

## **The invisible in the visible: identifying potency and power in rock art imagery**

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Abstract:

Much rock art was created in the context of hunter-gatherer societies in the ancient and recent past. Based on global ethnographic evidence, we know that a common feature of the ontology of forager societies is the belief in a 'magical' power that binds entities in dynamic interrelationships and interactions. Images participate in those interactions. Although potency itself is invisible, it has agentive power and is frequently embodied in specific beings. This session focuses on a key question: was potency of this kind depicted in rock art, and if so, how? Some studies argue that potency is manifested in images of animals, and it has also been suggested that potency can be expressed in non-iconic forms. In some cases, the potency of images is relevant to their ontological status: more than representations, they are powerful 'things-in-themselves'. Another important question is: to what extent could the potency of images be shaped by non-iconographical contexts? Moreover, as rock art globally is not limited to hunting and gathering societies, the same questions apply to images created in other economic, cultural and chronological contexts. How, for instance, is the idea of potency expressed in Indigenous art made in different media, which can be used as a context for interpreting rock art? We welcome papers that show and discuss how potency or power can be identified in rock art and Indigenous art in any cultural and chronological context.