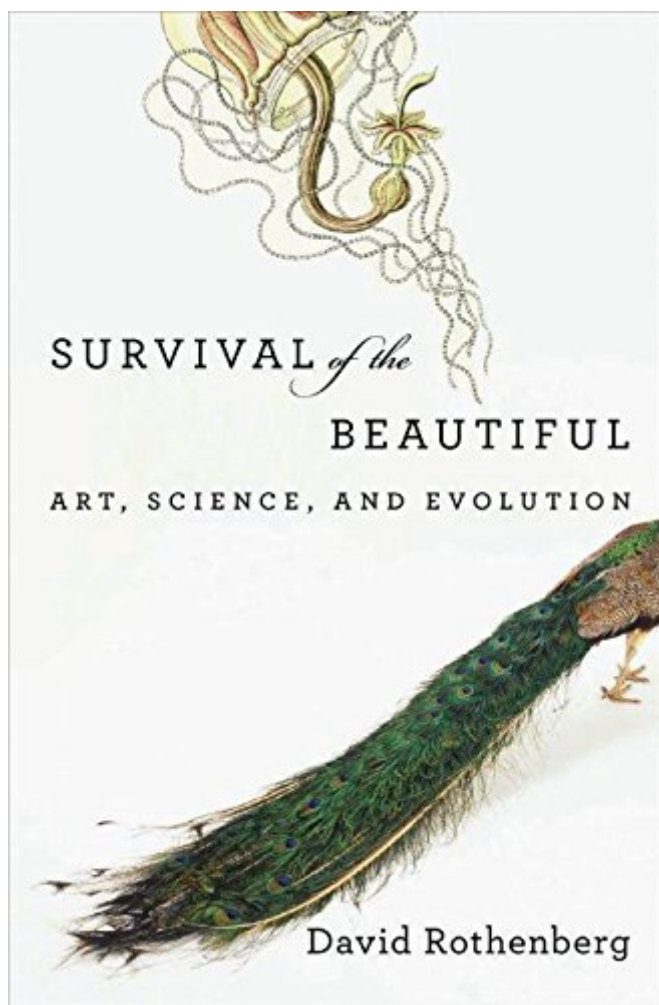


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Survival Of The Beautiful: Art, Science, And Evolution



Synopsis

"The peacock's tail," said Charles Darwin, "makes me sick." That's because the theory of evolution as adaptation can't explain why nature is so beautiful. It took the concept of sexual selection for Darwin to explain that, a process that has more to do with aesthetics than the practical. *Survival of the Beautiful* is a revolutionary new examination of the interplay of beauty, art, and culture in evolution. Taking inspiration from Darwin's observation that animals have a natural aesthetic sense, philosopher and musician David Rothenberg probes why animals, humans included, have innate appreciation for beauty-and why nature is, indeed, beautiful. Sexual selection may explain why animals desire, but it says very little about what they desire. Why will a bowerbird literally murder another bird to decorate its bower with the victim's blue feathers? Why do butterfly wings boast such brilliantly varied patterns? The beauty of nature is not arbitrary, even if random mutation has played a role in evolution. What can we learn from the amazing range of animal aesthetic behavior-about animals, and about ourselves? Readers who enjoyed the bestsellers *The Art Instinct* and *The Mind's Eye* will find *Survival of the Beautiful* an equally stimulating and profound exploration of art, science, and the creative impulse.

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Customer Reviews

Survival of the Beautiful is a tour de force for David Rothenberg. This crucial call to reassess the importance of aesthetics, from evolution through to contemporary art, was inspired by research on two of his previous books, "Why Birds Sing: A Journey Into the Mystery of Birdsong" & "The 1000 Mile Song: Whale Music in a Sea of Sound". But his influences go further back to his architect father and artist mother, his early work with deep ecologist Arne Naess, and particularly his own love of playing music. If we find experiencing and creating beauty compelling, why do we require functional explanations when we witness similar behaviors in other species? Are peacock hens actually calculating the odds for their future offspring, or might they reveal an evolved sense of aesthetics, when they go for the best male tail? Rothenberg brings together cutting edge science on how genes are expressed along with current exceptional trends in art and culture. Beautiful, evocative illustrations illuminate each major point. Taking us beyond the instinctual appeal of symmetry and harmony, Rothenberg's book is, in itself, an evolved and exuberant gesture.

