CHAPTER VII
Neolithic vs. Paleolithic:

Perfection in art, Huxley writes, does not necessarily coincide with advance in civilization; for example, there are paleolithic bisons that might have been drawn by Degas; on the other hand, there are neolithic figures of men and animals that might have been drawn by a child of seven. And yet all the evidence shows that the men of the New Stone Age were incomparably more intelligent and accomplished than the men of the Old Stone Age. The seeming degeneration of neolithic art, Huxley shrewdly points out, is in fact an advance. For it marks an increase in the power of generalization. What the neolithic artist was setting down was, not a mere likeness, but a set of symbols, each representing an intellectual abstraction. While palaeolithic man put a line round his untransformed memories, neolithic man put the line round his concepts, and arranged these Platonic Ideas of reality in patterns that would satisfy his soul's desire for order. 2

1. Edgar Hilaire Germain Degas (1834-1917), a French Painter.
2. Beyond the Mexique Bay; Chatto & Windus, 1949; pp.197-8.
But the technique of exploiting the visual-artistic faculty was very early brought to a high level of perfection. Paleolithic man made pictures of animals which have, quite literally, never been surpassed. He could only think in terms of particular images. Hence the snapshot realism of his bison — a realism that is only recaptured when men, grown very highly civilized, learn to look at the world once again with the un-prejudiced eyes of the primitive man. Nature, then, does not change; but the outlines that man sees in Nature are, within certain limits, continuously changing.

What Changes:

Nor does human nature ever change. The earliest known specimens of art are still comprehensible. Not only men's feelings and instincts, but also their intellectual and imaginative powers, were in the remotest times precisely what they are now. In the fine arts it is only the convention, the form, the incidentals that change: the fundamentals of passion, of intellect and imagination remain unaltered.

1. 'The Essence of Religion': Proper Studies; Chatto & Windus, 1933; p.189.
2. Texts and Pretexts; Chatto & Windus, 1949; p.51.
3. 'Fashions in Love'; Do What You Will; Chatto & Windus, 1949; p.130.
The favourite themes of art, too, change. If the Catholics have their Madonnas, the palaeolithic man has his Mother-worship. For him every day was Mother's Day. Carvings of mother in limestone, in soapstone, in mammoth ivory stand — images of man's earliest worship. Their small heads are bowed and their faces are featureless; they have next to no arms and their dwindling legs taper off, with no hint of feet, into nothing. Mother is all body, and that body is the portrait of no individual mother, but a tremendous symbol of fertility. In Egypt mother sometimes modulated imperceptibly into a hippopotamus. In Peru she often appeared as an enormous female Toby jug, and everywhere she manifested herself as pot, jar, sacred vessel, grail.1

Maya Art vs. Indian Art:

Writing about the Maya art which he saw during his tour of Central America, Huxley observes that its most conspicuous feature is the absence of the female form. The Maya pantheon included no goddess of love, and it was a man holding an axe who looked after the fertility of the Central American fields. Huxley could recall only one reference to the act of generation. Maya

sculptors were so conditioned by their environment that, whatever might be their tastes in life, they found sex in art all but unthinkable.

Huxley finds Maya art characterized by what he calls a chaste luxuriance. Comparing the art of the Central Americans with our no less richly ornamental art, he observes that, more than any other art, Indian art is impregnated with sensuality. Even the most sacred persons tend to melt — and at the most solemn moment of their religious life — into suggestive postures. Not only Buddha among the women of his father's court, but Buddha taking leave of the world, Buddha resisting temptation, Buddha preaching — the renderings of all these scenes in Indian art are of the same kind. This is equally true outside the Buddhist tradition. The very animals are symbols of sensuality. Even the ornamental forms have a certain sensual quality. Headdresses, bracelets, anklets tend to be conceived as a series of rolls of flesh. All the lines in a passage of Indian decoration are curved. It is the same in architecture, too. The Indians perfected a kind of organic architecture, whose forms are those, not of an abstract solid geometry, but of living tissue.¹ No wonder, as Monsieur

