Introduction
Prehistoric Imaginary and the Modernity of Images

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Hauling never-before seen things out of the caves into the light, as Leroi-Gourhan's generation of prehistorians had the fortune to do—the joy of discovery as an authentic experience, is a rarity nowadays. The fascination of touching something for the first time with hands or eyes, in this case the oldest evidence of anthropogenesis, can also be explained by an urge for progress, as a return to a new beginning. Simulation also proves to be a medium of avant-garde experience, be it as a duplicate of the caves at Lascaux, as a virtual model of computer-generated spaces, or even as a work of art itself. This return to the beginnings of artistic creation led to the visions that politically, socially, and from an individual psychological perspective are subject to a pressure to innovate and evolve. The currentness of the volume at hand is too multi-layered for this revisiting of prehistoric art to be filed away as just a fashionable phenomenon. By considering the question of the application and appropriation of prehistoric art and what could be seen or discovered therein, the subject of this book zeroes in on the historical initial spark of this short circuit. So-called classical modernism is a prime example of a readjusting of contemporary art through the rediscovery of an anthropologically condensed production and experience of art. In contrast, current works of art that deal in particular with corporeality, nature, and the human condition may seem to us like an echo, a faint recapitulation or remake of an authentic new discovery of prehistoric art by the early modernist generation.

However, this first short circuit linking contemporaneity with 30,000-year-old art, which surrenders itself to the gestural, physical works—the mode of production as well as the subject—to an unregulated form of expression that lies beyond the academic canon and flows directly from the self, is also a projection. The scarcity of evidence and its exclusivity guarantees authentic creation and the artistic experience. In the beginnings of art lies the full potential of a creativity, one that is closely tied to life, an unsevered part of humanity becoming aware of itself; in this way, this creativity becomes a guarantor for the existence of art at the center of contemporary efforts toward progress. This filter created by the struggles of discovery, by scarcity, stands

opposite the boundless availability of reproduced images, as thematized by Walter Benjamin. At the same time, it signifies an exclusivity on the part of the viewer, who is allowed to feel like a member of the clan and, today, conditioned by mass society, in search of authenticity far beyond art—between Neolithic kitchen and adventure camp—always preaches the Stone Age as a reset of his or her own relationship to the world; hollow shamanism, which sells gestures and shrouds in the promise of salvation, biologism, and palpability are a reaction to virtualization and technicized everyday realities. Nudism, that which is supposedly uncivilized or primitive, the here and now as it is seen today as an individual experience challenged by the paradox of individualism are just as much a mere reprise as was the revival of Zen and Buddhism in early modernism, which, what is more, blended the non-European with the prehistoric in the vicinity of the European genesis of humankind.

The only thing that can help us escape the impending museological praxis of life is the unimaginative objectivity of scientific examination based on hermeneutical principles. Its scope is essentially to be understood as modernist image production, as it stands at the merging point between the emergence of modernism and the confirmation of the beginning of anthropogenesis as a creative composite of nature and culture. Here, historical awareness becomes a kind of driving force and medication behind an expansion of awareness through the avant-garde.

Here, when the relevant, specialized research has its say, discrepancies and misunderstandings also come to light. After all, today the focus is mainly on panel paintings and sculptures conceived in isolation, works of art in the modern sense, an imaging medium clearly removed from cave painting or rock carving, and in museum-like, even temperature-controlled environments, at that. Artistic "re-updating" is first and foremost self-referential; it is an individual, original artistic product and not a simulation; it is modernity and only partly a wistful reversion to more authentic times, whatever that may mean. Indeed, with the modernist verve of the anti-academic, it actually goes against the as Hollywood as they are naïve projections of prehistory, as primed by the imaginarium of nine-teenth-century literary visions, giving space to true human nature, defending animal nature—the paradoxical fiction of a oneness with nature and instincts as a sublimation of puritanically regulated brutalities.

One may understand it as a freedom and ability to fall out of time, which, in parts of the avant-garde, proves itself to be a looking back into the future. The unaffected directness (in art) or, if you will, the noble simplicity of paintings has of course been prepared long in advance, roughly with the Rousseauian, moralizing, and social idea of a society that embraces a simplicité, the uncontrolled and unforeseeable—human nature. In early modernism, this is most impressively expressed in the tendency toward abstraction. Viewed against the backdrop of the prehistorians' contributions, it is certainly a questionable concept, as the construction of a succession of styles in fact deals with a conception of prehistoric archeology that is not easily escaped. The model of an initial abstract, geometrizing phase in art that preludes a "more developed" figurative form of creativity seems contaminated by the successive model based on

antiquity of ornamental art, archaic art, and classical art.

