

# *International Federation of Rock Art Organizations 2013*

## *ABSTRACTS*



*Layout by  
Peggy Whitehead*

### *Contributing Session Editors*

*Robert G. Bednarik  
Herman Bender  
Hipolito Collado Giraldo  
Carol Diaz-Granados  
José Julio García Arranz  
Mary A. Gordon  
Mavis Greer  
Yang Huisheng  
Jane Kolber  
Lawrence Loendorf*

*Carolynne Merrell  
Myles Miller  
William Breen Murray  
Edith Pereira  
Anne Q. Stoll  
Matthias Strecker  
Carlos Viramontes Arzuaga  
Steven J. Waller  
Zhang Yasha*

AMERICAN ROCK ART RESEARCH ASSOCIATION  
Glendale, Arizona  
2013

**Session 6**  
**GREAT MURAL TRADITIONS OF THE AMERICAN SOUTHWEST**

**James D. Farmer**, Department of Art History, Virginia Commonwealth University,  
jfarmer@vcu.edu

**Reinaldo Morales Jr.**, Department of Art, University of Central Arkansas,  
RMorales@uca.edu

*This session explores several specific pictographic styles found across the Greater American Southwest (Lower Pecos River in Texas [Fig. 1], Colorado Plateau in Utah [Fig. 2], Grand Canyon Esplanade in Arizona [Fig. 3], and Baja California [Fig. 4]). These styles are distinguished as one of the earliest great North American painted mural traditions, and constitute one of the greatest prehistoric rock art traditions worldwide, comparable to those of paleolithic Europe, Africa and Australia. These styles most likely date to the Middle to Late Archaic periods (4000 B.C.–A.D. 500). Elaborately stylized figures, sophisticated polychrome compositions, and simultaneous monumentality and miniaturism characterize the imagery, and provide the aesthetic affect that activates the various iconographic programs in each region. Yet only in the last 40 years have these styles begun to be subjected to more specific artistic and art historical interpretations.*

*Early historic interpretations of this imagery focused on two primary issues: dating and working chronologies, and basic identification of recognizable themes and subjects. The latter approach has long been influenced by ideas relating to shamanic practices and rituals, such as the otherworldly, transformative or supernatural appearance of the figures, or interactions between anthropomorphs, zoomorphs and plant forms. While these approaches remain valid, more recent scholarship and research has shifted to questions spanning the range between philosophical discourse regarding their function as actual works of ‘art’, to more art historical and object-specific issues focusing on form, style and technique, dating, iconographic analysis (as opposed to the mere identification of recognizable subjects), and broader cultural contexts, as well as purely art historical issues of spatial construction/perception, composition, naturalism vs. abstraction, etc.*

*This session investigates the concept of rock art traditions, specifically, the methodologies used to discern cultural connections across space and time. An underlying premise is that distantly related yet similar styles reflect various models of social and cultural interaction, as specifically reflected in the mural traditions considered herein.*



Figure 1. Pecos River style mural (“White Shaman”), Galloway White Shaman Preserve, Texas. (Photo: Reinaldo Morales Jr.)



Figure 2. Barrier Canyon style mural (“Holy Ghost Group”), Canyonlands National Park, Utah. (Photo: by David Sucec)



Figure 3. Esplanade style mural, Bureau of Land Management Kanab Creek Wilderness Area, Arizona. (Photo: James D. Farmer)

Figure 4. Great Mural style paintings (“Cueva Pintada”), Sierra de San Francisco, Baja California, Mexico. (Photo: Robert Mark, Rupestrian CyberServices)



Figure 5. Nordeste Tradition mural (“Toca do Morcego”), Serra da Capivara National Park, Piauí, Brazil. (Photo: Reinaldo Morales Jr.)

LAYERS OF MEANING: STRATIGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF A PICTORIAL NARRATIVE IN THE LOWER PECOS CANYONLANDS OF TEXAS

**Carolyn Boyd,  
Amanda Castañeda  
Charles Koenig**

SHUMLA Archeological Research and  
Education Center  
cboyd@shumla.org

Description of individual figures at rock art sites provides data for inter- and intra-site patterning. Through documentation and analysis of the sequential ordering of those figures, as well as their stratigraphic relationships, researchers can gain insights into the artistic and cognitive processes that led to the creation of the panel. In this paper, we present the results of an analysis of the White Shaman rock art panel located

in the Lower Pecos Canyonlands of southwest Texas. The panel spans 8 meters in length and 4 meters in height and contains more than 100 Pecos River style anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and enigmatic images dating to the Late Archaic (3,000 to 1,500 years ago). Through stratigraphic analysis of these pictographs using a Dino Lite handheld microscope, the development of Harris matrices, and production of layered illustrations using Adobe Photoshop, we have determined the strict order in which the colors were applied and the stratigraphic relationships between figures. This analysis demonstrates that the panel is a planned composition with rules governing not only the portrayal of symbolic forms, but also the sequencing of colors. Complex images painted in black, red, yellow, and white were woven together at the White Shaman site to form an intricate pictorial narrative.