I got this for a university course and it's surprisingly interesting and insightful. I'm not sure if I would recommend it for a casual reader but if you're really interested in the subject then it will hopefully give you another interesting perspective.

THE BOOK IS AN EASY READ AND REALLY BROADENS YOUR SCOPE. HIGHLY RECOMMENDED FOR TEEN READERS. THIS BOOK IS ESSENTIAL FOR THE CREATIVE MIND. IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE A CLEAR PICTURE OF THE WORLD AND SOCIAL INTERACTION YOU DON'T AT LEAST NOT UNTIL YOU HAVE READ THIS BOOK.

This is only the second time that I downloaded something from the Kindle Store to my iPad. Very disappointed to find that all the photos and graphics are in black and white. Seriously: if you sell this to be read on a color device, could you then not also prepare a color version of the book? Or did I miss something?

Very slow, too much art talk, not enough science. I gave up half way through. Nice idea, but poor execution.

The discussion of bower birds at the beginning of the book was utterly fascinating, and I was looking forward to the rest of it. There is truly much to think about in the book, and I also appreciated the many sketches of bowers, the discussion and pictures of feathers, the many black and white pictures, and the few, but excellent, color photos in the hard-cover edition. However, as I read on, the arguments about the nature of art and the origins of artistic behavior, how and why they evolved, how artistic appreciation may have evolved, and so on, were, for me, far from "accessible" and "clear," although other reviewers seem to have found the book to be exemplary in that regard. I found myself wishing for a chart laying out the various conflicting theories, who holds them, and who agrees with whom on what points. Perhaps the fault lies in my having majored in a field far removed from biology and evolution, but I can't help thinking that if Rothenberg had been thinking more clearly--or writing more clearly (One passage that would have benefited from editing and a bit of explanation is his friend Tchernichovski's anecdote in Chapter 3 about observing gazelles. Within three consecutive sentences, "you" is used to refer to three quite different entities, and there are other things that are confusing about this paragraph, too.)--it would have been easier to follow his arguments, and that is why I didn't give the book five stars. Another, though minor frustration. Figure 16 is a drawing of "Anchiornis huxleyi first dinosaur whose real colors we have discovered". Now, wouldn't you love to know what colors those are--see a color rendition of the drawing, perhaps? Too bad! I have been looking, but haven't found one yet, not in this book! In spite of these criticisms, there are many fascinating art-related subjects taken up in this book, and the joy of discovery has kept me reading. I have not finished the book yet, and expect to plow on, skimming over anything too confusing and delighting in the new insights and information I get from it.

This is definitely one of my all-time favorite books. At this point in my life I'm very interested in learning and reading about all things that delve deep into what is considered beautiful and what beauty truly is and I feel that paying attention to the finer details in nature is where one can behold it most powerfully. I'm more in love with nature now than ever at this point in my life and I love all of the rich information about it's beautiful mysteries held in this book. And I really love all of the quotes from various people, especially those from Wilhelm Bolsche. I'm so glad this book turned me on to him. His writing turns me on!!! Learning about this guy made me feel as if I had discovered treasure too. Not long ago, I watched the David Attenborough program "Life In the Undergrowth" and I was so moved watching the scene that showed a close up of some snails mating. I found that part to be quite erotic and watching it made me desire so powerfully to find a writer who could describe nature

in such erotically detailed ways. Well, I found such a writer in this book!! I had quite a good laugh when I read this sentence----"Bolsche reads like an X-rated version of a David Attenborough BBC program." Fine by me!! Although I don't agree with this after reading some of his quotes in this book. I find his writing to be so incredibly meaningful and spiritual, hardly X-rated material. I get such a sense of David's passion and love for nature when I read this book. I get so drawn into the material and truly feel joy when I read it. I'm looking forward to reading other books of his.

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