Dystopias in film, photography, and literature appear at once as an impending fear of catastrophe and as a longed-for place, with an underlying propensity toward catharsis in a hypercomplex world that no longer feels like itself. This could include topics such as the destruction of the environment, in particular climatic turmoil, if humanity looks back at ice ages, survival strategies, or the fire of fossil-fueled energy. At the same time, it is astonishing when the human form, in its corporeality, takes center stage but animal paintings are less likely to be continued. Moreover, the majority of artists, with their more or less intuitive approaches, were certainly not interested in an exact chronology, the efforts toward which are visible in scientists' discussions. The detailed observation of the work, what artists such as Klee, Baumeister, Miro, and Picasso did and did not know becomes all the more important.

It is a paradox when, in times of disenchantment with globalization, humankind, in its "thrownness" (Geworfenheit), turns toward regionalization and new supposed experiences of nature, ultimately seeking its projection in the prehistoric. In a technologically-saturated world of ubiquitous measurement and optimization, paleo kitchens and hand slaughtering still seem to have a thread of creatureliness. No virtual simulation can free us from our physical confinement. Though we may have increasing access to the Stone Age caves in the form of models, even today's technologically perfected replicas remain stationary hollows, spaces of fascination with that which can be seen, smelled and touched. But a connection to nature is sought precisely where we cannot imagine the traces of this prehistoric era as the beginning of any kind of culture. A tradition such as this would thus be a search for traces of cultural achievement rather than for evidence of nature.

By contrast, the exhibit of prehistoric art in Africa presented in concurrence with the colloquium in 2017 makes Paris look like a mirage of cultural and artificial accumulations—the precise locus of the avant-garde and sciences where the discovery of prehistoric art was intellectually promoted. The focus was on the international and multidisciplinary view of modernism's mechanisms of desire in search of originality. As a museum-like city home to historic, modern, and contemporary art, Paris proves itself a space for the "prehistoric." Here—with quarters filled with cave painting-like graffiti (Montmartre, with its caverns, and the Metro), applications of observations of everyday life on the walls as an all-over creative potential—the question of exclusivity of access also arises. Does the creative expression of this reversion primarily take place in modern agglomerations because it is precisely there that the desire for unfettered creatureliness is especially felt? One can hardly image a better point of departure, as the rediscovery of prehistoric art by the New York School utters the question, simply because of the almost inconceivably large and marked contrast in terms of location and times. Here, the first half of the twentieth century is examined, during which time prehistoric art was made part of the contemporary canon as "l'art premier." However, if, for example, we inquire into the beginnings of art and its history, which may very well lie in the millennium preceding the last ice age, the art

historical questions become considerably more complicated. But where? We have to say goodbye to the concept of linear development to avoid a teleology of art that, what is more, lumps together "European" and non-European prehistoric art. Considering the scarcity of findings from 40,000 years ago and the lack of analyzable artefacts, almost all questions of time and place, style, and center and periphery seem rather hypothetical. The first simple drawings are no children's drawings; their true nature remains conjecture, as does the theory of the translation of nature into symbols, and the question of naturalism. Does it make sense to categorically differentiate between abstraction, symbol, and naturalism if they are all part of a retrojection that derives its orientation from the history of the discipline and its self-examination? Occasionally, the complicated phenomenon of art transfer arises, for instance, when evidence of ice-age jewelry from the Atlantic or from southern Germany is found in Dordogne. And isn't the inability to distinguish a hoof print from a vulva what makes the indefinable so fascinating?

