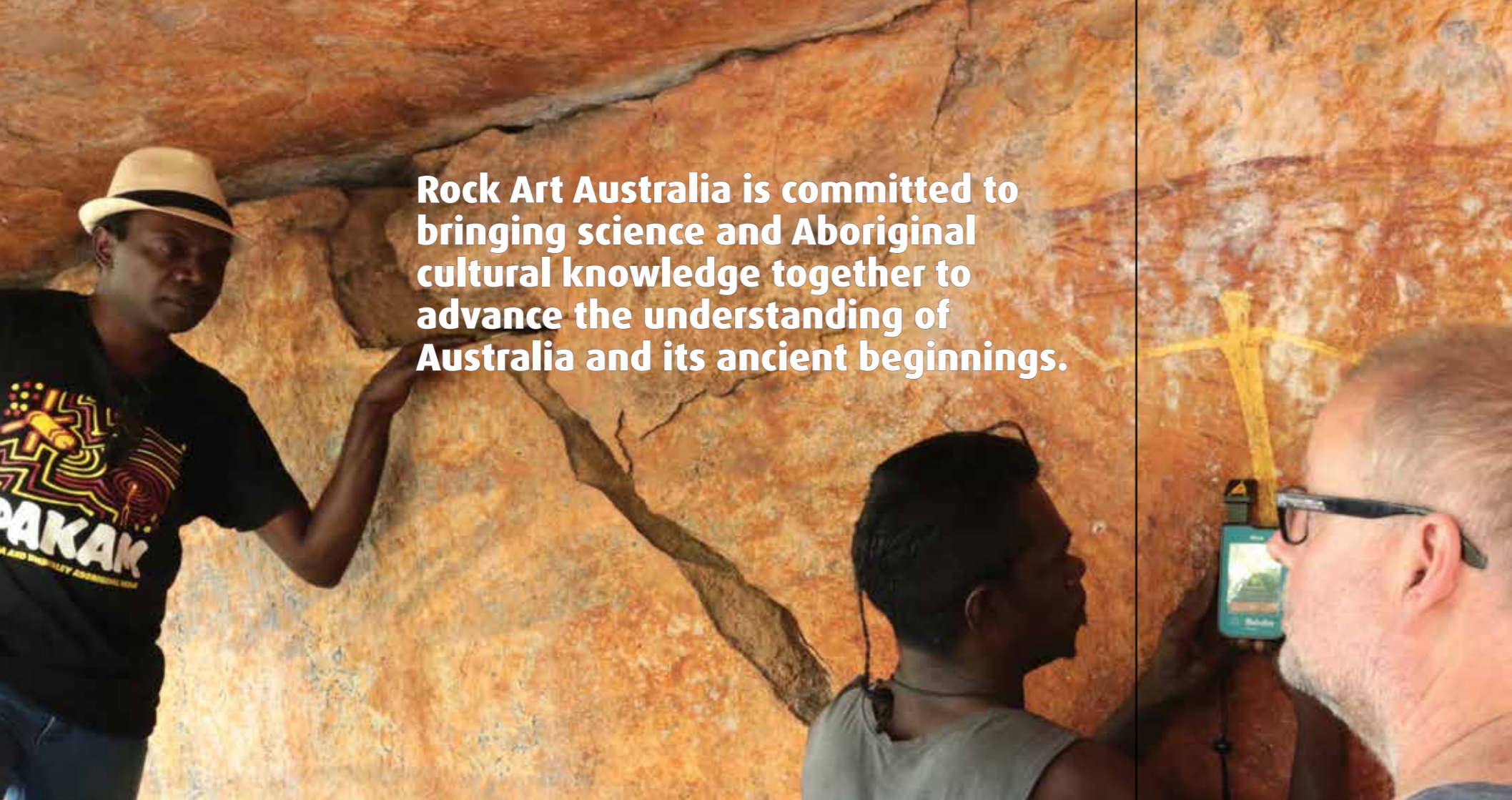


**ROCK ART  
AUSTRALIA**  
Uncovering our history

[rockartaustralia.org.au](http://rockartaustralia.org.au)



**Rock Art Australia is committed to bringing science and Aboriginal cultural knowledge together to advance the understanding of Australia and its ancient beginnings.**

Australian rock art is part of an ongoing culture and widely accepted as the world's most enduring cultural tradition.