¹ Beyond the Mexican Bay; Chatto & Windus, 1949; pp. 45-8.
Max-Pol Fouchet observes in his book *The Erotic Sculpture of India* (and Huxley would agree), that Victorian officials often tried to turn visitors away from places of high artistic interest, such as Konarak and Khajuraho. And even today, writers on Indian art still find it prudent to draw academic veils over much that is important.1

Of all this sensuality there is, in Maya art, as in Christian art, not the smallest trace. The female never appears, and the male body is always uncompromisingly male. Maya decoration is all straight lines and angles, flat surfaces perpendicular to one another. Maya architecture is an affair of pyramids, of flat walls divided up into rectangular panels, of wide and regular flights of steps. There is no sex in the art of the Mayas; but, by way of compensation, what a lot of death!

**Traditions of Art:**

Thus, comparing two widely different artistic traditions, Huxley is confronted with a question: why are artistic traditions different? Geographical, historical, climatic and economic factors play their part in determining the art of a people; so perhaps does racial idiosyncrasy. But the finally decisive element, says Huxley, is accident — the birth of an unusually gifted person, who starts a tradition which in course of time becomes popular.

Accident determines not only the traditional themes and forms of a people's art, but also its quality. At first sight it might appear as though artistic ability were a matter of racial inheritance. But when we look more closely, we begin to wonder if this be so. There are no artistic and inartistic races; there are only, within each social group, certain sets of artistically fortunate or unfortunate accidents.

Again, it is also asserted that the different European races are distinguished by different artistic aptitudes: that the Italians excel in plastic arts, the English in literature, the Germans in music, and so on. Now, first of all, all Europeans are fundamentally of the same stock. In the second place, such epithets as 'musical', 'inartistic', and so on, do not apply permanently to any group; for a people, once known for their artistic achievements, may be without any to their credit for generations.¹

Historians have tried to find social and cultural explanations for the fact that some epochs are fertile in artistic talent, others not. And, in effect, it may be that certain environments are favourable to the development of creative gifts, while others are not. But we must remember, says Huxley, that every

¹ Beyond the Mexique Bay; Chatto & Windus, 1949; pp. 47-51; 61-63.
individual has his or her genes, and the chances against
the kind of combination of genes that results in a
Shakespeare or a Newton are a good many millions to one.
Periclean Athens, Renaissance Italy, Elizabethan England
may be, on the genetic plane, extraordinary freaks of
chance. To those who believe that environment can do
everything, this is, of course, an intolerable conclu-
sion.¹

Art and Religion:

But to what extent are the arts conditioned by,
or indebted to, religion? Huxley asks. And is there,
at any given moment of history, a common socio-psychol-
ological source that gives to the various arts a common
tendency?

There is no guarantee, says Huxley, that faith
will produce good art. Its patronage of the arts is
more pronounced than its taste. For example, when
Buddhism flourished in north-western India, artistic
merit ran pretty low. And are we to think that Hinduism
in the last three centuries has been as feeble as the
it art/has produced? Similarly, the bad Catholicism of
the High Renaissance seems to have produced superb

¹. "Variations on a Philosopher": Themes and Variations;
Chatto & Windus, 1954; pp.73-74.
religious art; while the good Catholics of the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries produced a great deal of rather bad religious art. As for individual artists, we find that the creators of religious masterpieces are sometimes, like Fra Angelico,\(^1\) extremely devout, sometimes no more than conventionally orthodox, sometimes, like Perugino,\(^2\) open disbelievers.

The truth is that, while religion offers the artist a wealth of interesting subject-matter and many opportunities to exercise his skill, it has little or no influence upon the quality of his production. Indeed, the excellence of a work of art depends on certain tendencies, sensibilities and talents in the artist, and, secondarily, on the earlier history of his chosen art, and on what may be called the logic of its formal relations; neither of which has anything to do with religion. Though faith can move mountains, is Huxley's witty conclusion, it cannot of itself shape those mountains into cathedrals.\(^3\)

1. Fra Angelico (1387-1455), Florentine Painter.
2. Perugino (1446-1523), Florentine Painter.
And yet, some religions, by virtue of their tenets, can be propitious or unpropitious to arts. It is Huxley's view that, in this regard, Europe has been fortunate in its religions. Neither Graeco-Roman paganism nor Christianity imposed restrictions on what an artist might represent; nor did either demand of him that he should represent the unrepresentable. The Olympian deities were men made gods; the Saviour of the Christians was God made man. An artist could represent Zeus or Jesus without ever going beyond the boundaries of actual human life.

