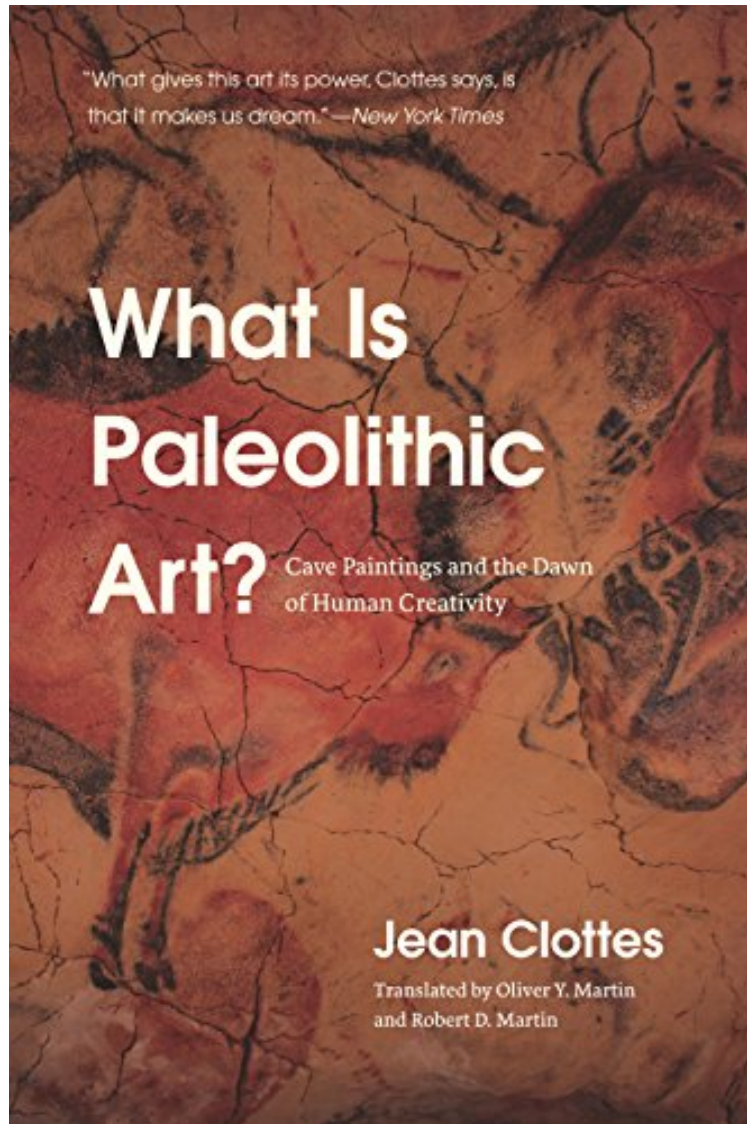


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# What Is Paleolithic Art?: Cave Paintings and the Dawn of Human Creativity

Jean Clottes

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**Jean Clottes : What Is Paleolithic Art?: Cave Paintings and the Dawn of Human Creativity** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised What Is Paleolithic Art?: Cave Paintings and the Dawn of Human Creativity:

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Was it a trick of the light that drew our Stone Age ancestors into caves to paint in charcoal and red hematite, to watch the heads of lions, likenesses of bison, horses, and aurochs in the reliefs of the walls, as they flickered by firelight? Or was it something deeper—a creative impulse, a spiritual dawn, a shamanistic conception of the world efflorescing in the dark, dank spaces beneath the surface of the earth where the spirits were literally at hand? In this book, Jean Clottes, one of the most renowned figures in the study of cave paintings, pursues an answer to this “why?” of Paleolithic art. While other books focus on particular sites and surveys, Clottes’s work is a contemplative journey across the world, a personal reflection on how we have viewed these paintings in the past, what we learn from looking at them across geographies, and what these paintings may have meant—what function they may have served—for their artists. Steeped in Clottes’s shamanistic theories of cave painting, *What Is Paleolithic Art?* travels from well-known Ice Age sites like Chauvet, Altamira, and Lascaux to visits with contemporary aboriginal artists, evoking a continuum between the cave paintings of our prehistoric past and the living rock art of today. Clottes’s work lifts us from the darkness of our Paleolithic origins to reveal, by firelight, how we think, why we create, why we believe, and who we are.

“Subtle, imaginative, and brilliantly accomplished, the images of animals and humans found in caves and dated from the end of the last Ice Age, between 40,000 and 10,000 years ago, continue to astonish us. The emotions and motives that inspired them beg to be understood. In *What is Paleolithic Art?*, Clottes, the renowned cave- and rock-art specialist, suggests some answers. . . . This is a thought-provoking book about complex societies that endeavored to understand the world in their own various ways. For anyone interested in Ice Age art, Clottes’s enthusiasm cannot fail to energize, inspire, and provide caution to their own investigations.”