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CAVE ART

Bruno David

Deep underground, hidden from view, some of humanity's earliest artistic endeavors have lain buried for thousands of years. The most ancient artworks found are portable objects, left on cave floors. Shell beads signal that by a hundred thousand years ago we had developed a sense of self and a desire to beautify the body, while ostrich eggshells incised with curious geometric patterns hint at how communities used the power of art to communicate, and to bind people together. In time, people came to adorn cave walls with symbols, some abstract, others vivid arrangements of animals, humans and beings that informed their world. Often undisturbed for millennia, these were among the first visual symbols that humans shared with each other, though they were made so long ago that we have entirely forgotten their meaning. However, as archaeologist Bruno David reveals, we have ways of unlocking their secrets.

Here, David tells the story of this mysterious world of decorated caves, from the oldest known 'painting kits', found virtually intact in South Africa, to the magnificent murals of the European Ice Age that are so famous today, onto present times where the meanings of more recent artworks are recounted directly by community members. Showcasing the most astounding discoveries made in the past 150 years of archaeological exploration, *Cave Art* investigates these creative achievements and what they tell us about the human past and ourselves today.

'Creative and original ... This book is a new way to frame our attempts to understand cave art on a global scale and is an easy but provocative read. Bravo!'

Meg Conkey, Professor Emerita, University of California, Berkeley

On the cover:
15,500-year-old cave painting
of a bison in the Salon Noir,
Niaux Cave, French Pyrenees.
Photo: Pascal Goetgheluck /
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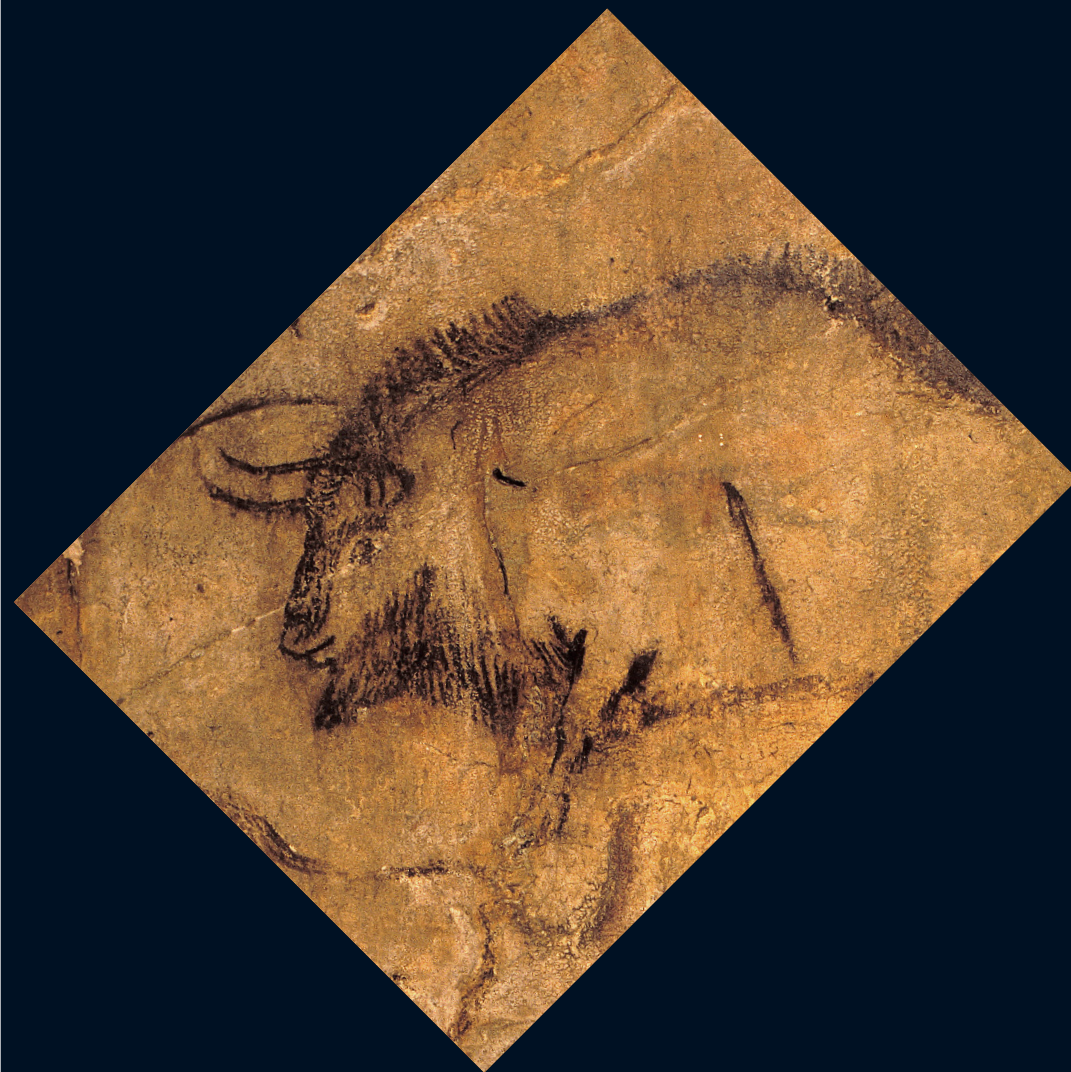
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