Rock art reflects humankind's rich spiritual and cultural heritage and has great significance to its creators and their descendants. It also has great significance to humanity generally.

*"It's important that Indigenous knowledge and stories are not lost and continue to be shared for generations to come."*

Cissy Gore-Birch, Chair Balanggarra Aboriginal Corporation



Rock Art Australia funds scientific research with archaeologists, scientists, Traditional Owners and community members into every aspect of the rock art and its creation to uncover our history.

## Why is the rock art so important?

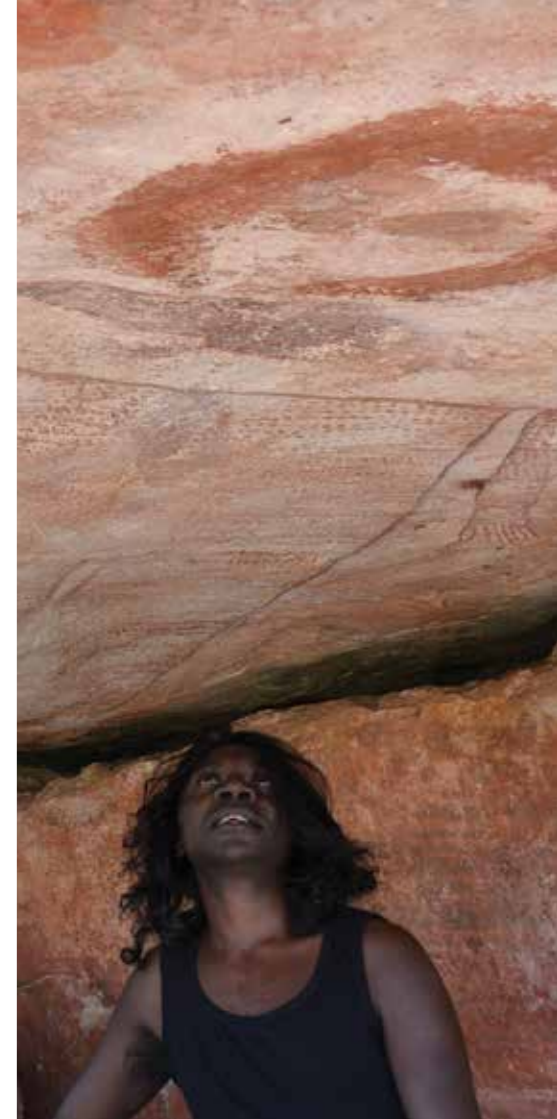
Important because it is the cultural and social legacy of Australia's Indigenous people.

Important because it can show us how people lived, what was important to them, how and what they hunted, their rituals, how they dressed and how they adapted to both dramatic and gradual changes in their environments over time.

Important because it is awe inspiring and inscribed or painted on rock surfaces in rugged and spectacular country.

Important because of the number of sites and the variations in styles and motifs and above all because these reveal sequences in the art styles found nowhere else in the world.

These are the oldest 'libraries' in Australia. Their preservation is paramount.