Even though the abstracted forms of female statues, as the most common subject in art to this day, indicate the transition to early historic art and, in our eyes, point toward the geometric art of Greece, the difference between often more detailed, more realistic animal depictions and the stylization of the human form, as seen, for example, in the usually less well-preserved male figures with animal heads, provides food for thought. Hands can barely be differentiated; epochal classifications based on stylistic phases remain nothing more than conceptual tools (Leroi-Gourhan's Paleolithic art styles I–IV)—makeshifts that operate like working hypotheses—which, in view of the vast timespan, however, at most allow a continuous development to be traced. The perception, discussion, and reproduction of Stone Age art has always fallen prey to the temptations of religiously or politically tinged ideologization. Here, it is less a matter of detailed questions than of a sense of how the structuring of the world in prehistoric times can be traced based on tradition. This pertains to bodily experience, bodily conventions, gestures, presences—the hand! This can be referred to as bodily experience without history, which subjects the viewer's body to a maximal stimulus. It is an act of bracing oneself for and surrendering to the all-consuming experience of the self, embedded in the cave, in the act of reception—a parietal art, comparable to the panoramas of the nineteenth century or animated motion pictures, which refers to the act of birth itself. The nexus of distant "history," prehistory, and a present day proves particularly fascinating and baffling—a short circuit that promises direct, unobstructed access and bypasses any history by simply tunneling under it. We are interested in what lies in the dark, a perception in which an almost mystical action appears, ideally accompanied by a studio that serves as a time machine in which to create reproductions. It comes down to this simultaneous presence of work and viewer in the iconic space of the grottos, the coexistence of materiality and olfactory qualities, of temperatures and tactile sensations, diffusely lit and of a diffuse temporality, as we look at prehistoric "art," whatever that may mean. It is a question of how we perceive the fabrication of the work (the application of charcoal, sanguine, or ocher, etc.

with the fingers or the mouth), in other words, how we imagine the artist-shaman in the ritual act; this is more important than what one could describe as the character of the work of art (Werkcharakter); ultimately, it is about overcoming the separation of subject and object. The grotto, as a projection space par excellence, is capable of dismissing the distinction between inside and outside by viewing the outside from within. This darkroom-like situation strips any perceptual situation of a linear temporality—indeed, when viewed from a distance, it renders linear chronology obsolete in a timeless experience. It is no coincidence that this is followed by allusions to the apocalypse, which, in their melancholia, shift the focus to the question of humankind's planetary presence.

In the combination or confrontation of the following articles, the problem is perhaps most concretely expressed in the widely varying goals of the disciplines: on the one hand, there is the work of the prehistorian, who, sticking closely to the findings and based on careful study, reconstructs the possible uses of the object; on the other hand, there is the perspective of the art historian, who tends to situate the objects in a context, a chronology, or even a history of reception in the hope of attributing meaning. Both push toward a sociology of Stone Age art. It is (modern) art itself that most strikingly lands within this gap or hiatus between rationality and imagination, as its variability encompasses both poles. Sometimes it manifests as a form of primitivism (Goldwater), transforms into an inversion of the Platonic cave metaphor (Nietzsche, Bergson), or leads to exoticism (Gauguin). It is about the infancy of humanity as well as the buried creative potential of the child, be it in the work of Miro, Picasso's ceramic pieces, or in regard to so-called "l'art populaire" in the sense of Rousseau, the customs officer. One might then agree with Miro in viewing the history of art since the cave paintings as one of decline, considering the artist's attempt to find a balance between abstraction and symbolism in his paintings. And if Picasso, after his visit to Lascaux in 1941, recognized the growth of culture as the beginning of decadence, then his recurring figures of bathers, Venus, and the minotaur represent a processing of cultural traditions whose demand to return to the "paradisiac" condition is immediately palpable; the same goes for the application of large-scale linear constellations on walls, as documented in Brassaï's photographs. It is also thanks to modernism that we get an idea of the extent to which the imagery of earlier myths sprang from the catalog of the prehistoric panopticon. The accident on the canvas, the unforeseeable symbol as the starting point for creative design, may very well mirror the situation of the cave painters: their handprints proceed from and insert themselves into an existing, unalterable constellation of the stone surface. Supports such as walls or animal hides are part of primitivism—as prehistoric art has been called since the 1920s. From a distance, this authentically direct expression is determined as academic and therefore as an inappropriate descriptor for prehistoric images.

So, when did prehistoric art start? The overwhelming majority of artefacts in Europe comes from the Magdalenian epoch. It must be assumed that the earliest evidence was simply not preserved. The idea that art was born far earlier than 40,000 years

ago, around the Aurignacian era, remains speculation. However, the increased mobility due to the sinking sea levels that accompanied the last ice age is astonishing when discernable regions clearly distinguish themselves as artistic centers (Charente, the Périgord, Basque Country, Asturias, or southern Germany). For this reason, in specific cases, modernism and its reception are largely dependent on the frequented, famous sites and their "layers of styles." The arrival of modern man in the Aurignacian era (the Dordogne being the most important gravitational center) and the relevant topographical particularities, such as the karst caves in the Swabian Alb or in the Jura mountains—this all forms a kind of artistic-topographical panorama to be travelled.

