

## Late Palaeolithic Cave Art and Liminality

What is the evolutionary significance of visual art? Why did art first begin? Ice Age art is often considered to mark a 'creative explosion' lasting thirty thousand years from around 40,000 years ago and extending from Western Europe across Eurasia. Its makers were anatomically modern humans with, broadly speaking, the same cognitive apparatus as us. Various attempts have been made to identify the determining factor in a causal account of the evolutionary role played by art. (For an excellent overview see Straffon 2019) In this presentation I take a different approach to establishing the significance of Ice Age cave art for cognitive evolution. Starting from the archaeological record—or, from a phenomenological perspective, 'the phenomena'—my aim is to describe and analyse a range of cognitive patterns exhibited by late Palaeolithic cave art. In particular, I examine the evidence for an attention to what I call 'liminality'. By the liminal I mean thresholds, transitions and border zones. I work with a number of case studies from cave art that show up distinctive but inter-related ways in which an awareness of thresholds played a crucial role in cognition—e.g., perceiving, feeling, remembering, representing, relating to self and other. In this way I hope to show the importance of liminality for understanding the significance of cave art for cognitive evolution.