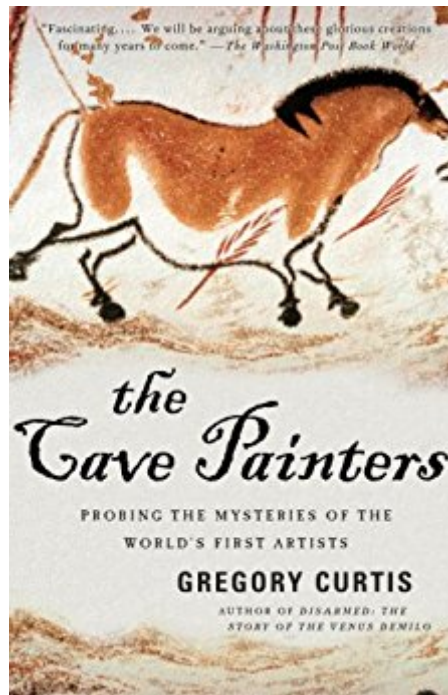


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The Cave Painters: Probing The Mysteries Of The World's First Artists



Synopsis

The Cave Painters is a vivid introduction to the spectacular cave paintings of France and Spain— the individuals who rediscovered them, theories about their origins, their splendor and mystery. Gregory Curtis makes us see the astonishing sophistication and power of the paintings and tells us what is known about their creators, the Cro-Magnon people of some 40,000 years ago. He takes us through various theories—that the art was part of fertility or hunting rituals, or used for religious purposes, or was clan mythology—examining the ways interpretations have changed over time. Rich in detail, personalities, and history, The Cave Painters is above all permeated with awe for those distant humans who developed—perhaps for the first time—both the ability for abstract thought and a profound and beautiful way to express it. From the Trade Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

The Cave Painters tells the stories of the recognition that the mastodons and mammoths, the bulls and the horses, the cave lions and bears pictured on the ceilings and walls are as old as they are.

Cave by cave, the discoveries of the cave paintings in France and Spain are described, when the archeologists decided for concluding some paintings were over 20,000 years old. Everyone knew that the older the art the more primitive it would be in the kindergarten of our ancestral years, the paleolithic and neolithic. Not so, it has turned out using techniques such as carbon dating. The animals that sizzle with life were not painted by Roman soldiers nor were they hoaxes. Some, as The Cave Painters tells, go back 25,000 or more years and many are of great mastery, like the black and red chalk drawings of Da Vinci, and with the draftsmanship of Picasso. Well illustrated, well researched, well written, this is a marvelous companion, whether read as an introduction and history of the discoveries or as a grand tale of scholarly wrestling with why these animals were painted (hunting magic? shamanism? community building?) and what role they played in ancient lives. I read this book before, during, and after I was lucky enough to get one of the few reservations for a guided trip to a cave still open to the public, Cuevas del Monte Castillo, at Puentes Viesgos near Santander, Spain. Thus I can verify first hand how good this book is as a guide and companion. The Cuevas is only for the agile, physically nimble and non-claustrophobic. As stated in The Cave Painters, many artists today would be hard-put to equal the ancient artists' mastery of action, perspective, visual memory, shading, and draftsmanship. Go while you can to see the real deal and take this splendid book with you. I also visited Altamira, fully discussed in The Cave Painters. What is now open to the public is a replica of one ceiling, totally accessible and while done as well as one could, is like a guppy in a fishbowl is to the fish traffic jams in Bali's Blue Lagoon. The Cave Painters helped imagine the originals from the replica, another benefit of this fine book.

This book will take you from being a newbie to being a devotee of cave painting. I find myself now obsessed with not just the paintings, but with the brilliant questions that Curtis raises as he brings the reader through not only the facts and history, but the intellectual and academic arguments and theories around these early artists. He balances science with narrative, speculation with fact, and the history of unknown painters with the history of today's cave painting hunters and scholars. This book is a colorful palette of beauty, mystery and ultimately, the question of what is art and what makes us so very human.

Excellent. Having read several more well known books on this subject I wondered if one existed that wasn't overwhelmed by pontification and speculation. Well yes there is and this is it. Straight forward, informative, concise, illuminating and highly readable this the book for the layman (me) who wants a comprehensive primer on prehistoric cave paintings. If you are more into overlaying our own

societal and religious experience onto what is actually known about the caves there are several other books you will prefer.

This is not only a synopsis of the theories regarding how the cave art came about and what purpose it served, it is also a review of what we know about the time of arrival of homo sapiens sapiens in Europe as well as the identifying features of the Ice Age and the tools that early man made and used. I can say that this is an interesting and very helpful book written by a journalist and will help anyone to understand the various levels of the Paleolithic era and cave art and the people who made it.

Happy with purchase.

Seven years old now, but still a very good introduction to the topic and pleasure to read. A couple of bits here and there have been superseded in the years since, but this is a fine overview of the caves, the art, the leading scholars and schools of thought about how and why these masterpieces were created and the role, whatever it was, they played in the lives and societies of the artists. A lot of reviews here with a good deal of detail, so in short: if the topic interests you and you are starting from, or near, scratch, this is a keeper. Well-written, well-researched and a little flight of fancy at the end doesn't bother me in the least.

I found this book fascinating, with stories very well told. It was superb background before actually viewing Lascaux 2. I am interested that the author does give his educated opinions about who the painters were and why and how they did the painting.

I really enjoyed this book. Curtis has an engaging style and is really informative about the people and processes involved in uncovering the drama of the cave art of Europe. You will feel like you have a grasp of not only the discovery but a fuller sense of the paintings and engravings as they express themselves to modern eyes. I recommend this book highly.

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