
Analyzing Art and Aesthetics is the ninth volume in the Artefacts series produced by the Artefacts Consortium, which holds annual conferences and releases publications that consider the tangible history of science and technology. Since the seventh publication, Illuminating Instruments, the Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press has managed the series’ publication. The publishers maintain a high quality of book production and image reproduction with well-crafted printing and binding.

For this volume, editors Anne Collins Goodyear and Margaret Weitkamp draw material from proceedings of the consortium’s “Science/Technology and Art” conference held in Washington, D.C. in 2008 (program available at http://www.artefactsconsortium.org/Meetings/ProgramWashingtonxiiiF.html). The conference focused on the aesthetic qualities of materials in the realms of science and technology. Analyzing Art and Aesthetics examines the convergence of function and form, exploring scientific objects as artworks and the artists or art inspired by practices in science and technology.

Illuminating the gamut between scientific model and artwork, the editors have structured a series of well-written essays into three parts. The first section looks at objects developed or used by past scientists, objects recognized today for their aesthetic qualities and historicity. The following section addresses the design of modern technologies, where form is incorporated into function. Purposeful objects, such as NASA’s Discovery space shuttle or cellular towers in foliage camouflage, are examined for their aesthetic qualities. Completing the curve, art historians discuss artists’ responses to science and technology, describing the ways in which form pays tribute to function. The repurposing of scientific objects as artworks, such as the appropriation of astronomical photographs or other examples of scientists embracing their creative ingenuity, is explored.

As a way to demonstrate how institutions are bridging the gap between art and science or technology, the book concludes with a review of the Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship Program, established in 2007. In an ongoing initiative, artists are paired with various science and history departments within the Smithsonian to collaborate on research from both scientific and artistic points of view. Perspectives from a former program coordinator, as well as accounts from an artist and a scientist that participated in the program, are provided in this section.

Each essay is concluded with detailed notes and bibliographies. Author biographies are provided at the end of the book. A full index of the book is provided and includes names, places, and overarching concepts and themes within the publication. A choice read for anyone interested in either the history of science and technology or art historical artifacts.

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