

Prehistoric Art: current questions, research challenges and new methods

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Abstract:

In recent years, prehistoric art research has experienced a remarkable expansion, both in the number of studied sites and in the depth of the consequent archaeological understanding. New discoveries across Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas have significantly broadened the temporal, geographic, and cultural horizons of early artistic expression. This session aims to examine how recent findings and innovative approaches are transforming our perception of prehistoric art and its role in past societies.

Advances in dating techniques, microscopic and geochemical analyses, and digital documentation methods have refined chronologies, revealed previously invisible details, and enhanced interpretations of production techniques, authorship, and social meaning. Interdisciplinary collaborations between archaeologists and other scientists are providing new insights into the relationship between imagery, landscape, and ritual practices, while theoretical developments are reshaping debates on symbolism, communication, and human cognition. At the same time, these gains in knowledge are paralleled by increasing concerns about the preservation of rock art, particularly in the face of climate change, microenvironmental instability, and human impact.

This session will bring together archaeologists, geologists, biologists, conservation scientists, digital specialists, dating experts, and other scholars contributing to the understanding of the symbolism of prehistoric societies. Through this dialogue, the session seeks to highlight the most recent advances in prehistoric art research and to define current and future priorities for an integrated, sustainable, and global understanding of humanity's earliest symbolic behaviour.