



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Art in the Making: The evolutionary origins of visual art as a communication signal

Mendoza Straffon, L.

Citation

Mendoza Straffon, L. (2014, September 10). *Art in the Making: The evolutionary origins of visual art as a communication signal*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/28698>

Version: Corrected Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/28698>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/28698> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Mendoza Traffon, Larissa

Title: Art in the making. The evolutionary origins of visual art as a communication signal

Issue Date: 2014-09-10

ART IN THE MAKING

Larissa Mendoza Straffon

Lay out: Larissa Mendoza Straffon
Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden
Cover illustration: Tom Gauld

© Larissa Mendoza Straffon, 2014

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the written permission of both the copyright owner and the author of the book.

ART IN THE MAKING
***The Evolutionary Origins of Visual Art as a
Communication Signal***

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van
de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,
op gezag van Rector Magnificus prof. mr. C.J.J.M. Stolker
volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties
te verdedigen op 10 september 2014
klokke 13:45

door

LARISSA MENDOZA STRAFFON
geboren te Mexico Stad
in 1977

PROMOTIECOMMISSIE

Promotoren

Prof. dr. C.J.M. Zijlmans

Prof. dr. W.J.L.M. van Damme

Copromotor

Dr. K. MacDonald

Commissieleden

Prof. dr. E.H.M. Sterck (Universiteit Utrecht)

Prof. dr. A. Verhagen

Dr. A. Verpoorte

Contents

List of illustrations	vii
Preface.....	1
1. Art unfolding: Studying the origins of visual art	5
1.1 Pleistocene visual art: An outline of definitions.....	6
1.2 Research approaches to the origins of art	9
1.3 Cooperation as an explanatory framework of human evolution	24
2. From the cradle to the cave: A survey of Pleistocene visual art.....	29
2.1 Archaeological periods in focus: The MSA and EUP.....	31
2.2 Pleistocene visual art: Identification and attribution.....	38
2.3 Tracing the origins of Pleistocene visual art: A general survey.....	42
2.4 Trends in the development of Pleistocene visual art.....	69
2.5 Conclusion	75
3. The art of courtship: Geoffrey Miller’s mate choice model	77
3.1 Sexual selection and mate choice theory: The background.....	78
3.2 The bowerbird and the artist: Key arguments	81
3.3 Visual art as a courtship display: Critical assessment	85
3.4 Test against the archaeological record of visual art.....	95
3.5 Conclusion	100
4. Life Artfied: Ellen Dissanayake’s ethological model	101
4.1 The biological study of behaviour: The background	102
4.2 The artification hypothesis: Key arguments.....	105
4.3 What is art for? Critical assessment.....	111
4.4 Test against the archaeological record of visual art.....	119
4.5 Conclusion	122
5. Art in mind: Steven Mithen’s model of cognitive evolution.....	123
5.1 The evolution of human cognition: The background	124
5.2 The prehistory of the mind: Key arguments	127
5.3 A mind for art: Critical assessment	132
5.4 Test against the archaeological record of visual art.....	141
5.5 Conclusion	144

6. Art signals: Communication, cooperation, and the origins of visual art	147
6.1 Introduction: Visual art as a communication signal	147
6.2 Who art thou? Cooperation, memory & identity	156
6.3 The borne identity: Visual art's origins	166
6.4 Test against the archaeological record of visual art	176
6.5 Conclusion	180
Concluding Remarks	183
<i>General Summary</i>	183
<i>Limitations of the research</i>	185
<i>Suggestions for future research</i>	186
<i>Final reflections</i>	187
Bibliography	189
Samenvatting	217
Curriculum Vitae	221
Acknowledgements	223

List of illustrations

Cover and end page. *Hunter and Painter*. ©Tom Gauld. Reproduced with permission.

Headpiece vignettes: quadruped from Cueva de la Serpiente, rock art site in Baja California Sur, Mexico. Drawing by Ramón Viñas. Reproduced with permission.

Figure 1. Theoretical structure of the origins-of-art models examined in chapters 3, 4 & 5, respectively. Illustration by L. Mendoza Straffon.

Figure 2. Geographical location of the most important sites included in this survey. Illustration by L. Mendoza Straffon and M.A. Wijnhoven.

Figure 3. Five discrete stages in the production process of Aurignacian ivory beads. Illustration by L. Mendoza Straffon and M.A. Wijnhoven, adapted from Barth et al. (2009:16) and White (1989:224).

Figure 4. 75,000-year-old shell beads from the site of Blombos Cave, South Africa. ©C. Henshilwood/F. D'Errico/M. Vanhaeren/F. van Niekerk. Reproduced with permission of Dr. Marian Vanhaeren.

Figure 5. Ostrich eggshell beads from the site of Enkapune Ya Muto, Kenya, dated to ca. 41,000 BP. Photograph by Prof. Stanley Ambrose. Reproduced with permission.

Figure 6. Aurignacian basket-shaped mammoth ivory beads from Abri Castanet, France. Photograph by Prof. Randall White. Reproduced with permission.

Figure 7. Aurignacian two-holed mammoth ivory beads from the site of Vogelherd, in Swabia, Germany. Photograph by W. Binczik. Reproduced with permission of Dr. Sibylle Wolf.

Figure 8. Disk-shaped mammoth ivory beads (reproductions). Reproductions and photograph by M.A. Wijnhoven.

Figure 9. Engraved ochre piece from Blombos Cave, South Africa, dated to ca. 75,000 BP. Image Courtesy of Prof. Christopher Henshilwood.

Figure 10. 40,000-year-old 'Venus' from the site of Hohle Fels, Germany, carved on mammoth ivory. Photograph by H. Jensen ©University of Tübingen. Reproduced with permission of Dr. Sibylle Wolf.

Figure 11. The *Löwenmensch* (Lion Man) from the site of Höhlenstein-Stadel, Germany. Sculpted from a single piece of mammoth tusk. Photograph by Yvonne Mühleis. ©Landesamt für Denkmalpflege im RP Stuttgart. Reproduced with permission of Dr. Kurt Wehrberger.

Figure 12. The tiny Lion Man from the site of Hohle Fels, Germany. Photograph by J. Lipták. ©University of Tübingen. Reproduced with permission of Dr. Sibylle Wolf.

Figure 13. Swabian mammoth ivory figurines (reproductions). A) Adult mammoth. B) Horse. C) Young mammoth. Photograph by M.A. Wijnhoven.

Figure 14. The 'Venus' of Willendorf, Austria. Carved from limestone, it shows traces of red ochre coloration. It has been dated to the Gravettian ca. 25,000 BP. (Reproduction). Photograph by M.A. Wijnhoven.

Figure 15. The horse panel at Chauvet Cave, France. An early example of a complex figurative rock art tradition from the Early Upper Palaeolithic. Photograph by Prof. Jean Clottes. Reproduced with permission.

Figure 16. Chronological relation of archaeological periods, hominin species, and visual art forms from the Late Pleistocene. Illustration by L. Mendoza Straffon and M.A. Wijnhoven.

Figure 17. Theoretical structure of the models analysed previously and the one sketched in chapter 6. Illustration by L. Mendoza Straffon.

Figure 18. Nested hierarchy of four social network levels, suggested by Gamble. Illustration by L. Mendoza Straffon and M.A. Wijnhoven.