It is very different in India, where one of the two predominant religions forbids absolutely the representation of the human form and, sometimes, of any living form whatever, with the result that Mohammedan art tends to be dry, empty, barren and monotonous. Hinduism, on the other hand, prescribes that the human is not enough; that art must express symbolically the superhuman, the spiritual, the pure metaphysical idea. The best, says Huxley, is always the enemy of the good, and by trying to improve on sober human reality, the Hindus have evolved a system of art full of metaphysical monsters and grotesques, none the less extravagant for being symbolic of the highest of high philosophies. The
Hindus, he concludes, are too much interested in metaphysics and ultimate Reality to make good artists.¹

But is Huxley right in making such a generalization? No doubt, the Hindu artist was often pre-occupied with metaphysics, and consequently created symbolical grotesques — like the elephant-headed god Ganapati, or Vishnu reclining on the serpent, Adishesha, in the mid-ocean. But he also created living forms of men and women. All Hindu art is not symbolical or metaphysical. Had Huxley seen the sculpture and architecture of the South Indian temples, he would have changed his mind.²

By way of a corrective to Huxley's extreme or only partly informed views, it would be fair to turn to Monsieur Max-Pol Pouchet's account of Hindu art. The Hindu artist, says the writer, is bound by strict rules


2. Huxley regrets he could not see the art of South India. He writes: "The Hindu architects produced buildings incomparably more rich and interesting (i.e. than the Taj) as works of art. I have not visited South India, where, it is said, the finest specimens of Hindu architecture are to be found." Jesting Pilate; Chatto & Windus, 1948; pp.61-62.
and codes when interpreting the higher orders of being, but clearly regains his freedom when he describes mankind's sensual delights. We drop then from the loftier regions of symbolism; the realism of every-day life emerges, zest is shown, and sometimes there are touches of fun. When gods are left behind and mortals reappear, art becomes simpler, freer, gains in spontaneity what it loses in hieratic calm. Life swarms, and we are down to the level of the teeming market-places of India. No aspect of life is neglected; feminine beauty is lavishly depicted. Ajanta, for example, is one of the places in India where woman is most charmingly and exquisitely portrayed. Its frescoes and bas-reliefs have been rightly described as a 'poem of Hindu Women.'

Materials of Religious Art:

While on the subject of religious art, Huxley, with his inexhaustible curiosity and love of detail, discusses the various materials of this genre. He notes that everywhere and at all times religious art has used vision-inducing materials, such as polished metals and precious stones; for such religious objects as the shrine of gold, the chryselephantine statue, the jewelled symbol or image, are found in contemporary Europe as in

1. Erotic Sculpture of India, by Monsieur Max-Pol Fouchet; George Allen & Unwin Ltd., p.12 and p.29.
ancient Egypt, in India and China as among the Greeks. For this purpose, glass is hardly less effective than natural gems, and in certain respects more effective since there can be so much more of it. To glass we owe Paolo Uccello's great window of the Resurrection; and in the Catholic churches, faceted prisms dangle, from the seventeenth century to this day, from innumerable chandeliers. Glazed tiles have found their way into mosques and, here and there, into Christian churches, while in China, images of gods and saints are made in shining ceramic.

Colours:

While Huxley does not accept the view that pure, bright colours are of the very essence of artistic beauty, he agrees that such colours being characteristic of the Other World, works of art painted in them should be capable, in suitable circumstances, of transporting the beholder's mind in the direction of the Other World. The Catholic Church, Huxley goes on to point out, makes a deft use of light and colour in the midst of enviro-

1. Paolo Uccello (1397-1475), Florentine painter.
Andrea del Castagno\(^1\) for the nuns of Santa Apollonia at Florence. Hence the visionary intensity, the strange transporting power of these extraordinary works.

