



The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems

Stephen Halliwell

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Mimesis is one of the oldest, most fundamental concepts in Western aesthetics. This book offers a new, searching treatment of its long history at the center of theories of representational art: above all, in the highly influential writings of Plato and Aristotle, but also in later Greco-Roman philosophy and criticism, and subsequently in many areas of aesthetic controversy from the Renaissance to the twentieth century. Combining classical scholarship, philosophical analysis, and the history of ideas--and ranging across discussion of poetry, painting, and music--Stephen Halliwell shows with a wealth of detail how mimesis, at all stages of its evolution, has been a more complex, variable concept than its conventional translation of "imitation" can now convey.

Far from providing a static model of artistic representation, mimesis has generated many different models of art, encompassing a spectrum of positions from realism to idealism. Under the influence of Platonist and Aristotelian paradigms, mimesis has been a crux of debate between proponents of what Halliwell calls "world-reflecting" and "world-simulating" theories of representation in both the visual and musico-poetic arts. This debate is about not only the fraught relationship between art and reality but also the psychology and ethics of how we experience and are affected by mimetic art.

Moving expertly between ancient and modern traditions, Halliwell contends that the history of mimesis hinges on problems that continue to be of urgent concern for contemporary aesthetics.

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