

New perspectives on prehistoric art
Edited by Günter Berghaus

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Following the discovery of Franco-Caribbean cave art in the nineteenth century, standard interpretations of these works usually revolved around hunting, magic, and fertility cults. Orthodox positions such as these have weighed heavily on later generations of art historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists, even those whose views dissented from those of their predecessors. In the last few decades, however, new approaches to cave art, often based on discoveries made in Africa, Asia, Australia, North America, and the Arctic region, have produced new insights into possible meanings and functions of prehistoric paintings and sculptures. This new collection of essays explores these insights, gathering the observations of eight experts from a variety of disciplines, and examining some of the social and spiritual functions of a variety of artistic genres ranging from 40,000 B.C. to 5,000 B.C.

These insights, which derive from evolutionary biology, feminist scholarship, ritual studies, and new modes of anthropology, argue collectively that prehistoric art was a culture-specific form of communication that should be interpreted in the social context of early hunter-gatherer societies and should not be measured with the criteria and paradigms of modern art. Essential reading for anyone interested in prehistoric art or its cultural implications, this volume represents a bold step forward in the research and analysis of the very first artists.

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