**Position:**

Huxley is of the view that a position of rest suits superhuman beings more than action. This, he says, accounts for the overwhelming, the more than merely aesthetic, impression made by the great static masterpieces of religious art. "The sculptured figures of Egyptian gods and god-kings, the Madonnas and Pantocrators of the Byzantine mosaics, the Bodhisattvas and Lohans of China, the seated Buddhas of Khmer, the steles and statues of Copan, the wooden idols of tropical Africa — these have one characteristic in common: a profound stillness. And it is precisely this which gives them their numinous quality, their power to transport the beholder out of the Old World of his everyday experience, far away, towards the visionary antipodes of the human psyche.... Other things being equal, a heroic figure at rest has a greater transporting power than one which is shown in action."\(^2\)

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1. Andrea del Castagno, (1390-1457), Florentine painter.
Decoration :

Speaking of decoration in art, Huxley has some interesting remarks, not very favourable to the modern trend. While admitting that decoration is unpopular today because it is costly, he does not accept the theory of the superior beauty of unadorned simplicity in art. He points out how, in architecture, we mistrust today all 'fussy details', and can admire only the fundamental solid geometry of a building.

But the facts, is Huxley's comment, are against us. The best art has not been always and necessarily the simplest; while profusion of decorative detail need not obscure the main lines of a composition. In the best specimens of Hindu architecture one can see an unparalleled extravagance of decorative details, entirely subordinate to the main architectural design. On the walls of the Chitor temples, for instance, there is not a single blank square foot; but so far from distracting the attention from the architectural composition, the sculpture and the ornament serve to emphasize the characteristic forms and movements of the strange design.¹

¹. Jesting Pilate; Chatto & Windus, 1948; pp.88-89.
Beauty in Art:

Huxley does not pretend to know why we should feel so strongly in the presence of certain forms and colours, sounds, verbal suggestions of form and harmony — why, in short, the thing we call beauty should move us at all. He naturally does not accept any metaphysical or mystical explanations. He thinks these are the outcome of fundamentally puritanic traditions, as in England. He prefers, here as elsewhere, the French un-puritanic acceptance of the facts as they are.¹

Beauty in art or nature, says Huxley elsewhere, is a matter of relationships between things not in themselves intrinsically beautiful. There is nothing beautiful, for example, about the vocables 'time' or 'syllable'. But when they are used in such a phrase as 'to the last syllable of recorded time', the relationship between the sounds of the component words, between our ideas of the things for which they stand, and between the overtones of association with which each word and the phrase as a whole are charged, is apprehended, by a direct and immediate intuition, as being beautiful.²

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¹ 'Nationality in Love': On the Margin; Chatto & Windus, 1948; pp.99-100.
Appreciation of Art:

Appreciation of beauty, Huxley would say, is a matter of taste; and taste is a matter of unbringing. Old guide-books, containing the impressions and opinions of tourists, help us realize the entirely accidental character of all our tastes. Goethe did not care for Giotto\(^1\), and all he thought worth seeing at Assisi was the portico of the Roman temple. Stendhal was ravished by Guercino\(^2\), who leaves most of us cold. Given their upbringing, neither could have thought differently. The modern altered standards of appreciation and generally greater tolerance are chiefly the result of increased acquaintance with the art of every nation and period. Because the art of the greater part of the world has been nonrealistic, we are more favourably disposed to it and much less impressed by realism.\(^3\)

Huxley expresses a similar view in Ends and Means. All artistic experiences can be had only by those who have had training. The Indian, for example, who

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1. Giotto (c.1266-1337), Florentine painter.
2. Guercino (1591-1666), Italian painter.
finds European orchestral music intolerably noisy, over-
intellectual and altogether lacking in beauty, would, if he 
has patience and listens to enough of it, come at last to 
realise that this music possesses all the qualities which 
Europeans claim for it. Similarly, at first, Shakespeare 
sonnets seem meaningless, Bach's fugues a bore, differen-
tial equations a sheer torture. But in due course, a 
trained mind's contact with an obscurely beautiful poem 
or an elaborate piece of counter point causes us to feel 
direct intuitions of beauty and significance.  

