

World Views

TOPICS IN NON-WESTERN ART

LAURIE SCHNEIDER ADAMS

John Jay College and the Graduate Center
City University of New York



Boston Burr Ridge, IL Dubuque, IA Madison, WI New York San Francisco St. Louis
Bangkok Bogotá Caracas Kuala Lumpur Lisbon London Madrid Mexico City
Milan Montreal New Delhi Santiago Seoul Singapore Sydney Taipei Toronto

Preface

This series of brief, illustrated discussions of topics in non-Western art is designed to accompany the *History of Western Art*; however, this full-color text is also available for individual classroom adoption. The works represented here are the tip of a much larger iceberg, for each culture has its own history, customs, myths, and styles. Since it is impossible to cover all areas of the world in sufficient depth in a single, small volume, *World Views* offers a limited selection of works from a very wide field.

We begin with some examples of preliterate rock art—Aboriginal Australian, Saharan, and Native American. The next section considers aspects of pre-Buddhist China, the development of calligraphy, and later Chinese painting. From the ancient cultures of the Indus Valley in modern-day Pakistan, we proceed to Buddhist India and China, and the expansion of Buddhism to Japan. We consider the image of the Buddha in China, India, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. In India, we also consider the impact of Hinduism and the Hindu temple, and, in Cambodia, an example of the synthesis of Buddhist and Hindu trends.

The section on Mesoamerica surveys several cultures, from the colossal Olmec heads to the Inkas, who built Machu Picchu, in modern Peru. Most histories of Western art include Islamic Spain; here, therefore, we go beyond Islam in Europe, discussing its expansion and its main architectural expression—the mosque. In addition, we consider the figurative court styles of Persian miniature painting and of the Islamic Mughal dynasty that flourished in seventeenth-century India.

World Views: Topics in Non-Western Art also discusses aspects of non-Western art from cultures that directly influenced Western artists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For example, the woodblock prints of Edo-

period Japan influenced the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists. A particular subset of African art—that of the Benin kingdom—is considered along with a few representative examples of Oceanic and Native American art. The art of these non-Western cultures made a significant impact on the artistic avant-garde of Western Europe and America, which was seeking new forms of expressions outside its own traditions.

Hopefully students will take away from this discussion a sense of the enormous variety of world art and culture, and will continue to study these subjects in greater depth. As the world gets smaller, it also gets bigger, for we are forced to encounter the differences as well as the similarities between people and the ideas that motivate them. By opening such cultural and artistic windows, it is possible that we can be united by similarities even as we learn to appreciate differences.

Several people have been extremely helpful in producing this text. Georgia Riley de Havenon contributed sections on Andean and Aztec art. George Corbin (Professor of Art History at Lehman College and the Graduate Center, CUNY) reviewed and corrected sections on African, Native American, and Oceanic art, and Patricia Karetzky (O. Munsterberg Chair of Asian Art, Bard College) reviewed the sections on Asian art. Their assistance was immensely helpful. I am also grateful to Carol Flechner for expert copy editing, to Linda Robertson and Roberta Flechner for the interior design and layout, to Robin Sand for picture research, to Jeannie Schreiber for art direction, to Jennifer Mills and April Wells-Hayes for production management, and to John Adams for assistance at all stages of the process.



1

Rock Paintings and Petroglyphs



Cultures around the world have been drawn to cave walls and rock faces as surfaces for making images. Rock paintings and rock carvings have been produced before and after the Stone Age in Europe. Some of these appear to share qualities seen in the Paleolithic cave art of western Europe. There is often uncertainty in dating works created by such cultures and in pinning down the antiquity of their mythological traditions.

Rock Paintings of Australia

(c. 30,000/20,000 B.C.–the Present)

In the outback of Australia, hunting-and-gathering societies, called Aboriginal, have had an unusually long history. Dating of Aboriginal rock art is often very difficult, if not impossible, due to the placement of the shallow rock sites and the fact of disturbance of the sites over the years by successive reuse. However, most of the more complex types of rock art are usually dated from about 9000 B.C. to the present. The vast majority of these were probably painted during the past two thousand years. Australia is an island that had been relatively isolated from the rest of the world until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nevertheless, there are remarkable visual similarities between European Paleolithic and Aboriginal rock paintings, including handprints, naturalistic animals, and hunting scenes.

Aside from these works, our knowledge of ancient Aboriginal mythology, ritual, tradition, and social customs comes from contemporary Aborigines. Their society is divided into clans that “own” certain myths and sacred images. Myth and imagery thus assume a concrete value and are considered to be cultural possessions. They have a totemic, or ancestral, significance, and it is thus possible that many of the animals represented in Australian rock art are, in fact, totems of particular clans.