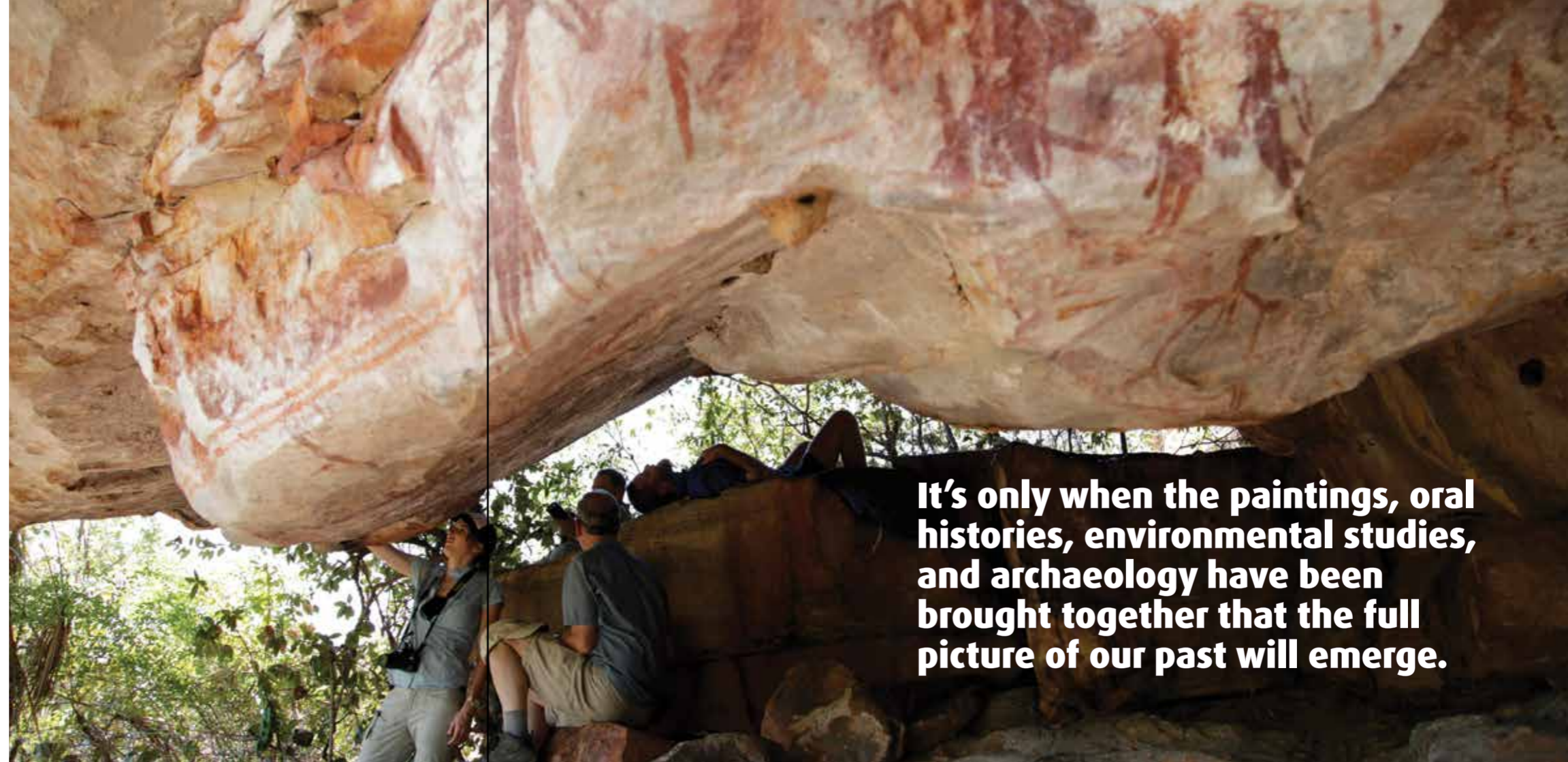


## Rock Art Australia and rock art research

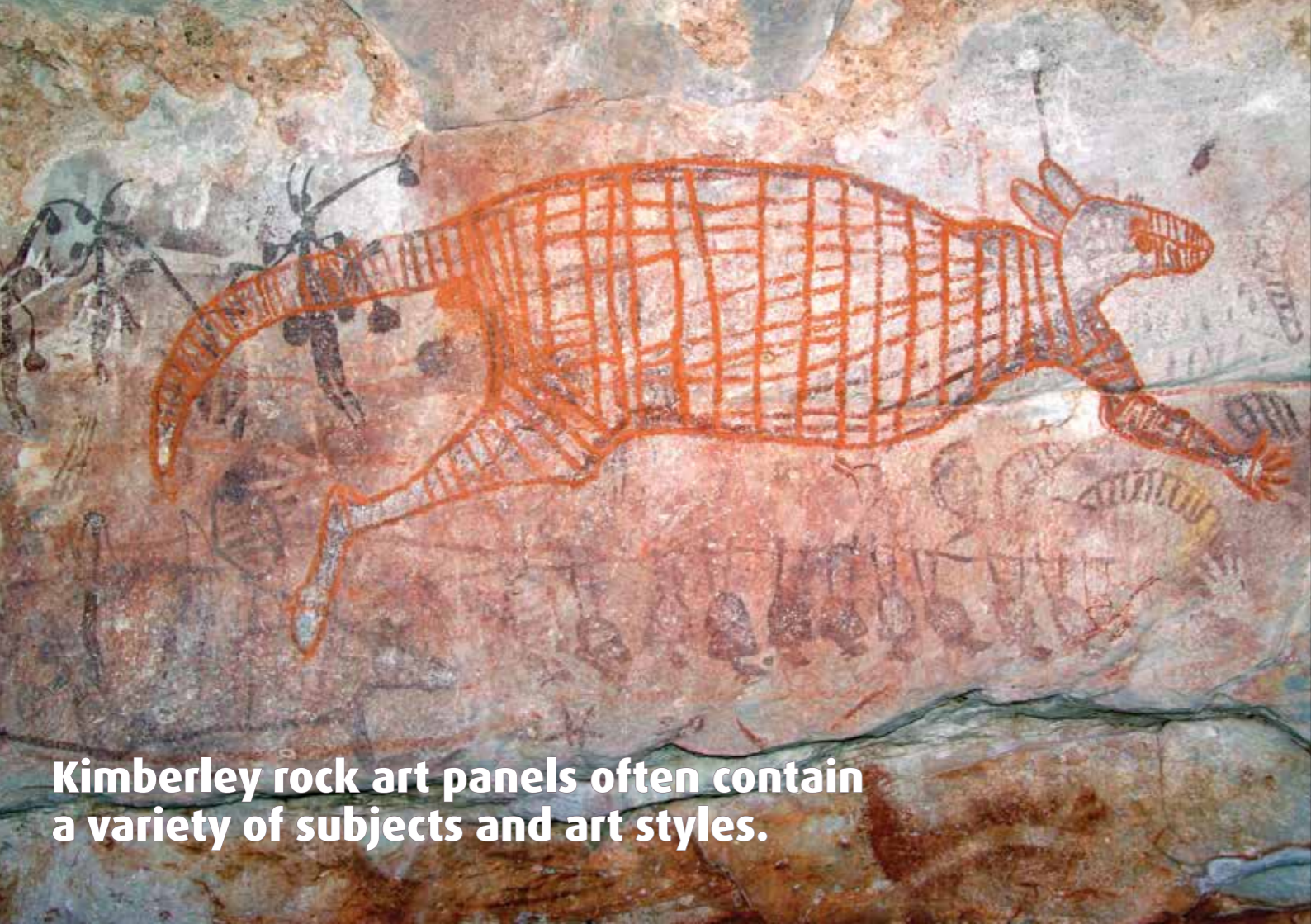
Rock Art Australia was established almost 25 years ago and has been at the forefront of scientific research to understand Australia's rock art and the people and cultures that produced it.

We fund rock art research and research into past climates because it is central to answering some of the big questions about human migration.

As well as dating the rock art and undertaking rock art surveys, the Foundation is funding a project that will provide a detailed environmental atlas of the last 50,000 years.



**It's only when the paintings, oral histories, environmental studies, and archaeology have been brought together that the full picture of our past will emerge.**



**Kimberley rock art panels often contain a variety of subjects and art styles.**

## Dating the art

Establishing the age of the rock art has been challenging because of the lack of organic material. New research has enabled a team of 20 researchers using four different dating methods to date the rock art.

The *Rock Art Dating Project* found a rock art painting of a kangaroo to be 17,300 years old based on the age of wasp nests under and over the painting. Applying the same radiocarbon dating technique used on the kangaroo painting, a conclusion that Gwions are 12,000 years old has also been reached.

We also know that many dating techniques and many samples will be necessary to satisfactorily conclude the dating questions which the *Rock Art Dating Project* is working towards.

