

***Making Scenes: Global Perspectives on Scenes in Rock Art.*
Iain Davidson and April Nowell, editors. 2021. Berghahn Books,
New York. xviii + 339 pp. \$199.00 (hardcover), ISBN 978-1-78920-4.**

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Archaeologists studying ancient rock art have long recognized that sites typically comprise several scales of organization from individual images to large-scale sets of motifs reflecting specific narratives important to the makers. This edited book focuses on such sets of meaningful images and how they might be recognized and interpreted. The book has 20 chapters, each one focused on either methodological questions or applications of the notion of “scenes” to specific case studies of rock art sites from around the world. Margaret Conkey provides an insightful preface to the volume. The book’s subject matters are introduced and summed up in bookend chapters by the editors.

In their introduction, Iain Davidson and April Nowell provide a definition of “scene” that grounds the succeeding chapters: “A scene can be identified from a set of images in spatial proximity . . . from which, without any knowledge other than the images themselves, an observer can infer actions taking place among the actors represented in the images.” Thus, scenes are graphic, they contain elements that have organized spatial relationships, and they depict action by the actors or elements. Usually, a number of images comprise a scene, although it is possible for a single image to do so if it displays action and narrative. Scenes, therefore, are amenable to quantitative and qualitative spatial analysis that may elucidate patterns among the elements—the compositions—that were meaningful to the makers.

Space precludes detailed consideration of each chapter, but the case studies are quite varied. Six continents are represented, with sites in Namibia, South Africa, India, Jordan, Iran, Argentina, Canada, Spain, France, Australia, and the United States. The number of sites examined and the number of images entailed also vary among the chapters. One striking aspect of these studies is their diversity in analytic methods, which vary from intuitive examination to large-scale, computer-assisted data mining. Methodological exploration and, especially, the variety in approaches to analyzing spatial relationships among images are two great strengths of this book.

I have two concerns about *Making Scenes*. The first is quite minor but reflects an implication that a focus on scenes—that is, on spatial relationships, action, composition, and narrative content—is new. I would argue that scholars of rock art have long recognized and emphasized composition in ancient images, including those concerned with Paleolithic art in Europe. Marcelino Sanz de Sautuola illustrated the entire ceiling of Altamira in 1880 and discussed the movement and relationships among the bison. Henri Breuil saw composition and action everywhere in Paleolithic art. Andre Leroi-Gourhan’s masterful studies of composition in Paleolithic cave art were certainly focused on scenes at various scales. Scenes also dominated early studies of San rock art, work in Australia, and some of the earliest observations of rock art in the Americas. The idea that rock art is composed of scenes as defined in this book has always been part of rock art scholarship.

My second concern is the absence of Indigenous voices. To me, this is a curious lack, given the book’s interest in inferring meaning from scenes and the movement in archaeology today toward decolonizing approaches to intellectual property and engaging in collaborative work with descendant communities. By collaborative work, I do not mean only using ethnographic information—something rock art scholars have done for many years—but the direct engagement of descendants in the process of analysis and interpretation. True, five of the 20 chapters deal with Upper Paleolithic through Iron Age rock art sites in Europe, so descendant connections might well be lost. The other case studies, however, treat geographic regions where Indigenous people still live and where some of those people have expressed their interest in rock art studies. An Indigenous archaeology, according to Joe Watkins (*Indigenous Archaeology*, 2000, p. 170), is founded in part on “the wish of the Indigenous population to gain control over the construction of their culture history.” This movement has an international range, so it is

surprising that, in a book covering much of the world, only one author (working in Australia) acknowledges Native collaboration. Given that this book contains so much innovative work, the lack of descendant community engagement in both theoretical formulations and applied studies is unexpected.

Despite these caveats, this book provides an important view of varied and powerful methods for analyzing the spatial dimension of ancient rock art. It should be read by all students of rock art who hope to go beyond the mere description of these ubiquitous and important cultural records.

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***The Unstoppable Human Species: The Emergence of Homo sapiens in Prehistory.* John J. Shea. 2023. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. xviii + 345 pp. \$105.00 (hardcover), ISBN 978-1-10842-908-5. \$34.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-10845-298-4. \$34.99 (e-book), ISBN 978-1-10866-983-2.**

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Paleoanthropologists are all too often absorbed with “who” questions: What hominin species made the Oldowan? Who is responsible for the Châtelperronian? Or “who had sexual intercourse with whom in the Ice Age?” (p. xv). In this thoughtful, fast-paced, and frequently humorous treatise, Paleolithic archaeologist John J. Shea makes the persuasive argument that we should instead be asking much more interesting “how” questions, such as the following: How did humans traverse landscapes teeming with obstacles like mountains, deserts, rivers, and seas? How did they make and use fire or build shelters? Or, more essentially, how did prehistoric humans solve the multiple survival problems they would have encountered as they expanded into new habitats? Our own existence is, of course, proof that our ancestors did successfully solve myriad problems as they spread across the globe.

In addressing “how” questions, Shea draws from multiple lines of evidence: the archaeological record, experimental archaeology, ethnography/ethnoarchaeology, “bushcraft” and wilderness survival literatures, and nonhuman primate ethology. He points out the advantages and pitfalls of these approaches before turning his attention to six major survival challenges faced everywhere by prehistoric humans: first aid/medication, thermoregulation, hydration, nutrition, transportation, and communication.

Shea’s thesis is that *Homo sapiens* became “unstoppable,” or acquired near-immunity from extinction, through a unique integration of a suite of “ancestral survival skills” shared with at least some of our ancestors and that they often used in a habitat-specific way. These include powerful precision gripping, predictive hallucination (i.e., imagining potential future events and how to deal with or avoid them), endurance bipedalism, language/quantal speech, hyperprosociality, and technical skills such as fire making and cordage manufacture.

This data-rich, theoretically sound book is organized into thematic sections. Chapters 1–3 serve as a primer on human evolution, prehistory, paleogenetics, the mechanics of paleoanthropological fieldwork, and an epistemological examination on how we know what we think we know about the archaeological and paleontological records. Little here is new to the specialist, but Shea’s accessible work is written to appeal to a much broader audience.

In Chapter 4 he lays out the book’s thesis, introducing our ancestral survival skills and the challenges to survival our ancestors faced. The “meat” of the book, however, is found in Chapters 5–10; they provide a continent-by-continent case study comparing how Pleistocene *Homo sapiens* (and Neanderthals in Chapter 8) fared relative to their presumed ancestors (*Homo heidelbergensis*,