

WHEN ART FLOURISHES

STEPHEN HICKS, PH.D.



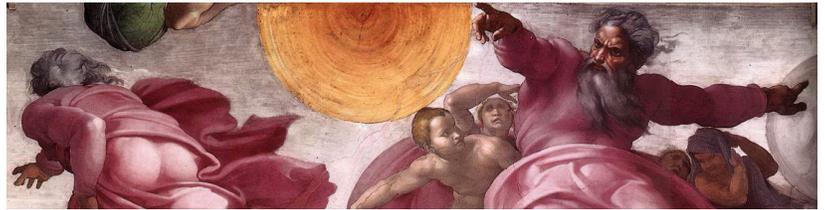
Why does art flourish

in some cultures but not in others? Classical Athens had its artistic golden age—

neighboring Sparta did not. Renaissance Florence was brilliant—the Kingdom of Naples, not so much. The Dutch Golden Age was artistically vigorous—nearby Denmark was not. Paris in the nineteenth century was a cauldron of aesthetic innovation—in Prussia, not much was happening. Why?

Michelangelo's epic struggle with Pope Julius—the young Rembrandt's long hair and eccentrically stylish clothes—Monet and the early Impressionists' battle against the conventions and monopoly of the Salon—what do they teach us about the rising prestige, the cultivation of individuality, and the social and artistic freedom of the artist?

While Michelangelo, Rembrandt, and Monet were standout geniuses of their times, for each great genius their cultures produced dozens or hundreds of other near-geniuses. How did they do it?



In this image-rich documentary, Professor Stephen Hicks looks at the factors—economic, political, religious, scientific and philosophical—that unleash eras of artistic creativity. **The greatest of the great eras in art emerged from liberal cultures—cultures marked by relaxed or worldly religion, freethinking philosophy and science, democratic or republican politics, and market-friendly and cosmopolitan economies.** Those cultural preconditions existed in Athens, Florence and Venice, the Dutch states, and France and made possible the artistic flowerings there.

When Art Flourishes then turns to our contemporary art world. In the United States and Europe, we hear many voices of despair about our impoverished arts culture—and we hear them from both the cultural left and the cultural right. To what extent are the cultural factors that enabled artistic achievement in Athens,



Florence, Holland, and Paris at work in our time? Do the lessons of history suggest that we should be optimistic or pessimistic about the future of art? And looking further afield, do the same cultural factors explain impressive artistic achievement in eastern cultures—China, Japan, and India?

Great art does not happen accidentally. *When Art Flourishes* connects art history with cultural economics to show that those societies that develop liberal institutions create the material wealth and psychological freedom that nurture artistic creation.

About Stephen Hicks: Stephen Hicks is professor of philosophy at Rockford College, where he is also executive director of the Center for Ethics and Entrepreneurship. He is widely published in the fields of philosophy, history, and aesthetics, including *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism from Rousseau to Foucault*, *Why Art became Ugly: From Modern to Postmodern Art*, and the documentary *Nietzsche and the Nazis*.