#### CHASING ROCK ART HISTORY: THE ROLE OF AMERICAN ROCK ART IN TRADITIONAL ART HISTORICAL DISCOURSE

**James D. Farmer**

Virginia Commonwealth University  
jfarmer@vcu.edu

Rock art scholarship, and particularly studies on ancient American rock art styles, have long held a rather peculiar relationship to mainstream art history. On the one hand, most standard college art history survey textbooks generally ignore or marginalize rock art imagery almost to the point of non-existence, yet with one notable exception. Nearly all of these same textbooks typically introduce the entire history of human art with discussions on the significance of one of the most highly acknowledged and globally recognized rock art styles, the great Paleolithic cave paintings of Western Europe. Many of these textbooks exceed 1000 pages in length, including over 1000 total illustrations, yet after no more than two to three pages (at most) dedicated to the cave paintings as introduction, rock art is summarily abandoned and

only fleetingly referenced in a very few cases. Given the global range, deep antiquity and persistency of rock art imagery throughout the history of human artistic production, such apparent dismissal by the core art history survey textbooks is difficult to rationalize.

Rock art scholarship itself of course suffers from no such lack of publication or coverage, and has indeed evolved as a somewhat separate and rather robust field of art historical inquiry, existing parallel to, but only occasionally directly engaged with mainstream art historical discourse. As J. J. Brody pointed out in 1991, the vast majority of scholarly publications on ancient American culture, including rock art studies, are routinely cataloged and shelved in the anthropology, religious studies, or history sections of libraries and book stores, rather than sections on the arts. Ancient American rock art often suffers from a second scholarly disadvantage within the general art history survey texts as well, as it is commonly subsumed within the broader coverage of Precolumbian art in general, only covered in texts which include the even broader distinction of Non-Western art coverage (including African, Asian, and Oceanic as well), and again typically given less than adequate coverage.

Rock art studies in the last 30 years have clearly established the extraordinary artistic sophistication of numerous ancient American rock art styles as significant painting traditions (as distinguished from the more archaeologically loaded, and less art historical term "rock art"). This presentation presents a brief review of the context and coverage of ancient American rock art images in the major art historical survey texts of the 20th and 21st centuries, and argues that several ancient American styles, such as the Barrier Canyon Anthropomorphic Style of Utah, or the great murals of Baja California, are worthy and comparable candidates for inclusion in more broadly contextualized art historical surveys, and that rock art scholarship as a process should target a more specific art historical

audience, rather than specific rock art or anthropologically oriented publication venues.

#### REFERENCES CITED

Brody, J. J.

1991 *Anasazi and Pueblo Painting*. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.

Joyce, T. A.

1913 The Weeping God. In *Essays and Studies presented to William Ridgeway on his 60th Birthday*, edited by E. C. Quiggin. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Lekson, Stephen

2009 *A History of the Ancient Southwest*. School for Advanced Research Press, Santa Fe.

Ridgeway, William

1964 *The Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races*, Benjamin Blom, New York.

Schaafsma, Polly

1985 Form, Content, and Function: Theory and Method in North American Rock Art Studies. In *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory*, Vol. 8, pp. 237-277. Academic Press, New York.

1990 Shamans' Gallery: A Grand Canyon Rock Art Site. *Kiva* 55(3):213-234.

Turpin, Solveig A.

1994 On a Wing and a Prayer: Flight Metaphors in Pecos River Art. In *Shamanism and Rock Art in North America*, edited by Solveig A. Turpin. Rock Art Foundation, San Antonio.

#### PATTERNS OF FIGURE PLACEMENT IN GREAT MURAL ART NEAR MISSION SANTA GERTRUDIS, BAJA CALIFORNIA

Jon Harman

dstretch@prodigy.net

Paintings of the Great Mural Style in Baja California follow strict conventions in the depictions of humans and animals. These conventions have been described in Crosby's book *Cave Paintings of Baja California*. The figures are often placed in

groups or overlapped. This paper describes patterns in figure placement at sites in Baja California in the vicinity of Mission Santa Gertrudis. Patterns include: pairs of large human figures (called monos in this rock art style) with arms crossing; rows of monos placed side by side with arms crossing; groups of smaller figures at the feet of the larger ones or grouped together by themselves; V-shaped groups of large monos. These patterns demonstrate that conventions governed figure placement as well as figure content in this region. It is hoped that study of the placement of figures can give insight into the meaning of the paintings.

#### VARIOUS SHARED THEMES AND SYMBOLS IN THE GREAT MURAL TRADITIONS OF ARCHAIC NORTH AMERICA

James Burr Harrison III

jamesh@SpokaneTribe.com

There is continuity between Pecos River, Barrier Canyon, Grand Canyon Polychrome, Gran Mural, and Dinwoody styles of rock art. Commonalities include motifs, animate characters, and structural relationships between figures. The following paper will explore particular examples from Utah, Baja, Texas, Coahuila, Wyoming, and Arizona. Despite these ties and the potential for historical links and information exchange the majority of evidence suggests that each style is a distinctive and unique cultural manifestation.

