

Visual Culture, Heritage and Identity

Using Rock Art to Reconnect Past and Present

edited by

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Cover: Alexei L. Ulturgashev, *Fertile Spirit*, oil on canvas, 67 x 86 cm, date unknown, late 20th or early 21st century (Photo: Dolinin Boris Ven'iamovich and Sergei G. Narylkov, published with acceptance of S.G. Narylkov). This painting was inspired by prehistoric images, mainly by the image of the 'beast' engraved on the Bronze Age stela of the Okunevo culture discovered in Askiz in Khakassia (southern Siberia) and other petroglyphs.

Composition of different Siberian rock art motifs traced and arranged by Vladimir F. Kapel'ko, archive of The Khakas National Museum of Local Lore named after L.R. Kyzlasov in Abakan (Photo: Andrzej Rozwadowski).

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A Brief Note about the Editors

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Using Rock Art to Reconnect Past and Present: An Introduction

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The study of rock art engages both archaeology and anthropology. The simple fact that the majority of rock paintings and engravings were created in prehistoric times makes their connection to archaeology obvious and evident. If we agree, however, that the ‘ultimate purpose of rock art *research* [...] is to *explain*’ (Lewis-Williams 2001: 24) – that is, to try to elucidate why the images were created – then we see just how important anthropological perspectives and approaches are. After all, anthropology is the field of social sciences best acquainted with questions surrounding the complexity of human culture and its interpretation; as such, anthropological thinking cannot be excluded from any research attempting to explain human actions. Rock art, however, has at least two further anthropological dimensions. First, many rock paintings and engravings were made in relatively recent times. Second, images on rocks, no matter how old, are often – perhaps always? – subject to reinterpretation, thus becoming active elements of contemporary socio-cultural processes. There are then strong arguments for seeing rock art research as both anthropologically as well as archaeologically shaped, as evidenced by the recent compendium *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology and Anthropology of Rock Art* (David and McNiven 2018).

The global development of rock art studies has resulted in a great number of publications, professional and popular, and often wonderfully illustrated – these publications have piqued an interest in rock paintings and engravings around the world.¹ Many rock art sites are today easily accessible to tourists, and many countries strive for recognition from the UNESCO World Heritage committee, not just for pride and prestige, but also for the measurable economic benefits resulting from the development of tourism. It should come as no surprise that this applies not only to European cave paintings, but also to rock art sites in almost every corner of the world (e.g. Duval and Smith 2012; Duval *et al.* 2018). The (re)discovery of the Paleolithic painted caves in Europe at the turn of the 20th century was accompanied by an aura of sensation and mystery prompted by not

only the unexpected age of the images, but also by their stunning aesthetics and ‘formal perfection’. No wonder that not only scientists but also contemporary artists were intrigued by this ‘first’ art.² Indeed, the fascination shown by early 20th century artists left an important mark on contemporary culture, and, as we hope this volume demonstrates, it was this fascination that was (at least to some extent) responsible for subsequent returns to rock art as a source of inspiration for artists up until the present day. Rock art, then, is an aspect of both archaeology and anthropology – but it is also inherent to studies of art history, visual culture, heritage, identity, and socio-politics. As Paul Taçon and Liam Brady point out in their milestone volume related to rock art in the contemporary world (Brady and Taçon 2016), rock art is ‘a distinctive symbolic marker surviving in the modern world’ and as such ‘is used to negotiate contemporary relationships between people, places, and identity’ (Taçon and Brady 2016: 5). Rock art discourse and research, therefore, is not simply ‘archaeologically driven’ (Taçon and Brady 2016: 5).

Rock art research encompasses a wide range of questions and vitally important topics. What attracts our attention in this volume are the anthropological, sociological, and artistic dimensions of rock art: how it is perceived, how it shapes social relations, how it functions in identity processes, and how it influences contemporary artistic activities. Put simply, we are interested in the *re-use* of rock art. How and why are paintings and engravings used and re-used? What are the results of these re-uses? All of these questions furthermore contribute to the issue of rock art as heritage. Vivid debates revolving around the questions ‘what is heritage?’ and ‘who or what makes heritage?’ (Harrison 2013) show that the very statement that rock art is ‘the only concrete intelligible expression and testimony of the complexity of the thoughts, beliefs, and cults of lost Indigenous civilizations’ (Clottes 2008: 1), although true and stimulating, may appear insufficient to some critics because it implies that rock art is a thing from the past (see e.g. Smith 2006). Here, we stress that

¹ For more on the history of rock art research, see Whitley 2001, and Hampson *et al.* forthcoming.