Often on one art panel distinct styles and subjects are painted one on top of the other. These superimpositions provide archaeologists and rock art experts evidence of a chronological sequence of Kimberley rock art styles (right). The most ancient style at the bottom and the most recent style painted on top. The names given to the various periods reflect either an Aboriginal name or the dominant theme of that period.

### Sequence of Kimberley Rock Art Styles



**1. Pecked Cupule Period** (Archaic, Rock Art Markings)  
This earliest form of art arises from pecking, abrading and engraving shapes into the rock surface. Examples of ancient and more recent man-made cupules, pits, grooves and animal tracks area are found mainly on the rock walls.



**2. Irregular Infill Animal Period** (Archaic, Naturalistic)  
This period is dominated by painted naturalistic animals, fish and plants. Human figures are rare. This period includes stencils and prints of boomerangs, hands, feathers, grass, string and objects.



**3. Gwion Period** (Bradshaw, Kujon, Kira Kira, Djangargun)  
Finely painted human figures, frequently in group scenes and carrying objects, often boomerangs. The figures are dressed and decorated with feathers, tassels and aprons which hang from waist and arm bands.



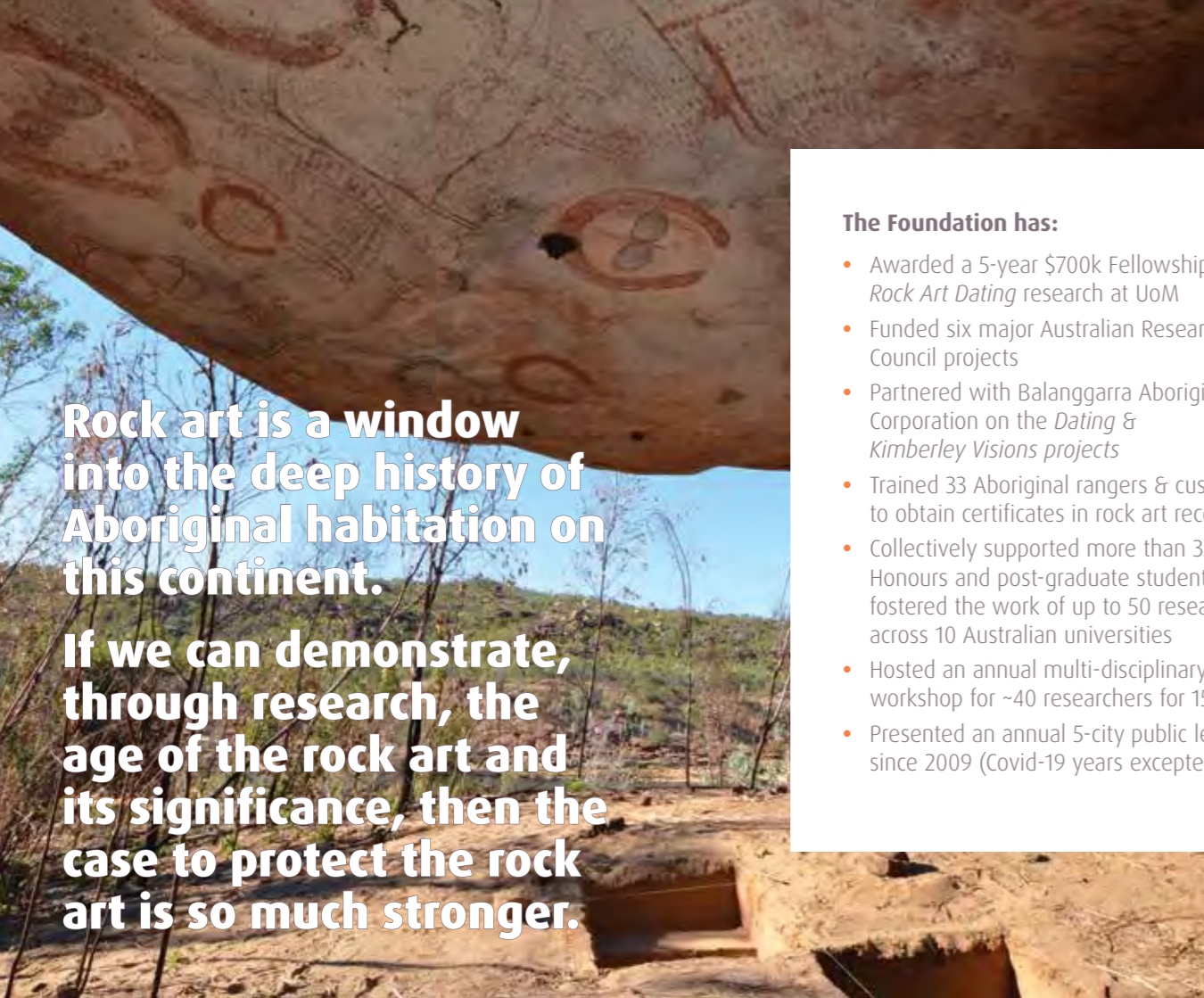
**4. Static Polychrome Period** (Clothes Peg, Straight Part)  
This period is almost always represented by human figures which lack the muscle detail of earlier styles; body and limbs are usually painted with straight lines. Painted in three colours, red white and yellow, it is only the red that has endured. Spears and spear throwers become prevalent.



