Production of cave art facsimile at Atelier des Fac-Similés du Périgord, Montignac-Lascaux, France. (See article by Maxime Ferrier on pages 116–117.)

Early medieval rock engravings at the Chaganka site, Altai, southern Siberia. (See article by N. Konstantinov et al., pp. 8–18.)

The main panel of the Duogart site complex, northern Xinjiang Province, China. (See article by P. S. C. Taçon et al., pp. 19–31.)
Rock art: a cultural treasure at risk

Indigenous Australians have created a wealth of rock art, some of the most important and spectacular in the world, of great significance to them and their culture, and more generally, under their custodianship, a great Australian cultural treasure. Australian rock art is, however, in many cases under severe threat. In Australia there is no national strategy for the conservation of rock art.

The internationally renowned Getty Conservation Institute (GCI), based in Los Angeles, has a long history of work on conservation of rock art and, in Australia in 1988/89, sponsored the earliest international course on this subject. The GCI under the leadership of Dr Neville Agnew has continued its interest and work in rock art conservation and management. Recently the GCI has been working in southern Africa and in Australia, to run a series of rock art management courses and workshops, and an exchange program between Australian and southern African traditional owners and rock art experts.

This culminated in a forum hosted by the Traditional Owners and staff of Kakadu National Park, to bring together the learning and input from Australian and southern African participants. The forum aimed to identify the key threats to rock art and the needs for its conservation, in the process creating a vision for the future conservation of rock art.

On behalf of Neville Agnew and the Getty Conservation Institute, and the Traditional Owners and experts who work with the GCI, it is a great pleasure to let you know that a book entitled Rock art: a cultural treasure at risk, which is a reflection of this work, is now available as a free downloadable and lavishly illustrated PDF. To obtain a copy, please copy and paste the following link into your web browser:


The purpose of the work is to raise public awareness about the value of rock art and to encourage best practice in its conservation and management. We invite you to have a look at this document and to use it in any way that you see fit in the development of policy and practice in this area and to pass on the link and this information to anyone else who might be interested.

Feedback is invited on this document. You are very welcome to send comments and suggestions to Neville Agnew at nagnew@getty.edu, or to any of the following Australian representatives:

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Cave art facsimiles

The Atelier des Fac-Similés du Périgord is a company specialising in reproductions of decorated pre-Historic cave walls. It is based in Montignac-Lascaux, in the Périgord region of France.

Its reproductions of cave walls are made with the utmost precision, mirroring the caves’ real contours, surface finish and speleothem decoration. The producers combine the latest technologies, including laser scans, digital photos and data processing, using patented materials and the input of highly skilled artists, painters, sculptors, visual artists and specialist technicians (Fig. 1). The Atelier’s work is both scientific and artistic and has now been exhibited in some of the world’s best museums, garnering worldwide acclaim as part of the travelling International Exhibition Lascaux.

The Atelier boasts considerable production and development capacity, with a floor space of 4000 m² including painting, modelling, resin casting and mechanical construction studios, a ‘colours and testing’ laboratory, a photography space, a model room, a showroom measuring 100 m² and several storage

Figure 1. Skilled artist working on cave art facsimile at Atelier des Fac-Similés du Périgord, France.
AFSP grew out of the reproductions of the Lascaux cave, a world-renowned cave art site located in the heart of the Périgord region. Today, the company aims to share its outstanding expertise with any kind of reproduction projects at other caves worldwide, for which reproducing their pre-Historic paintings would represent safeguarding valuable local heritage from the deterioration caused by public visitation. Facsimiles allow the public continued access to cave art produced by our distant ancestors, and thus fulfils the human desire to investigate the origins of our humanity.

The Atelier’s most prestigious work in progress, which it began in 2012, is the Montignac Lascaux International Centre for Parietal Art. This involves producing in the workshop the world’s most important decorated cave replica, with around 900 m² of reproductions, to be transported and then installed on the site of the new International Centre (Fig. 2).

Previously, the Atelier reproduced five walls (120 m²) displaying major murals from the Lascaux cave for the International Exhibition Lascaux. These replicas can be dismantled for transportation and have been designed to travel the globe: they have been to Bordeaux, Chicago’s Field Museum, Houston, Montreal, Brussels, Paris and Geneva and will travel to Asia also. Seven panels of the Ekain cave in Spain, totalling 260 m², have also been produced, complete with murals, which were transported and installed at Zestoa in Spain. Some replicas of the cave of Niaux have also been created for a museum in Spain.

Finally, the Atelier has restored the replica cave currently open to the public in Montignac, Lascaux II, after it had withstood some thirty years of visits by millions of people. Most of the walls and vaults were cleaned, corrosion was removed from steel parts and anti-rust treatment applied, remodelling undertaken and the background and paintings on many murals were repaired.

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A resource

A useful resource for rock art researchers looking for relevant organisations around the world is the Global Rock Art Database hosted by Griffith University, Australia. Located at http://www.rockartdatabase.com/v2/, it has been established and is being maintained by Robert Haubt, a PhD candidate at the Place, Evolution and Rock Art Heritage Unit at Griffith University.

Figure 2. Production of facsimile of Lascaux.

Abstracts of recent Australian rock art theses

Sex & gender: an archaeological analysis of rock art of the northwest Kimberley
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The study of rock art throughout the world has recently taken a retrospective view of the theoretical approaches traditionally adopted in its analysis and reporting. This has been triggered principally by feminist arguments that much of the ethnographical and anthropological scholarship was largely male-centric. Reviewing existing data generated by both male and female researchers revealed that a Eurocentric and androcentric reporting was endemic and this stimulated new approaches. The cry was for ‘women to be placed back in the picture’ and the pendulum swing was impressive. Feminist advocates had their day with ‘gender’ taking front of stage. This was a healthy reaction to its absence and has resulted in analysis of feminist issues being absorbed into recent mainstream archaeological research. However, it is now time for a more considered approach to be taken where the male, female and other are given equivalent attention.

My recording of rock art sites focused on the Aboriginal lands of the far northwest section of the Kimberley in Western Australia. Analysis was designed...