



Adornment

What Self-Decoration Tells Us About Who We Are

Stephen Davies

"The wondrous array of body ornaments pictured here itself adorns a wide-ranging, learned, accessible, and fascinating discussion of aesthetics by distinguished philosopher Stephen Davies. *Adornment* is not only a feast for the eyes but for the mind." *Ellen Dissanayake, author of What Is Art For? and Homo Aestheticus*

"Decoration is often dismissed as trivial, but Davies shows how deep-seated and functional the human impulse to decorate is. He argues that it is nothing less than one of our most fundamental modes of communication. This fascinating tour of adornment is bound to transform readers' outlook, drawing attention to the aesthetic embellishments that we add to everything we touch." *Kathleen M. Higgins, Professor of Philosophy, The University of Texas at Austin, USA*

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Elaborating the history, variety, pervasiveness, and function of the adornments and ornaments with which we beautify ourselves, this book takes in human prehistory, ancient civilizations, hunter-foragers, and present-day industrial societies to tell a captivating story of hair, skin, and make-up practices across times and cultures.

From the decline of the hat, the function of jewelry and popularity of tattooing to the wealth of grave goods found in the Upper Paleolithic burials and body painting of the Nuba, we see that there is no one who does not adorn themselves, their possessions, or their environment. But what messages do these adornments send? Drawing on aesthetics, evolutionary history, archaeology, ethology, anthropology, psychology, cultural history, and gender studies, Stephen Davies brings together African, Australian and North and South American indigenous cultures and unites them around the theme of adornment. He shows us that adorning is one of the few social behaviors that is close to being genuinely universal, more typical and extensive than the high-minded activities we prefer to think of as marking our species – religion, morality, and art.

Each chapter shows how modes of decoration send vitally important signals about what we care about, our affiliations and backgrounds, our social status and values. In short, by using the theme of bodily adornment to unify a very diverse set of human practices, this book tells us about who we are.

Stephen Davies is Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. He is an inaugural Fellow of the New Zealand Academy of the Humanities and a Fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand. He is a former President of the American Society for Aesthetics and Vice-President of the International Association for Aesthetics. He is on the editorial boards of *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, *Philosophy Compass*, and *Rivista di Estetica*, he is a consulting editor for *Res Musica* and *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, and he is co-editor for aesthetics in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

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