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TEACHING TUESDAY

WABI-SABI

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Wabi-sabi is a type of Japanese aesthetic that focuses on the elegance of simplicity and the beauty of transience and imperfection. Some characteristics include asymmetry, roughness, simplicity, modesty, and an appreciation of natural processes and materials.

Wabi-sabi was originally two separate words, with related meanings of loneliness, but became an aesthetic through the teachings and ideals of Buddhism. Through their solitary lifestyle, Buddhist monks began to appreciate simplistic, rustic beauty and found this was a welcome relief from materialism. This outlook and the notion of *mu*, or “nothingness,” which taught monks to see inherent beauty in the desolate, transformed the words into an aesthetic revered for its elegant simplicity. In addition, it is thought *wabi-sabi* was embraced in contrast to the popular aesthetic ideals of beauty and perfection.

Wabi-sabi can describe an array of aesthetics ranging from the arts to natural, everyday occurring phenomena. Some examples include: tea houses, *Ginkaku-ji* in Kyoto, *ikebana* (flower arrangement), Japanese Zen gardens, Japanese pottery, and falling autumn leaves. A stark contrast to the sleek and uniform designs of modernism, *wabi-sabi* has become a worldwide phenomenon that is discussed at design forums, art galleries, home decorating magazines, and more.