² Of course, we now know that the earliest art was produced outside of Europe.

rock art deserves the status of heritage, particularly because it is central to numerous contemporary discourses and social interactions. Indeed, rock art is heritage not simply because it is admired, but rather because it is used and re-used by people, here and now, to negotiate their place in the world.

The chapters in this volume stem from a session titled 'Modern (Re)Uses of Rock Art: Art, Identity and Visual Culture' that we organised at the International Federation of Rock Art Organisations (IFRAO) Congress in Valcamonica in 2018. Some, but not all, of the researchers who took part in that session were trained archaeologically. We believe that discussions between researchers with diverse backgrounds can and do help us develop a multifaced understanding of rock art, rock art created in the past but used (and re-used) in the present.

The volume starts with Jamie Hampson and Rory Weaver's chapter *Indigenous art in new contexts: inspiration or appropriation?* Stemming from many years of fieldwork in southern Africa, North America, and Australia, Hampson and Weaver consider how Indigenous art shapes, reaffirms, and challenges cultural and socio-political identities today. Through anthropological and visual heritage lenses, the authors address concepts of reproduction, agency, emotion, and affect, and suggest how the trivialisation of appropriated rock art motifs might be avoided. Using specific case studies – including the recontextualisation of First Nation images in Canada; Kokopelli and Thunderbird motifs in the USA; San paintings in South Africa; and Aboriginal art in Australia – Hampson and Weaver show that there is still much work to be done, above and beyond the 'common sense' approaches of respect and openness. They also show that the scramble by researchers for the moral high ground is itself often unfettered by moral concerns.

Pilar Fatás's chapter on *The Cave of Altamira and contemporary artistic creation* takes us further into the world of contemporary art, to a vivid theme that is still rarely discussed in today's rock art discourse. (The 'presence' of rock art in contemporary art was, in fact, the initial topic of the IFRAO session; only once we received more proposals than anticipated did we decide to extend the remit to other aspects of the contemporary re-uses of rock art.) Fatás takes us back to a very early phase of rock art research: the discovery of Altamira in 1868 and its art in 1879. This milestone not only had profound consequences for archaeology, it also had a great impact on the everyday, non-scientific world. Indeed, the Altamira paintings quickly aroused the interest – and even obsession! – of numerous artists, and acted as the catalyst for new artistic movements such as the 'Altamira School'.

The art of Altamira (as well as that in other caves in the Franco-Cantabrian region) enchanted and inspired artists by its alleged simplicity and perfection; the beautiful paintings prompted people to discover their unrestrained and primordial creative souls. Twentieth-century artists were inspired by the iconography and technique of the (so-called) 'first painters' not only in Europe but also in North America, where abstract expressionism flourished. Fatás reminds us that we would do well to take note of not only the iconographic aspects of early art (which for a long time dominated rock art analyses), but also the importance of technique and action: the use of the hand, the paints based on natural dyes or sand, and so on (cf. Jones and Cochrane 2018).³ Fatás also makes clear that artistic fascination with Palaeolithic art continues today, as exemplified by Andrea Benetti's (2009) 'Manifesto of Neo Cave Art' at the Venice Biennale.

