your coffee table, this would be an excellent choice.

Only Umberto Eco could write a book that defines beauty through the ages of western culture as this one does. He looks at the great contemporary writers for insight into the great contemporary artists. Umberto brings Plato to the front to explain early Greek art, and brings in Hume to explain humanist style. It is a classical book that should be used in colleges to not only introduce people to art but to thinking about art and words. The color plates are wonderful. What I wish is that the Italian CDrom was available in English. One can see from the style used that this book was a great interactive CDrom. Reading Umberto's insights and looking at great art..what a wonderful way to spend a morning at starbucks!

Umberto Eco is one of the world's leading experts on aesthetics and art, as well as being an outstanding novelist in his own right. This work on the history of beauty is aimed at a general audience rather than a specialised one, and as such it abounds more in beautiful works of art and illustrations rather than scholarly analysis of art itself. However, it still contains an excellent history of the idea of beauty, and how artists through the ages have tried to implement somewhat abstract ideas, while philosophers and theologians have abstracted from art to apply artistic and creative terms to entities such as Platonic Forms or God. One of the most interesting developments in the history of beauty was the identification of beauty with reality as it was in itself. Platonists identified the beautiful with the Good or the One, and Christians planted these ideas onto God. The notion that God was the most beautiful entity that existed, that God could be represented in art, and also that the cosmos in many ways is God's work of Art, expressed itself in many great works of art, poetry and architecture in the medieval period. With the Renaissance, the concept of beauty became more grounded in human and earthly realities, and one sees far more focus on the beauty of material objects, nature, and people, as they are rather than their ideal nature. Art becomes more and more focused on the material world until the 20th century when in the era of late capitalism, art itself has become a consumable commodity and the chief virtue of art seems to be to cause pleasant feelings to arise in the consumer (something Andy Warhol satirises a lot in his works of art). Yet even in this period, artists still manage to create works of creative beauty which capture both the beautiful and the ugly, as we now see them. This work is essential reading for anyone curious about Art and its history, and its relation to abstract ideas.

This is Umberto Eco at his most restrained, and yet he remains profound. The breathtaking range of photos and their sequence speak for themselves, and his comments add immeasurably. This is a book which I will not keep on the shelf, but instead on my desk for frequent reference, refreshment and inspiration.

This wonderful collection of art work History of Beauty edited by Umberto Eco attempts to answer the questions: What is beauty? What is art? What is taste and fashion? and Is beauty something to be observed coolly and rationally or is it something dangerously involving? With literally hundreds of reproductions of fine art works speaking to these questions, this book would be a joy even without the words. But of course the words tell the deeper story and attempt to give at least partial answers - sometimes directly, more often indirectly. The chapters cover such things as the aesthetic ideal in ancient Greece, light and color in the Middle Ages, magic beauty between the 15th and 16th centuries, and romantic beauty. The reader and observer sees that the depiction of beauty has both changed and remained constant over the centuries. The symmetry, the color, the poetry might change with the art form while it is clear that the characteristics of the human bodies (both female and male) have not changed. History of Beauty would make a wonderful coffee table book in any home except maybe those who find the naked body distasteful.

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