Art and Artist:

In an essay included in Music at Night, Huxley 
contrasts the anonymity of ancient and medieval artists 
with the excessive publicity (including self-publicity) 
given to the modern artist. In ancient times the artist 
worked without hope of personal fame, contemporary or 
posthumous. An extreme case is the Egyptian fresco 
painter who spent his life producing unsigned master-
pieces in tombs, where no living eye was ever intended 
to see them.

It was the Greeks who first signed their works 
and habitually worked for immediate glory and what is 

1. Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), German musical composer. 
2. Ends and Means: Chatto & Windus, 1948; p.287.
known as immortality. The fall of the Roman Empire ushered in a second period of artistic anonymity. The middle Ages produced a vast quantity of nameless painting, architecture and sculpture whose authors are unknown or very little known. With the Renaissance art once more ceased to be anonymous, and the public began to be interested in the artists as human beings, apart from their art. The autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini\(^1\) is symptomatic. Since then public interest in the personality of artists has increased, and in America carried to grotesque extremes.\(^2\)

**Form and Subject in Painting:**

Fashion changes and the views of art critics with it. At present, says Huxley, it is fashionable to believe in form to the exclusion of subject. Young people almost swoon away with excess of emotion before a Matisse.\(^3\) Two generations ago they would have been wiping their eyes before the latest Landseer.\(^4\) This should make us chary

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1. Benvenuto Cellini (1500-1571), Italian artist, metal worker and sculptor.
3. Henri Matisse (b.1869), French painter, a leading exponent of the Fauviste, a Post-Impressionist school.
of believing too exclusively in any single theory of art. One fashionable kind of painting, one fashionable set of ideas is made the basis of a theory which condemns all other kinds of painting and critical theories.

Contemporary criticism considers the formal qualities of a work of art the most essential and rejects the subject as unimportant. The young painter, therefore, scrupulously avoids introducing into his pictures anything like a story, or the expression of a view of life. He passes over in silence all that is not a matter of formal relations. Every germ of drama or meaning is disinfected out of an old picture; only its composition is admired. The process, Huxley wittily remarks, is analogous to reading Latin verses without understanding them — simply for the sake of their rhythm.

True, no picture can hold together without composition; it is obvious no man can adequately express himself unless he takes an interest in his medium of expression. Not all painters are, however, interested in the same sort of forms. Some, for example, have a passion for masses and the surfaces of solids. Others delight in lines. Some compose in three dimensions. Others prefer to make silhouettes on the flat. All these purely aesthetic considerations are important. All artists are
interested in them, but almost none to the exclusion of everything else. Good painters of 'abstract' subjects or even of still lives are rare. Apples and solid geometry do not stimulate a man to express his feelings about form and make a composition. All thoughts and emotions are interdependent. One feeling is excited by another. For example, a good painter's faculty for making noble arrangements of forms is, as in the case of Mantegna*, stimulated by his feelings about heroic and good-like humanity. Expressing those feelings, which he found exciting, he also expressed his feelings about masses, surfaces and so forth. If, on the other hand, a painter happens to possess, like Van Gogh{1} some measure of that queer pantheism, which made him look upon the humblest of common objects as being divinely or devilishly alive, he will make pictures of cabbage fields and bedrooms of cheap hotels that shall be as wildly dramatic as a Rape of the Sabines.{2}

Should a Picture Tell a Story?

To the question: should pictures tell stories?

Huxley replies that in the past the answer would have been

1. Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890), Dutch painter.

*The Rape of the Sabines* is a painting by Rubens.

* Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506), Italian painter.
been unanimously, yes. Unfortunately, today the intrusion of literature into the plastic arts is regarded as almost a crime. Huxley's own view is that, while in the hands of a bad painter, pictorial story-telling may turn a sublime subject-matter into a comicstrip, yet, it is not so when a good painter tells the same story. The exigencies of illustration stimulate his imagination on every level, including the pictorial, with the result that he produces a work which, though 'literary', is of the highest quality as a formal composition. Left to itself, the pictorial imagination even of a painter of genius could never conjure up such a subtle and complicated pattern of shapes and hues as is to be found in any famous painting of the past. It is highly significant that, in no abstract or non-representational painting of today, do we find a purely formal composition having anything like the richness, the harmonious complexity found in the earlier masters.

The distinction between the 'literary' and non-representational art is similar to the traditional distinction between the crafts and the fine arts, which is based, among other things, on degrees of complexity, because art harmonizes more, and more diverse, elements of human experience. Some of the more recent non-
representational pictures, however beautiful, are, even
the best of them, minor works, inasmuch as the number of
elements of human experience in them is pitifully small.1

While Renoir2 said, "A painter who has the sentiment
of the pap and the buttocks is a painter who portrays
real models with gusto," the pure aesthete, Huxley
remarks, should only have a feeling for hemispheres,
curved lines and surfaces. But this 'sentiment of the
buttocks' is the lowest common measure of the whole pro-
fession. As great artists like Mantegna, Michelangelo3
and Rubens4 have shown, there is no conflict between a
passion for the body and an interest in spiritual values.
The greater includes the less; the dramatic and reflect-
ive painters know everything that the aestheticians know,
and a great deal more besides. What they have to say
about formal relations is only a part of what they have to
express. The contemporary insistence on form to the
exclusion of everything else is an absurdity, Huxley sums

1. Gesualdo: Variations on a Musical Theme: Collected
3. Michelangelo (1475-1564), Florentine painter.
4. Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), Flemish painter.
up. So was the older insistence on exact imitation and sentiment to the exclusion of form. In short, there need be no exclusions.

Non-representational Elements Tell a Story Too:

Form and subject, then, are, to Huxley, equally important in painting. He goes on to discuss elsewhere another allied problem: How the formal, non-representational elements have a story of their own to tell. A representational picture is one that "tells a story". But this story is never the whole story. A picture always expresses more than is implicit in its subject. Every painter who tells a story tells it in his own manner, and that manner tells another story — about the painter himself, a story about the reaction of one highly gifted individual to his experience of the universe. While the first story is told deliberately, the second, as it were, tells itself.

Draperies:

Treatment of drapery is one way in which this second story tells itself. When you paint or carve drapery, you are painting or carving forms which, for all

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practical purposes, are non-representational. The non-representational nine-tenths of a Madonna or an Apostle may be, says Huxley, just as important qualitatively as they are in quantity. Very often they set the tone of the whole work of art, expressing the artist's mood, temperament, attitude to life. For example, Piero's smooth surfaces and broad folds reveal a stoical serenity; Bernini's enormous sartorial abstractions reveal man's heroic aspirations; the broken surfaces of Tura's draperies reveal a sense of disquiet; and so on and so forth, with Huxley's detailed and inexhaustible knowledge of painting and sculpture.

In some works, however, the non-representational passages are actually more important than the representational. Thus, in many of Bernini's statues, only the hands, feet and face are fully representational; all the rest is drapery. In El Greco's paintings, a good

1. Piero della Francesca (1416-1492), Florentine painter.
2. Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680), Italian architect and sculptor.
3. Cosima Tura (1430-1498), Italian painter, founder of the Ferrarose school.
5. Domenico Theotocopuli (1545-1614), Greek painter who settled at Toledo in Spain. He was universally called El Greco, that is to say, "The Greek".
proportion of the entire surface is occupied by low-level organic abstractions, like draperies, clouds or rocks. But these abstractions are powerfully expressive, and it is through them that, to a considerable extent, El Greco tells the private story that underlies the official subject-matter of his paintings.