#### ANCESTRAL LANDSCAPES: IDENTITY, MEMORY AND ROCK ART IN THE CENTRAL CORDILLERAS OF THE PENINSULA OF BAJA CALIFORNIA, MEXICO

**María de la Luz Gutiérrez Martínez**

Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Centro INAH-Baja California Sur  
lukero2@hotmail.com

The peninsula of Baja California, Mexico, concentrates one of the most extraordinary

repertoires of rock art in the country; in fact, one of the most characteristic features of its prehistory is that the native people promoted, in some regions, the mass production of rock paintings from very ancient times. The region that has more profusion and variety of imagery is the central sierras, which is also scenery where an exceptional cultural event occurred: the development of the pictorial tradition of the Great Murals. The paper will present a review of stylistic variants of these monumental rock paintings, becoming known other newly identified regional trends; besides, an updated version of their areas of distribution will be discussed, as well as their possible relation to the demarcation of social territories. The analysis starts from the premise that some emblematic Great Mural sites are capable of referring to the relations of similarity and difference that governed the indigenous community organization by the lineages, process by which they constructed, consolidated and negotiated their identities in a inter/group level and even inter/ethnic, mapping the landscape over large areas loaded with memory and feeling.

#### 1492 BC: THE GOLDEN AGE OF AMERICAN ANTHROPOMORPHISM

**Reinaldo Morales Jr.**

University of Central Arkansas  
RMorales@uca.edu

By around 1500 BC a variety of mural painting traditions had developed in the Americas. Some noticeable examples are characterized by a particular manner of stylized anthropomorphic form, including the Barrier Canyon, Esplanade and Pecos River styles from the American Southwest. The level of formal similarities shared by these styles forces us to consider how closely related the painters were: Are these similarities the product of formal coincidence? Are they the product of some cognitive inevitability? Or might these similarities represent evidence of an outright aesthetic conspiracy?

The degree and nature of the cultural interconnections between these groups of painters is key to these questions. Nothing in the geography or cultural (pre)history of the American Southwest precludes the sort of long-distance communication networks required to support contact across vast regions. "Everyone knew everything," and "distance can be dealt with," as Stephen Lekson (2009:8-9) reminds us. The notion of a rock art *tradition* might thus be appropriate to describe these Late Archaic Southwest styles — roughly contemporary, and "similar in content and expression" (Schaafsma 1985:252).

But when examples of similar stylizations from much farther afield are considered (Fig. 5), such as those from Brazil's *Nordeste* (Northeast), distance is not so easily dealt with. An "aesthetic conspiracy" enabled by long-distance communication networks seems less likely when we acknowledge the remarkable consistencies between *Nordeste* rock art and that from the American Southwest. Recognizing formal similarity is easy. Deciphering what it means, if anything, is not. The cognitive landscape of the Archaic Americas might have provided an environment where similar forms and iconography recurred as part of an ancient "shamanistic tradition" (Turpin 1994:90). Perhaps these painters "shared a world view and its associated ideology to a significant degree" (Schaafsma 1990:230). These murals might be evidence of a long-held suspicion in New World archaeology, "that the various manifestations of ancient American culture possessed at least a common psychological element" (Joyce [1913] in Ridgeway 1964:373). The anthropomorphism that characterizes a fluorescence of American mural traditions by 1500 BC is evidence that something connected several disparate hunter-gatherer populations in a distinct recurring aesthetic, even if a broadly acceptable explanation for such unity of visual expression evades us.

HOLY GHOST IN SPACE: A CONSIDERATION  
OF FORM IN PREHISTORIC BARRIER  
CANYON STYLE ROCK ART

**David Sucec**

BCS Project

bcsproject@xmission.com

Framed by a shallow arch, the Holy Ghost Group is the physical and aesthetic center of the Great Gallery, which is the type-site for the Archaic Period Barrier Canyon style (originally termed the "Barrier Canyon Anthropomorphic Style", but Polly Schaafsma in 1971). The Great Gallery is located in Canyonlands National Park, southern Utah. Barrier Canyon style images are found in large parts of Utah and, to a lesser extent in western Colorado and northern Arizona. Certainly, the most striking Barrier Canyon style rock art composition, the Holy Ghost Group may well be the most remarkable prehistoric painted composition on the Colorado Plateau and unique in North American rock art. The size and elevated locations of the Holy Ghost images rarely fail to impress visitors to this well-known site; yet, what distinguishes this panel, among those at other prehistoric rock art sites, is its masterful design and "modern" spatial construction. The Holy Ghost composition has the appearance of visual depth (three dimensions). Although, we are accustomed to seeing convincing representations of three dimensional space in the paintings of today, the world of prehistoric rock art was, for tens of thousands of years, dominated by a flat-looking, frontal, two-dimensional figure image and pictorial format. This presentation will undertake an analysis and discussion of the visual form of the Holy Ghost composition, particularly, the spatial dynamics that sets this group of anthropomorphic figures apart from most other prehistoric rock art panels or compositions.