The re-use of rock art by contemporary artists is not limited to Palaeolithic art. As noted above, rock art can be and is of importance to contemporary societies not just because of its age, but also because of its connection to modern-day culture and identity. Sometimes, and especially in post-colonial nations, this link is very strong; indeed, in some regions people *still* paint and engrave rocks, and others 'keep alive' the memory of ancestral artists (e.g. May *et al.* 2019; O'Connor *et al.* 2008). These relationships often span long periods of time, as shown in Alisdair MacRae's chapter *Joane Cardinal-Schubert: ancient contemporary*. Cardinal-Schubert, who died in 2009, was an Indigenous Canadian artist of Kainai Nation ancestry; rock art was an important element of her artistic and political manifesto of cultural identity. Cardinal-Schubert had a special relationship with a place known as Writing-on-Stone or *Áísínai'pi* in Alberta (recently inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List); for her, the petroglyphs there became a symbol of the primacy and connection of Indigenous peoples to the 'Canadian' land, a testimony of the power and its centuries-long continuity in the tradition of First Nation peoples. Cardinal-Schubert was also involved in artistic documentation of the Writing-on-Stone petroglyphs, as demonstrated in many of her works. She represents a generation of Canadian artists who have no fear of talking about the appropriation of Indigenous culture, its degradation by some (Western-oriented) sections of Canadian society, and the enormous trauma associated with the experience of the boarding/residential school system. In fact, the art of contemporary Indigenous Canadian artists has a particularly strong political dimension; the ancient rock art the artists recall in their works are part of a wider identity discourse. As with other Indigenous art traditions, the significance of rock art to Indigenous North American artists is due primarily to the fact that

³ See also the chapter in this volume by Lina do Carmo.

the paintings and engravings were created by Native Americans First Nations peoples, and no matter how long ago (hundreds or sometimes thousands of years). The priority is the place: pictographs and petroglyphs are *from here*. Of course, sometimes the relationship between ancient art and contemporary artists is remarkably strong, as in the case of Cardinal-Schubert, for whom the rock art of Writing-on-Stone is all the more poignant because of its uncontested links to the traditions of the Great Plains Indians, of which her Kainai people are a part.

Canada is an attention-grabbing region when we consider the re-use of rock art. Equally powerful transformations of rock art motifs into symbols of identity can be found in the art of Jane Ash Poitras, a Cree artist who also lives in Alberta (McCallum 2011; Rozwadowski 2019). To a lesser extent, we find rock art motifs in the works of other First Nation artists (such as Carl Ray, Carl Beam, and contemporary artists Alan Syliboy and Marianne Nicolson), all of whom continue the tradition started by a true legend of Indigenous Canadian modern art, the Ojibwa (Anishinaabe) artist Norval Morriseau (McLuhan and Hill 1984). Indeed, in the 1960s Morriseau was arguably the first artist in Canada to bring the Indigenous vision of the world into contemporary art galleries. One of the sources of his iconography was rock art, particularly paintings from the Great Lakes region. Morriseau learnt about the meaning of these pictographs from the elders, but interestingly, the first person he then shared information with was his friend Selwyn Dewdney, an artist, amateur archaeologist and pioneer of rock art research in Canada (Dewdney and Kidd 1962).

This relationship between archaeologists and artists (whether Indigenous or otherwise) turns out to be symptomatic of the theme of the presence of rock art in contemporary art. Indeed, we find a similar situation in a completely different part of the world: Siberia. This is the focus of Andrzej Rozwadowski and Magdalena Boniec's chapter *Face to face with ancestors: Indigenous codes in the contemporary art of Siberia*, which illustrates the phenomenon of contemporary Siberian artists re-using rock art. Their studies concentrate on the Khakassia, a small South Siberian republic rich in ancient art forms. As in Canada, archaeology here also has become a catalyst for weaving rock art motifs into contemporary art. In Khakassia, an important role in this process was played by Vladimir Kapiel'ko, a unique artist and amateur archaeologist, who also documented numerous petroglyph sites in the field. In late twentieth century Siberia, a distinct artistic movement called Siberian Neoarchaic emerged, and strove to revive the 'original spirit' of Siberia; rock art was, and indeed still is, one of the media through which modern artists try to reconnect with the 'primordial Siberian spirit'.

For Indigenous artists in Siberia, rock art was and is a source of personal and national identity; for those without Indigenous roots the paintings and engravings were and are rather the source of a new artistic-territorial identity, one that gives them the opportunity to distance themselves from the gravitational pull of Moscow. For some, prehistoric art has also become the source of 'mystical' identity; like Miró, and the other artists highlighted in Fatás's chapter, some Siberian artists actively study ancient beliefs and rock art in order to find or re-discover a primordial 'creative base'.