The ancestral character of Australian Aboriginal art and religion is related to what has been translated into Western languages as the “Dreaming.” This phenomenon is not a sleep dream, but rather a mythological plane of existence. For Aborigines, “Dreamtime” is the order of the universe and encompasses cosmological time from its beginning to an indefinite future. Included in Dreamtime are the ancestors who created and ordered both the world and the human societies that populate it. Dreamtime is accessible through the performance of certain rituals—such as creating rock paintings—accompanied by singing and chanting. In the Aboriginal Dreaming, therefore, is contained a wealth of cultural mythology, much of which is revealed in the visual arts.

The Wandjinas, or Cloud Spirits, found in the Kimberley Mountain region of Northwest Australia, for example, appear in numerous rock pictures, usually painted in black, red, and yellow on a white ground (fig. 1.1). These creatures combine human with cloud forms and are ancestral creators from the Dreamtime. According to Aboriginal myth, Wandjinas made the earth, the sea, and the human race. They are depicted frontally with large heads, massive upper bodies, and lower bodies that taper toward the feet. Around their heads are feathers and lightning. Their faces typically lack mouths, although the eyes and nose are present. If Wandjinas are offended, they unleash lightning and cause rains and flooding, but they can also bring fertility.



1.1 Wandjina, Rowalumbin, Barker River, Napier Range, Kimberley, Australia. These rock paintings were discovered in 1837 by an expedition led by George Grey. He described his first view of the Wandjinas as follows: "They appeared to stand out from the rock; and I was certainly rather surprised at the moment that I first saw this gigantic head and upper part of a body bending over and staring down at me."



1.2 Mimi hunters, Kakadu National Park, Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia. Rock painting. In the Mimi style, as here, figures are painted in red ochre. These hunters carry spears and boomerangs.

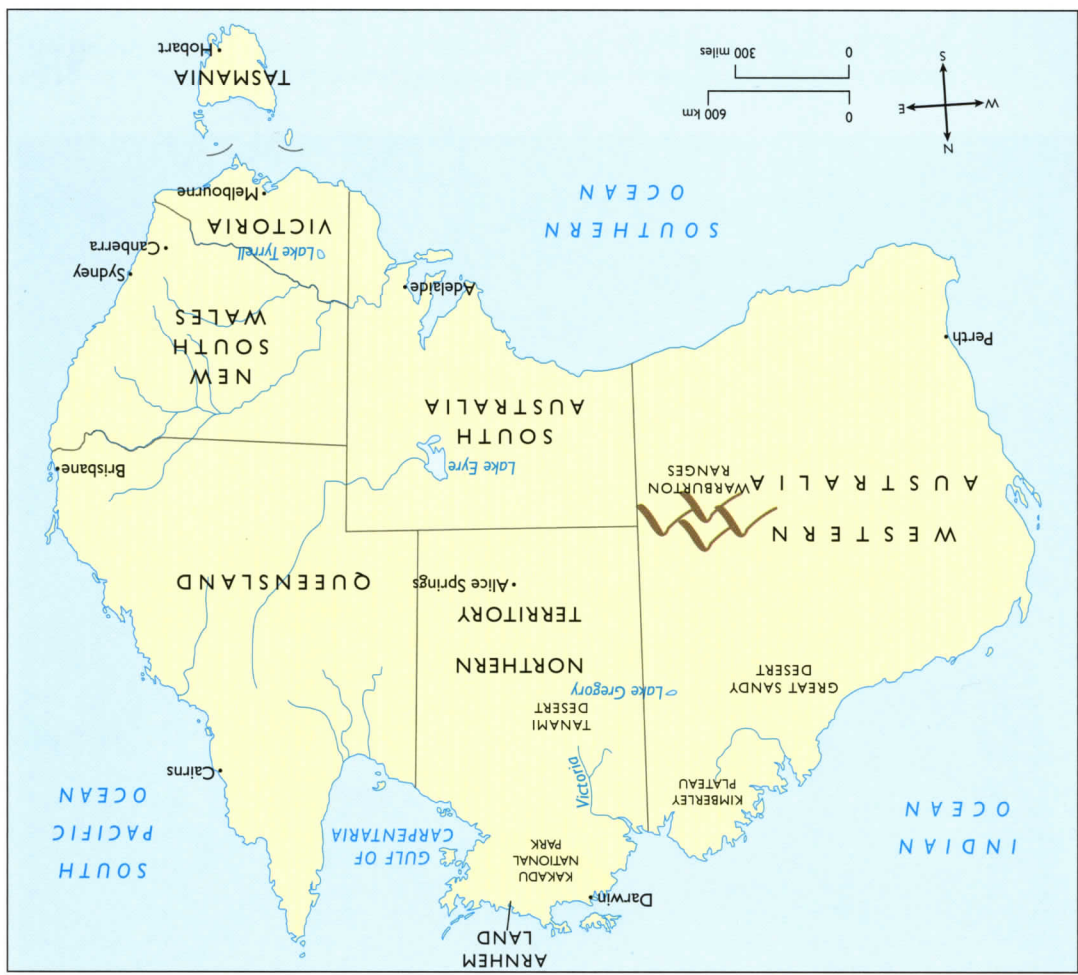
Pa
the
ref
in
are
so
the
hin
the
hu
the
ing
of
ral
co
an



