

Abstract to “Life is a Passacaglia”  
Stephen Davies

Danto's theory of art implies that Westerners cannot recognize non-Western art as such, because its "atmosphere of theory" is not known to them. Nevertheless, sometimes he writes as if we can understand foreign art. I argue that, though there are aesthetic universals rooted in our common biological inheritance and shared environments, these can be inflected by culture in ways that disguise their natural import. Yet, even if connoisseurship requires cultural immersion, the skills of a dilettante might be acquired with surprising ease. Even tourists might learn to identify foreign artworks and to appreciate some of their significant features. Such understanding is partial but genuine.