**5. Painted Hand Period** (Clawed Hand)  
Human, animal and plant motifs are painted in thick outlines and the interior of the motif is broken into parts. Circle designs and decorated hand motifs with distinct nails are also part of this period.



**6. Wanjina Period** (Wandjina)  
This period of art is dominated by anthropomorphic figures characterised by halo-like headdresses and mouthless faces with large round eyes. They are the sacred spirit ancestors of today's Aboriginal people. Wanjina art also includes animals and plants significant in Aboriginal mythology.



**Rock art is a window into the deep history of Aboriginal habitation on this continent.**

**If we can demonstrate, through research, the age of the rock art and its significance, then the case to protect the rock art is so much stronger.**

#### **The Foundation has:**

- Awarded a 5-year \$700k Fellowship in *Rock Art Dating* research at UoM
- Funded six major Australian Research Council projects
- Partnered with Balangarra Aboriginal Corporation on the *Dating & Kimberley Visions* projects
- Trained 33 Aboriginal rangers & custodians to obtain certificates in rock art recording
- Collectively supported more than 35 PhD, Honours and post-graduate students and fostered the work of up to 50 researchers across 10 Australian universities
- Hosted an annual multi-disciplinary research workshop for ~40 researchers for 15 years
- Presented an annual 5-city public lecture series since 2009 (Covid-19 years excepted)

## Our impact

The backbone of the Foundation, thanks to its supporters, is the establishment of two fully endowed Chairs – the Rock Art Australia Ian Potter Kimberley Chair at The University of Western Australia (UWA) and the Rock Art Australia Munderoo Chair in Archaeological Science at The University of Melbourne (UoM). These two centres of research are helping to establish the importance of Australia’s archaeological record, and transforming this area of research and teaching.

Rock Art Australia acknowledges the significance of the support of The Ian Potter Foundation and The Munderoo Foundation.



# Make a donation

**Rock Art Australia** is the only not for profit organisation supported by the public and other institutions to drive research into the human habitation of Australia and the evolution of rock art.

The Foundation is supported by thousands of people who want to understand their own country and culture. People who care about this remarkable Indigenous cultural legacy, and who want to see it protected and recognised for its worldwide significance. We hope you will join them.

All donations are tax deductible.

## To donate:

Credit Card donations can be made easily and securely on our website:  
[rockartaustralia.org.au/support-us](http://rockartaustralia.org.au/support-us)

To make an Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT):

Account Name: Rock Art Australia Limited Donation Fund

BSB: 033-364

Account number: 985120

Bank: Westpac

Please send an email to [accounts@rockartaustralia.org.au](mailto:accounts@rockartaustralia.org.au) advising us of your donation.



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We acknowledge principal foundation supporters and partners who make this research possible



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We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the places in which we live and work. We recognise and respect the enduring relationship they have with their lands and waters, and honour the Elders, past and present.

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