Paintings of them are believed to have special powers and, therefore, are approached with caution. The oldest identifiable style of Aboriginal rock painting, referred to as the Mimi style, is found in Arnhem Land in northern Australia (fig. 1.2). Mimi, in Aboriginal myth, are elongated spirits living in rocks and caves and are so light that they can be blown away and destroyed by the wind. If a Mimi entices a man to its cave and tricks him into eating its food or sleeping with a Mimi woman, then the human turns into a Mimi and cannot return to his human condition. Mimi are often represented hunting, as they are in figure 1.2, and are believed to have taught hunting to the Aborigines. Note the disproportionate elongation of the running Mimi figures compared to the relative naturalism of the turtle and fish paintings on the right side of the composition. The kangaroo, which is indigenous only to Australia and adjacent islands, is a frequent subject of Aboriginal

rock art. Kangaroos have been hunted for thousands of years, probably as a source of food. Those represented in figure 1.3 are trying to escape from a group of male and female hunters. That the kangaroos are hopping is clear from their poses—the one in the center has just landed and tilted slightly back on its feet; the kangaroo on the left leans forward as if to regain its balance. In paintings such as this, Aboriginal artists used two relatively different styles: a naturalistic one for animals and a schematic one for humans. The kangaroo in figure 1.4 is a good example of the latter. It is rendered in brown and white as if displaying the inner organic structure of bones and muscle. Because of its flattened pose, it is stylized rather than naturalistic. The fish-shaped head reflects the appearance of aquatic animals in Aboriginal rock iconography that took place following a rise in sea level around 8000 B.C. The skeletal figure on the right is the fearsome Lightning Man surrounded by an electrical circuit.

Map of Australia.



er
ised
o
d his
d in



1.3 Men and women hunting kangaroos, Unbalanya Hill, Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia. Rock painting.



1.4 Kangaroo with Lightning Man, Nourlangie Rock, Kakadu National Park, Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia. Rock painting. In Dreamtime, the Lightning Man, called Namarrkon or Namarragon, lived in the sky and carried a lightning spear. He tied stone clubs to his knees and elbows so that he would always be prepared to hurl thunder and lightning. For most of the year he lived at the far ends of the sky, absorbing the light of the Sun Woman. When the wet season came, he descended to the earth's atmosphere in order to keep an eye on the human race. When displeased, he hurled spears of lightning across the sky and onto the earth. Some 30 miles (48 km) east of Oenpelli, there is a taboo Dreaming site where Namarrkon is said to have settled. This site is avoided by Aborigines, who fear his wrath.



1.5 Sah

The

Many
the A
exam
fourth
devel
in we
transi
ture.
cattle
huma
ers in
consi
No
Saha
huma
routin



1.5 Saharan rock painting, Tassili, Algeria, Cattle or Pastoralist period, 5th–4th millennium B.C. Photo: Sonia Halliday, Weston Turville, United Kingdom.

The Sahara (5th–4th Millennium B.C.)

Many examples of rock art have been found throughout the African continent, but they are difficult to date. One example from the Sahara, thought to belong to the fifth or fourth millennium B.C., appears to parallel the cultural developments of the Mesolithic period (c. 8000–5000 B.C.) in western Europe (see fig. 1.5). This was the period of transition from nomadic hunting and gathering to agriculture. The scene shows human figures and domesticated cattle from the Tassili, in modern-day Algeria. Both the human figures—which resemble contemporary cattle herders in parts of Africa—and the animals are rendered with considerable naturalism and freedom of movement.

