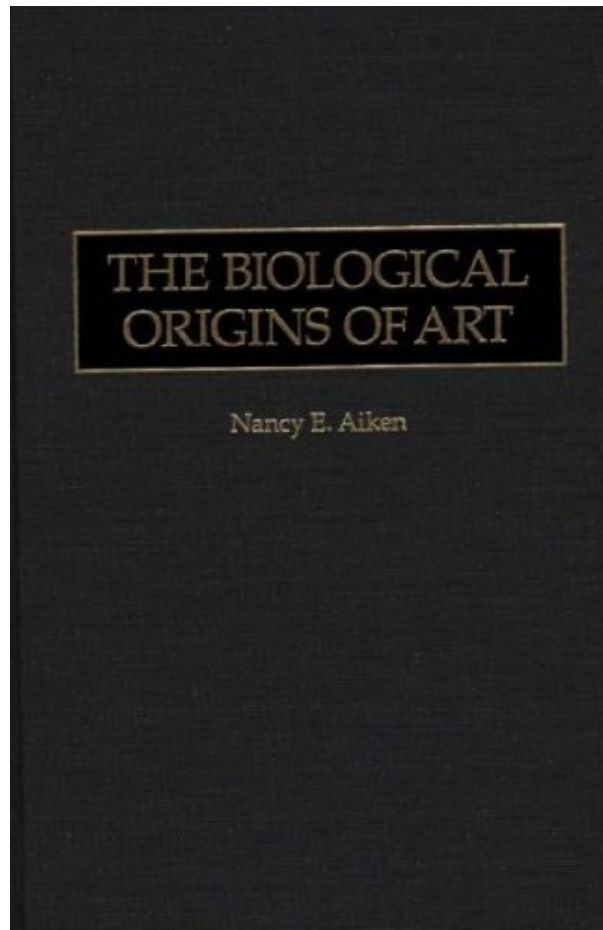


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NANCY E. AIKEN**



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## Review

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## About the Author

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Beginning with Plato, philosophers have theorized about art, asking What is art? and How does art evoke emotion? Their answers, evolving from Plato's Idealism, have led to Nihilism. Art cannot be defined is the current answer to the first question, and the second has not been dealt with in any significant way since Langer's *Feeling and Form* in 1953.

How art affects our emotions is considered not from a philosophical viewpoint but from an evolutionary standpoint. How are emotions aroused? is a biological question, and, as Aiken clarifies, it has been answered by neuroscientists. Art is usually thought of as pleasurable, but it can be ugly, disgusting, or fearsome. Aiken argues that fear, for example, can be elicited by simple shapes, lines, colors, or sound. Rather than just a source of pleasure, Aiken shows how art becomes a powerful tool of social and political manipulation. Through art, people can be conditioned to fear leaders, nations, gods, and ideas. A provocative work of interest to scholars and researchers as well as all people interested in art and human behavior.

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- 200 pages

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Most helpful customer reviews

14 of 14 people found the following review helpful.

Never Judge a Book by Its Cover or the Title on It

By tireldo@ffhsj.com

The title of Nancy Aikens' book, *The Biological Origins of Art*, seems a bit misleading. As it was published in 1998, I thought I would learn of some new and exciting scientific discovery of why humans feel (and have found for tens of thousands of years -- as we know thus far) the need to express themselves through imagery. It appears Nancy Aikens approached the subject matter in a more research-oriented manner in that she dryly reiterates what has already been evaluated and written on human behavior and emotion in general, instead of digesting and reinterpreting the material referenced in her Notes in an attempt to enlighten the reader with some new and interesting concepts and discoveries. Furthermore, by the time I finally read about the "origins of art," which appears some halfway through the book and is difficult to get to in a conscious state, I was deeply disappointed. Overall, there were a few interesting points, but these points were quotes, experiments or ideas of other authors. I failed to find Nancy Aikens book compelling and regret not being able to recommend it. Unfortunately, I felt the text was not as original as the title.

6 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

*The Biological Origins of Art*

By Power Boothe

Nancy Aiken's book provides empirical evidence for why the arts are an essential aspect of our evolved biological nature. Aiken's claim is that when we have a strong response to the arts we are usually engaging far more than topical issues. We are engaging the ancient parts of the brain that have to do with our survival. The fight, flight or freeze responses are at the core of being alive and as we participate in these experience -- through the arts -- we are making deep connections to the old parts of the brain. This may explain, not only the strong emotions we may have, but also how the arts are a vehicle for making us conscious of our essential human nature -- that we cannot always put into words. I highly recommend Nancy Aiken's book for its ability to offer an understanding of our biological responses to the arts, without destroying the unique and profoundly important quality of the art experience itself.

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

Doctoral thesis for Dissanayake fans

By A Customer

There is terrific information in this book for the true art 'n' biology geek. It does suffer from the academic form of the doctoral thesis, but it connects lots of interesting studies with theory from art and ethology. The cover is a dead give-away at just how non-sexy the book is going to be, but if you loved *Homo Aestheticus* and crave more on this topic, Ms Aiken's work will scratch your itch until Ellen D's next book comes out.

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