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

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Stellingen

1. Visual art is a communication signal, and like most animal signals, it can have different functions in different contexts.
2. The evolution of visual art forms in the Late Pleistocene archaeological record can be explained by an incremental human investment in, and the specialization of, visual art practices.
3. Many of the unique characteristics of human communication, cognition, and culture can be explained by the effects of cooperative interactions throughout our evolutionary history.
4. Visual art coevolved with typically human modes of cooperation, namely indirect reciprocity, as a signal of social identity to aid recognition and mediate interactions in extended networks.
5. Nothing in culture makes sense except in the light of society (to paraphrase Dobzhansky).
6. Models are tools that help us make sense of reality, not reality itself. However, we are often swift to reject new evidence in favour of established models, when we should be questioning the models instead.
7. An evolutionary approach in social science and the humanities means being informed by evolutionary biology, not replacing the theories and methods of the former for the latter.
8. Interdisciplinarity should be practiced, not only preached.
9. If the past is a foreign country, archaeology must be the 'Rough Guide'.
10. In research like in evolution, follow your gut and your brain will follow.

Larissa Mendoza Straffon
September 10, 2014