In their chapter *Contemporary views on rock art from within the frame: Indigenous cultural continuity and artistic engagement with rock art*, Marisa Giorgi and Dale Harding demonstrate how rock art links past and present while simultaneously educating people about the values of Indigenous culture. Dale Harding, a Bidjara Indigenous artist from central Queensland, Australia, draws inspiration from local rock art. He states that 'If the work doesn't relate to your family and your community, then what's the point?' (Harding 2019). In his work we can see the issues we have already highlighted – such as making contact with the past not only through the simple copying of the rock art motifs, but also through specific techniques. Harding (2019) tells us that 'working directly on gallery walls is an acknowledgement and continuation of painting stories on sandstone walls'. Through his art, Harding aims to change the perception of rock art as mere 'pretty pictures' or tourist attraction. Indeed, it is clear that rock art has for too long been presented through the prism of Western values and aesthetics, rather than the Indigenous values reflected by and rooted in the images – stories, myths or the landscape itself, from which the rock paintings and engravings cannot be separated (e.g. Gillette *et al.* 2015). The challenges here touch therefore upon the complex issue of selective appropriation of the Indigenous world – here by means of rock art motifs, which Westerners often separate from the motifs' original cultural contexts. The problem is all the more pressing because it involves the commercial exploitation of indigeneity, which nearly always benefits the people who appropriate rather than those whose art is appropriated. Here it is worth recalling the similar situation on Gabriola Island in British Columbia (Canada), described in Hampson and Weaver's chapter.

In his work, Harding engages young people by encouraging new avenues of knowledge transfer, as well as respect for, and understanding of, rock art. This brings us closer to the contemporary art of Lina do Carmo, a Brazilian dancer who draws inspiration from the rock paintings of the Serra da Capivara in Brazil. Her chapter *PalimpsGestures: rock art and the recreation of body expression* is an outline (*sensu* autoethnography) of her personal experience and fascination with rock

art from the point of view of a contemporary artist. Do Carmo aims to ‘embody’ ancient paintings in her choreographic practice, and she attempts to build a unique emotional bond with ancient artists who, she says, are ‘revived’ in and through her art projects. According to do Carmo, this bond is strengthened by the fact that her works are carried out in front of the paintings, i.e. in caves and rock shelters with ancient images. The ‘graphic stability’ of the rock paintings is transformed into the living movement of the human body. Do Carmo’s work can be read as a mystical union with images from the past, where the images of dancing figures on the rock dance anew in and through the body of the artist. Do Carmo channels a primordial vibration of rock art images, similar once again to artists such as Miró, but this time in the form of dance rather than ‘plastic arts’. If we talk about the embodiment of ancient visual forms in contemporary art, the actions of do Carmo can be read as a particularly full embodiment! The artistic voice of do Carmo allows us also to reflect on the possible reactions that rock images can and do evoke, not only socially but on an individual level. Could other ‘forgotten’ images from the past also evoke such emotional reactions and generate new individual and social artworks and actions?

Moving to southern India, Laura Teresa Tenti introduces us to the honey-gathering Alu Kurumba and Toda people in her chapter *In the name of ancestors: repainted identities and land memories*. Rock art in this region is, once again, an element of the manifestation of identity and connection with the land and ancestors. As in many areas of Australia, local contemporary painters refresh existing rock art in order to ‘keep the country healthy’ (e.g. O’Connor *et al.* 2008). There are other interesting parallels, too: *Kinatthillrshy*, a river sacred to the Toda people, is said to have been created by the gods as a response to the breaking of honey-gathering etiquette. As Teresa Tenti makes clear, this tells us that ‘Toda beliefs are the backbone of their religion and society, without which neither could stand’. Moreover, the Toda people believe that the deep appreciation of rock paintings helps exert pressure against unwanted government intervention and ecological degradation. In this chapter we also learn that Krishna Kitna, an artist whose grandfather Mathan was the last guardian of the Alu Kurumba ‘ritual art’ that was directly connected to ancient rock paintings, today produces canvas art inspired by earlier artistic traditions. Krishna honours his ancestors, but he also acknowledges that the artworks he makes are ‘revival products’ that meet the expectations of consumers. Above all, he sees himself as the ‘last caretaker’ of an ancient rock art tradition.

