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In Praise Of Shadows



Synopsis

An essay on aesthetics by the Japanese novelist, this book explores architecture, jade, food, and even toilets, combining an acute sense of the use of space in buildings. The book also includes descriptions of lacquerware under candlelight and women in the darkness of the house of pleasure.

Book Information

Paperback: 56 pages

Publisher: Leete'S Island Books; First Edition edition (December 1, 1977)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0918172020

ISBN-13: 978-0918172020

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.2 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 6.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

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Customer Reviews

The Japanese have an aesthetic concept called "Wabi Sabi." This term consists of two words.

"Wabi" literally means "poverty," but in the aesthetic context it stands for simplicity; "Sabi" is literally "solitude, loneliness," and for aesthetic purposes it means something like natural impermanence.

Wabi Sabi encourages, as one observer put it, a profound feeling of inner melancholy, and an appreciation of quietly clear and calm, well-seasoned and refined simplicity. Andrew Juniper's "Wabi Sabi: The Japanese Art of Impermanence" summarizes the concept by saying that "the term wabi-sabi suggests such qualities as impermanence, humility, asymmetry, and imperfection. These underlying principles are diametrically opposed to those of their Western counterparts, whose values are rooted in the Hellenic worldview that values permanence, grandeur, symmetry, and perfection. ... Wabi-sabi is an intuitive appreciation of a transient beauty in the physical world that reflects the irreversible flow of life in the spiritual world. It is an understated beauty that exists in the modest, rustic, imperfect, or even decayed, an aesthetic sensibility that finds a melancholic beauty in the impermanence of all things." (pages 2 and 51) In order to appreciate Junichiro Tanizaki's 50-page pamphlet "In Praise of Shadows" it helps to keep the concept of Wabi Sabi in mind. While

many people would object to Tanizaki's anti-modernist view of art (and call it "reactionary" or "nationalist"), it is in fact a contemporary take on an ancient aesthetic concept that favors obliqueness (shadows) over brightness, weathered naturalness over functional novelty, the crude over the polished, and - ultimately - irrationality over rationality.

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