The specific stimulus for the contributions in this book consists in the direct confrontation of fact-based archeological work with texts on modernist artistic references. This is precisely what lead us to once again pose the questions of mystical attribution; l'art pour l'art; even of the necessity of production in general, which requires time and energy; of the individuality or seriality of products; of continuity or creative eruptions. If the more than one thousand examples of graphic depiction in the Chauvet Cave are themselves considered complex findings, what about the idea of a "proto-art," as seems to have developed in Africa? Is the artistic product the mainspring of anthropogenesis, a catalyst for that which we want to describe as culture? Or is art proof of a cultural achievement justified as something other than as the hallmark of humankind?

These are the questions modern art raises anew. Here, knowledge of the individual work is crucial, for example, when we look for meaning in the depiction of a horse or an ibex. Does a religious practice underlie the work? Is it part of a ritual? Is it linked to animism? Can the cave be said to have a scenography, perhaps comparable to the sections of a sacred space with a peristyle, narrative nave, and apse or sanctuary? These are questions about the motivations of prehistoric humans, about life and art—these are the questions of the modern artist.

If we call to mind the shift during the 1930s from the geometric abstraction of an artist like Oskar Schlemmer to the glyphic imagery of Willi Baumeister, knowledge of the artist's collection—including silex, figurine reproductions, and prehistoric tools—and visits to the caves in Untertürkheim means everything, because herein lies the "unknown in art"! The same is true for the absence of a linear development in the work of Alberto Giacometti, which instead follows the influences of his surroundings: that of his village home in the Alps as well as the impressions left by Rodin and Paris, where the Surrealists' *Histoire naturelle* coincided with the arrival of prehistoric painting in Paris in the 1920s. Giacometti, who had known of the rock carvings in the Camonica Valley since the 1920s, arrived in Paris with luggage in hand. The pictorial solutions are as diverse as the prehistoric references. This all perpetually blends together with knowledge of the art of the high cultures of Egypt and Archaic Greece and non-European art from the South Pacific, Africa, and New Guinea. Linear influences and the teleological principle can hardly handle modernism's short circuits and are also obsolete with regard to prehistoric products and behaviors. Here too one may speak of material decay.

The example of the petroglyphs spread over a 25-kilometer stretch in the Camonica Valley near Brescia constitutes an archive spanning 10,000 years, from a post-ice age hunter-gatherer culture into the Roman era. At the same time, this exceptional case, which indeed illustrates an evolution of art, reminds us of the temporal horizon that only leads to a halfway concise concept from a distance and through omissions. The seemingly mystical rock formations, the images that oscillate between natural forms and anthropomorphic masks and carry the traces of their creators' workmanship, are reminiscent of stylistic changes and something akin to artistic periods. At the same time, however, subsequent alterations, scratched out areas, and the recycling of images, which, over thousands of years, led to the accumulation of layers on a single rock, a certain stability of traditions, leads us to believe that, in the villages preserved today as remnants of walls, people had a similar view of things. The extended duration of their use—Cemmo Stele 3, located in the National Archeological Parc of Massi di Cemmo, shows evidence of a total of 7 different periods—gives us an idea of a sequence of phases, which were also certainly influenced by climatic changes. They progress from the naturalism of a hunter-gatherer culture to a schematic Surrealism of a population that grew with the ice age; from an initial focus on animal depictions to seemingly entranced imaginary spiritual beings with a supernatural quality; from scenic configurations to, ultimately, symbolic images that point to pre-Etruscan script.

In these interpretative attributions and through artistic treatment, prehistory becomes part of history. At the same time, these classifications carry concepts of social structures, religion, or oligarchically organized communities: weapon cults; central deities and cosmogonic theories of a god of the universe or a splitting up into specific cultic contexts in the Bronze Age; territorial structuring based on engraved topographies; and even narrative depictions of the Iron Age, complete with weapons, warriors, erect phalluses, and sodomitical unions between man and animal. If we understand this too to be an inscription into history, then where does one draw the line between prehistory and history?

The fundamental question remains to what extent the modern works, paintings, and objects can be considered as merely a reference to—particularly in this case—prehistoric models. Understanding them as a rediscovery of or answer to anthropological constants based on the new discoveries of prehistoric art, contrary to historical conceptual tool that seek to assign every picture a predecessor, could contribute to a deeper understanding of that which is inherent in creativity and art. To this end, one must consider the distinctiveness of the artistic individual; created in cave-like studios, their work springs from an "enactment" that, with water and fire, often translates deeper layers into gestures, which were key for Leroi-Gourhan. Viewed from this perspective, the confrontation of pre- and early history with modern art and its history promotes a particularly fruitful and mutually beneficial critical analysis when it comes to a reflexive understanding of the essence of art both here and there.