Building, maintaining and (sometimes) challenging identity through the reinterpretation of local rock art(s) is a widespread phenomenon (e.g. Gwasira *et al.* 2017)

– and two further studies provide evidence of this. Jairo Saw Munduku, Eliano Kirixi Munduku and Raoni Valle show in their chapter ‘*Muraycoko wuyta’a be surabudodot/ ibarakat*’: *rock art and territorialization in contemporary Indigenous Amazonia - the case of the Munduruku people from the Tapajos River* just how important places with rock art are for the self-identity of the Munduruku. Rock art shapes the Munduruku perception of territory – a perception that is often difficult to translate into Western terms. Unlike ancient Indigenous villages and other cultural nodes, rock art sites are considered to be highly dangerous – some can only be visited in the company of a *wamōat* (benign shaman). Songs referring to *Muraycoko*, the father-of-writing and producer of *sura* (sacred paint), help create wellbeing and connect Munduruku people to sacred landscapes with rock art, merging the past into present, and ‘history into geography’. Moreover, this chapter demonstrates how archaeological sites and sacred places can and do become tools for Indigenous resistance to government attempts at illegal land-grabs; using sacred rock art, the Munduruku hope to enact ‘the cultural shielding of the Indigenous territory’.

Gerard O’Regan, in his chapter *Appropriation, re-appropriation, reclamation: the re-use of New Zealand’s most renowned Māori rock art*, addresses the different forms of recontextualisation in New Zealand. He looks at misappropriation (by non- Māori groups), and the re-use of old motifs by Māori artists today; he also analyses Māori efforts – some more successful than others – to reclaim tribal and community authority over both rock art motifs and the ancestral places in which they were originally created. O’Regan’s primary and telling case study, the Opihi *tanihwa* (monsters), brings together many of the themes that thread their way throughout this edited volume: authenticity, ownership, education, inspiration, and identity. O’Regan considers which meaning ‘is or is not carried into the reuse of the rock art’. He stresses that, unsurprisingly, ambiguities and (often heated) debates exist when sacred symbols are recontextualised. Importantly, however, this ‘does not excuse or condone particular actions, but, rather, it highlights the benefit of thinking widely and clearly about what we are actually doing when we draw on our relationships with the rock art.’

Finally, when thinking about the contemporary re-use of rock art motifs we inevitably face the issue of presentations and displays in museums, that is copies and facsimiles of original forms. Almost every year new museums or rock art centres are built, or virtually created. One of the most spectacular forms of re-presented rock art is undoubtedly cave replicas, whole or significant parts of them, with their ‘accurate’ reproductions of paintings and petroglyphs. The last great undertaking in this respect was the creation

of a complete copy of the Chauvet Cave (Duval *et al.* 2019), which is certainly a consequence of the huge success (including commercial success) of the Lascaux replicas, now in its fourth edition. In his chapter *Reproduction, simulation and the hyperreal: a case study of 'Lascaux III' 2015-2017*, Robert Wallis addresses the mobile third iteration (Lascaux III). He points out that it is no longer necessary for tourists to travel to the Dordogne in France in order to experience the charm of the ancient paintings; instead, Lascaux comes to them. Wallis considers the kind of information the Lascaux exhibitions carry, which emotions they evoke in the viewer, and the extent to which they reflect and propagate the scientific knowledge of this ancient art and Palaeolithic way of life.

The set of chapters in this volume is one more step in an important process that has gained pace over the last decade or so (although see e.g. Dowson 1996): that is, to increase and broaden awareness of the role of rock art in the contemporary world (e.g. Baracchini and Monney 2018; Blundell and Woolagoodja 2012; Blundell *et al.* 2018; Brady and Taçon 2016; Gwasira *et al.* 2017; Rogers 2018; Rozwadowski 2014, 2019; Russell and Russell-Cook 2018). As Marisa Giorgi and Dale Harding state, one admirable – and indeed achievable – aim is surely to overcome ‘a static view of rock art as being from the past and not having contemporary relevance.’

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