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**Anthropologists Discover Earliest Form of Wall Art**

May 14, 2012 — Anthropologists working in southern France have determined that a 1.5 metric ton block of engraved limestone constitutes the earliest evidence of wall art. Their research, reported in the most recent edition of the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, shows the piece to be approximately 37,000 years old and offers rich evidence of the role art played in the daily lives of Early Aurignacian humans.

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Aurignacian culture existed until approximately 28,000 years ago. In 2007, the team discovered an engraved block of limestone in what had been a rock shelter occupied by a group of Aurignacian reindeer hunters. Subsequent geological analysis revealed the ceiling had been about two meters above the floor on which the Aurignacians lived -- within arms' reach.

Using carbon dating, the researchers determined that both the engraved ceiling, which includes depictions of animals and geometric forms, and the other artifacts found on the living surface below were approximately 37,000 years old.

"This art appears to be slightly older than the famous paintings from the Grotte Chauvet in southeastern France," explained White, referring to the cave paintings discovered in 1994.

"But unlike the Chauvet paintings and engravings, which are deep underground and away from living areas, the engravings and paintings at Castanet are directly associated with everyday life, given their proximity to tools, fireplaces, bone and antler tool production, and ornament workshops."

He added that this discovery, combined with others of approximately the same time period in southern Germany, northern Italy, and southeastern France, raises new questions about the evolutionary and adaptive significance of art and other forms of graphic representation in the lives of modern human populations.

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Anthropologists, including NYU's Randall White, working in southern France have determined that a 1.5 metric ton block of engraved limestone constitutes the earliest evidence of wall art. Their research shows the piece to be approximately 37,000 years old and offers rich evidence of the role art played in the daily lives of Early Aurignacian humans. Pictured above are pieces of the discovery, which depict animals in red and black paint. (Credit: Images courtesy of Raphaëlle Bourrillon)

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- 1. Randall White, Romain Mensan, Raphaëlle Bourillon, Catherine Cretin, Thomas F. G. Higham, Amy E. Clark, Matthew L. Sisk, Elise Tartar, Philippe Gardère, Paul Goldberg, Jacques Pelegrin, Hélène Valladas, Nadine Tisnérat-Laborde, Jacques de Sanoit, Dominique Chambellan, and Laurent Chiotti. Context and dating of Aurignacian vulvar representations from Abri Castanet, France. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 2012 DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1119663109

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