**Japanese Art and Architecture**

Japanese Art and Architecture, works of art produced in Japan from the beginnings of human habitation there, sometime in the 10th millennium BC, to the present.

Historically, Japan has been subject to sudden invasions of new and alien ideas followed by long periods of minimal contact with the outside world. Over time the Japanese developed the ability to absorb, imitate, and finally assimilate those elements of foreign culture that complemented their aesthetic preferences. The earliest complex art in Japan was produced in the 7th and 8th centuries AD in connection with Buddhism. In the 9th century, as the Japanese began to turn away from China and develop indigenous forms of expression, the secular arts became increasingly important; until the late 15th century, both religious and secular arts flourished. After the Onin War (1467-1477) Japan entered a period of political, social, and economic disruption that lasted for nearly a century. In the state that emerged under the leadership of the Tokugawa clan, organized religion played a much less important role in people's lives, and the arts that survived were primarily secular.

Painting is the preferred artistic expression in Japan, practiced by amateur and professional alike. Until modern times, the Japanese wrote with a brush rather than a pen, and their familiarity with brush techniques has made them particularly sensitive to painterly values. They found sculpture a much less sympathetic medium for artistic expression; most Japanese sculpture is associated with religion, and the medium's use declined with the lessening importance of traditional Buddhism. Japanese ceramics are among the finest in the world and include the earliest known artifacts of their culture. In architecture, Japanese preferences for natural materials and an interaction of interior and exterior space are clearly expressed.

Japanese art is characterized by unique polarities. In the ceramics of the prehistoric periods, for example, exuberance was followed by disciplined and refined artistry. Another instance is provided by two 16th-century structures that are poles apart: Katsura Palace is an exercise in simplicity, with an emphasis on natural materials, rough and untrimmed, and an affinity for beauty achieved by accident; Toshogu Mausoleum is a rigidly symmetrical structure replete with brightly colored relief carvings covering every visible surface. Japanese art, valued not only for its simplicity but also for its colorful exuberance, has considerably influenced 19th-century Western painting and 20th-century Western architecture.