

Roger Scruton: Why Beauty Matters

Up to the year 1930, beauty was seen as a value, just as truth and goodness are values. But after Marcel Duchamp exhibited a urinal as a work of art, the cult of **ugliness** soon displaced the quest for beauty in the artistic world.

In modern conceptual art, ugliness, **alienation** and the **cult of the individual** hold sway. Architecture, language, music and manners have come to reflect this tendency as well. The theory is that if the world disturbs us, art should disturb us also. Modern art reflects the world that we live in and by doing so supposedly helps us to understand that world. There is little evidence that this is so.

Roger Scruton believes that by losing beauty we are also losing the meaning of life. In the past, beauty was the remedy for suffering and chaos and life. It offered consolation and affirmation of human worth and dignity. It redeemed suffering and chaos. No longer is this the case. The demise of beauty has also been accompanied by the demise of values and, of course, of religion.

It has become threatening to judge taste or to proclaim standards. Values have been replaced by the appetites. In a consumerist world, **utility** is the new standard of measure.

Nothing is more illustrative of this than modern architecture. Form has to follow function. Utility is married to ugliness. But the vandals and graffiti writers are not to blame for our depressing cities, the architects are. The vandals and the graffiti writers merely complete the job.

Sex too has been desecrated by modern art. Rather than an expression of love, it has become a denial of love. Real art makes ugliness beautiful but fake art shares in the ugliness it illustrates.

(Find Roger Scruton online)

Reflection: Modern conceptual art with its denial of beauty is a classic case of the Emperor having no clothes and everybody being afraid to point this out. How much is this also the case with the dismissal and ridicule of religion in our society? Are we prepared to challenge, the specious, the superficial, the ugly and the vulgar in our culture, language and behavior? Are we prepared to name prejudice? In the face of political correctness, the drive for utility and the cult of individualism, are we prepared to champion religion as giving real meaning to life and true value to the person? Are we prepared to take up the message of Jesus in the gospel: God is in all of life and the fullness of human life and of all life is to be found only in God?

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