

1-1-2015

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Recommended Citation

VanGelder, Leslie, "Group Sizes of Upper Paleolithic Cave Artists" (2015). *Walden Faculty and Staff Publications*. 206.

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3. What's New in What's Old?

15942 - Group Sizes of Upper Paleolithic Cave Artists

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): *Van Gelder, Leslie, (Walden University, Minneapolis, MN, USA)*

Since the first cave art was discovered two central questions have plagued the research. “Who made the art?” and “Why?” Multiple theories have been raised and explored, however, few lacked hard data to be able to narrow down to the individual level of artist and intention. Recent research focused on the study of finger flutings – lines drawn with hands and fingers in the soft surfaces of caves – has yielded a wealth of forensic data about their creators. While there is still no definitive way to know if the fluters are also the artists of the painted and engraved images, they leave increasingly clearer images and begin to answer some of the questions of what individuals were doing in the caves. One of the most promising areas of research, and the one on which this paper focuses, is the subject of group sizes as we are able to determine through forensics the minimum number of individuals who fluted the caves. By identifying individuals in various parts of the caves we are able to know who the artists were, where they went, and how many individuals participated in the creation of specific panels. Through this we are able to respond to some of the previously proposed theories on the use of the caves and raise new questions about specific cultures within the broader time frames of the Upper Paleolithic.

15898 - Learning to See and Seeing to Learn: Children, Communities of Practice and Pleistocene Visual Cultures

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): *Nowell, April (University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada / Kanada)*

During the Late Pleistocene, children in southwest France and northern Spain grew up engaging with the world around them through the lenses of locally and historically-situated pictorial cultures. This particular period and region is not the site of the earliest example of symbolic behavior, nor is it the only example of the production of imagery during the Pleistocene but the rich record of Franco-Cantabrian visual material culture provides a unique opportunity to explore how children learned to decode and transform the world around them through imagery. In this paper, focusing on parietal art, I consider the biological, cognitive and social underpinnings of the uniquely human ability to move between two and three dimensional worlds and to perceive a fourth dimension—time—through the perception of motion from still images. These abilities, which can be traced through the archaeological record, allowed children and the adults they became, new ways of imagining and acting in the world and may be key to understanding our success as a species.

15863 - Gallus and the Altar of Symbolic Discontent

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): *Walshe, Keryn (South Australia Museum, Adelaide, Australia / Australien)*

Koonalda Cave, situated on the Nullarbor Plain of South Australia is well known for its antiquity, its finger flutings and flint mining. The archaeology of this very important site was first brought to public attention by Dr Alexander Gallus, a Hungarian immigrant to Australia post WW2. Gallus brought to the archaeological investigation of this site his extensive experience of working in various Palaeolithic caves of Europe. Gallus looked at the entire cultural spectrum revealed in Koonalda Cave. His interpretation of the artefacts was argued, as was the postulated 30,000 year old date for the cave, but it was his claim that naturally shaped nodules of flint had been deliberately placed as sculptural objects imbued with symbolism that caused the greatest controversy. Bluntly, his identification of a sacred space was scorned by serious academics and professional archaeologists. However recent revisions of the site and its assemblages; finger flutings and connected Indigenous knowledge have encouraged the author to revisit Gallus's thinking. Can new methods of investigation, discussion with Indigenous people and a 'lightening up' of embedded cultural attitudes held by academics and professionals allow novel insight to a highly complex cultural space? Is it possible that there is not only merit in Gallus's exploration of the naturally formed flint but a valid expression within the vast array of symbolic cultural expressions more readily identified in the site? This presentation will (bravely) explore this path and comment on the place of 'Gallus and his altar' in 21st century exploration of Australia's ancient caves.

