

Cosmology and Belief

Theme 5: Cosmology and Belief

Introduction

In all cultures, people strive to understand their reason for being and their place in the universe. Art can be an instrument for not only recording spiritual beliefs, but also for creating myths, defining the realms of mortal and immortal, communing with ancestors, channeling forces of good, and repelling those of evil.

Session

Review:

1. Share your responses to the comparison questions for Ceremony and Society.
2. Share any other questions or ideas prompted by the previous assignment.

Watch the Cosmology and Belief video (30 minutes).

Consider/discuss the following:

1. What purpose do creation myths play in the development of societies and cultural values?
2. Even when societies are distant from each other, their creation stories often have similar underlying themes and comparable characters. What themes or character types are similar in different stories or art depicting divine creation? What do these narratives' similarities say about humankind in general?
3. Many cultures have organized their universe in some type of cosmological order. How has this helped people discover their own roles in life? How do these organizational conceptions of the universe influence how societies govern their social structures and systems? In examples from the program, how have different cultures reconciled their spiritual notions with the scientific theories available to them?
4. How does art help deliver the ideas and beliefs of a divinity? How does viewing works of spiritual or religious art help people understand a belief system and, perhaps, increase their devotion to it?
5. What differences can you identify between objects meant for personal worship or devotion and those meant for public view?
6. How does the scale or form of a religious site of worship change the follower's relationship to it and the faith it represents? How do the materials with which religious structures or objects are made affect their meaning? What architectural similarities or differences can be seen in the places of worship of different religions?

Between Sessions:

Go to the Web site at www.learner.org/courses/globalart and:

1. Explore featured artworks from this program, including the descriptive text and the expert perspective commentary.
2. Read the chapter about Cosmology and Belief in the downloadable text.
3. On the Web, compare selected artworks by considering the questions posed. Prepare to share your responses by taking notes. Bring your notes to the next session.