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Altamira Cave

Gruber, Marcus

In 1879, eight-year-old Maria Justina discovered spectacular paintings in the Altamira cave in northern Spain. The depictions of animals and humans were at least 17,000 years old, and became synonymous with the origins of human art. When researchers reexamined it in 2012, they found a cone-shaped symbol, at least 35,600 years old, beneath the cave paintings. An even older cave painting, a red disk dated to at least 40,800 years ago, was found in the neighboring town of El Castillo—the earliest known cave art in Europe. Our ancestors seem to have discovered their artistic talents around the same time they migrated into Western Europe, and must have brought art with them from Africa or the Near East. The calculated dates of these artworks are just the earliest estimates; therefore, they could even be older, and may have been painted by the Neanderthals. In any case, human culture now included a new dimension, figurative art.



A replica of a bison from the Altamira Cave
Marcus Gruber

Drawn by *Marcus Gruber* , 2014.

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The Art of Hunting Mammoths: Altamira Cave

Text and images by Marcus Gruber
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Altamira, Spain, about 17,000 years ago
"Son, now that you are a man, you need to learn how to hunt for mammoths."

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"Hunting is very dangerous. Uncle Bronko was killed by a mammoth. But we need to hunt in order to survive. And now, the time is right to teach you how."

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Son - “What are mammoths?”
Father - “Son! Mammoths are huge and scary. Come on, get a piece of charcoal, and I’ll draw one for you!”

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Son - “Where are we even going?”
Father - “To Altamira Cave, the elite school of hunting.”
Son - “School?!”

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“Son, we’re here!”

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Father - “Mammoths are huge and highly aggressive. Their tusks can destroy anything. Come on, let’s go hunting now.”
Son - “Oh man, that’s scary!”

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Father - "To die while hunting is to die an honorable death, my son"

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Father - "Come on now, boy! The mammoths won't wait for us!"
Son - "I think I'd rather be an artist."

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Artist's comment:

Although I am an artist myself, I must admit that I knew very little about cave art and paintings. After all, they are the earliest artistic representations created by mankind, although this may only seem significant in hindsight. The role of an artist is more important today than it ever was. He creates culture, expresses criticism, describes situations, or tells a story—like I do in this comic.

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Further readings:

- Sources and Literature for the Anthropocene Milestone Comics

Related links:

- Welcome to the Anthropocene. The Earth in Our Hands. Special exhibition at the Deutsches Museum http://www.deutsches-museum.de/en/exhibitions/special-exhibitions/archive/2015/anthropocene/
- Welcome to the Anthropocene. The Earth in Our Hands. Virtual exhibition on the Environment & Society Portal https://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/6354
- Comic-Anthology, Deutsches Museum Website http://www.deutsches-museum.de/sammlungen/entdecken/comics/

Websites linked in this text:

- http://www.marcus-gruber.com