

Death

Theme 6: Death

Introduction

Death is one of the few experiences common to all people and all societies. But how different people have conceived of death and how those conceptions have shaped their behaviors and practices has varied over time and across cultures. Through art, people have expressed attitudes toward death that are in some respects universal, while in others personally and culturally specific. They have, moreover, used a wide range of objects, images, and structures to negotiate the processes of aging and dying, grieving and commemorating.

Session

Review:

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

Watch the Death video (30 minutes).

Consider/discuss the following:

1. What does the concern for naturalism indicate about a culture's beliefs concerning death and the afterlife?
2. Of the examples featured in the program, which of the death-related rituals, ceremonies, and funerary art were created for the living, and which were created for the deceased?
3. While tombs, coffins, cemeteries, grave markers, monuments, and other ceremonial objects were intended to commemorate the dead, how have they also served political or social purposes?
4. A *memento mori* is an image that serves as a reminder of the inevitability of death and the transience of human life. While different types of images have served this purpose, skulls and skeletal figures are seen in the art of different cultures. In viewing the featured art images in the program, how do the skulls or skeletons in these works reflect different cultural views of life and death?
5. Certain objects were buried along with the deceased, such as the Book of the Dead in ancient Egypt, or the terracotta warriors buried with the Qin Emperor of China. What were the intended purposes of these objects?

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 Death 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.