**Synthesis of Abstraction and Representation:**

At this point, Huxley anticipates a question: Seeing that non-representational elements in representational works are so expressive, why should we bother with representation at all? Huxley himself would have no objection to pure abstractions which, he admits, can in the hands of a gifted artist achieve their own kind of aesthetic perfection. But this perfection, he adds, is a perfection within rather narrow limits. The Greeks called the circle 'a perfect figure'; and yet a composition consisting of a red circle inscribed within a black square would strike us, for all its perfection, as being a little dull. Nature is a richer source of forms than any textbook of plane or solid geometry. But the richness of Nature is, from our point of view, a chaos upon which we, as artists, must impose various kinds of unity. A work of art which imposes aesthetic unity upon a large number of formal and psychological elements is a
greater and more interesting work than one in which unity is imposed upon only a few elements. At their best, non-representational compositions do achieve perfection; but it is a perfection nearer to that of the simple artefact; and the most sensible and rewarding thing for a painter to do is to make the best of both the worlds, and combine representation with formal and abstract elements.¹

England:

Whatever the reason — chance or something in the national character — England has produced very few plastic artists of first-class importance. The Renaissance manifested itself differently in different countries. In Italy, the Renaissance was, more than anything, an outburst of painting, architecture and sculpture, while in Germany, its typical manifestation was only scholarship and religious reformation. In England, however, its symptoms were almost exclusively literary; though later, in the seventeenth century, there were Inigo Jones and, a little later, Wren.²

² 'Sir Christopher Wren': On the Marsin; Chatto & Windus, 1948; pp.173-74.
China and Japan:

Huxley finds Chinese art superior to Japanese art. That sobriety, that strength, that faultless refinement, which are the characteristics of Chinese art, are totally lacking in the art of Japan. The designs of Japanese fabrics are garish and pretentious; the sculpture even of the best periods is baroque; the pottery which in China is irreproachable both in hue and shape is always in Japan just not 'right'. It is as though there were some inherent vice in Japanese art which made the genuine seem false and the expensive shoddy.

This is partly due to the fact that, in recent years, we have become so familiar with the conventional forms of Japanese art turned out on machines by the million for the penny bazar market, that we cannot associate them with anything but cheapness and falsity; partly, too, due to a certain intrinsic feebleness and vulgarity in the forms themselves.¹

Phoenician Art:

The Phoenicians (heaven knows why) seem to have been incapable of producing anything but monstrosities in the field of art. This statement, perhaps, is an

¹ Jessing Pilate; Chatto & Windus, 1948; p.245.
exaggeration. For, they were capable sometimes of produc-
ing cutenesses. Their figurines of hippopotami, for ex-
ample, might have been modelled by Walt Disney. But
if art was not their strong point, commerce undoubtedly
was; and it must have been in the interests of commercial
efficiency that one of them invented the new and enormously
simpler system of writing which was destined to replace
cuneiform and hieroglyphics throughout the Near East and
Europe.¹

Mogul Painting:

While touring India, Huxley had an opportunity to see Indo-Persian water-colours of the Mogul period in the Lahore Museum. All of them he found in the highest degree 'amusing'. Their subjects are mostly scenes from domestic and courtly life, and to judge from these pictures the distractions of the Moguls were remarkably simple. Besides hunting, war, and love-making, there was the amusement of 'looking at the clouds', apparently the principal occupation of Oriental kings and queens. Those cloud-gazers are represented as standing or reclining on the roofs of their palaces, looking up at a sky full of pitch-black

¹. 'Adonis and the Alphabet': Adonis and the Alphabet; Gatto and Windus, 1956; p.182.
vapours, against which a flight of somewhat heraldic swans stands out.

The capacity to enjoy such simple pleasures, Huxley observes, is perhaps a sign of the superiority of Oriental civilization to that of the West. One of the choicest inventions in the art of living is frequently represented in the numerous love-scenes between black-bearded nawabs and fawn-eyed trousered beauties, in which amorous dalliance — on carpets of the most exquisite Persian design — is combined with the leisured smoking of the silver and crystal hookah.¹

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¹ Jesting Pilate; Chatto & Windus, 1948; pp.46-47.