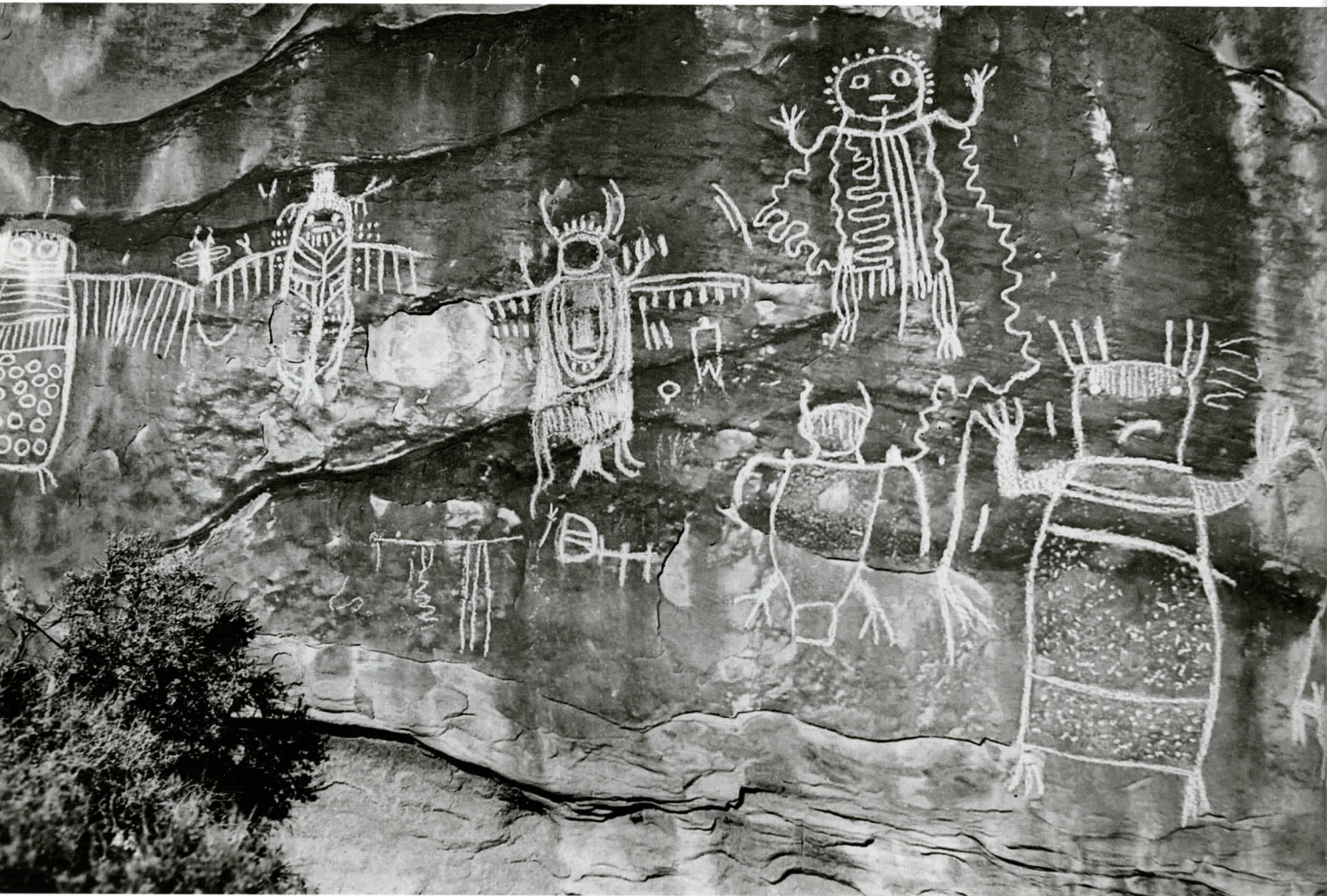
Note that, in contrast to the Australian examples, the Saharan animals are tame. They wander freely among the human figures, who seem to be going about their daily routines in peaceful coexistence with the cattle. Although

the artist does not indicate a ground line, there is a sense of three-dimensional space as the animals appear to stand on a natural, horizontal surface. At the lower right of the illustration, the seated and kneeling human figures are shown as if in an actual landscape.

Native American Petroglyphs of the Plains

(Late 17th–Early 20th Centuries)

Before contact with Europeans, hunting-and-gathering societies in North America coexisted with agricultural communities that lived in year-round villages. Among the hunting peoples of the Plains, where animal migrations were an annual occurrence, there is evidence of rock



1.6 Petroglyphs, Plains culture, pre-European contact period, c. 1650–1800. Dinwoody, Wyoming. Photo: T. W. Daniels. Courtesy of the Department Library Services, American Museum of Natural History, New York.

carvings (**petroglyphs**) depicting hunting magic and shamanistic practices. Petroglyphs are typically incised into the rock surface, creating light images on a dark background. The petroglyphs found in Dinwoody, Wyoming, from the pre-European contact period are an example (see fig. 1.6).

The figures depicted here combine human with animal and bird features. They stand upright, like humans, but

also have wings, horns, and feathers. This merger of human and animal motifs suggests the transformations of the shaman, who was believed capable of communication with the gods. The frontal pose of the figures makes them confront viewers directly and enhances the impression of their supernatural powers over the nonspirit world.