

The Beginnings of Art

What purpose did art serve in early human society?

The first art created by humans appeared about 35,000 years ago. Early art included paintings on cave walls, etchings, and statues carved from stone and bone. The earliest images are hidden deep inside caves, and were probably religious or spiritual in nature, although it is difficult to know for sure since there are no written records from this time.

Cave paintings were done with pigments made from charcoal or ochre—a clay found in many shades of red and yellow—mixed with animal fat. The paint could be brushed onto the wall with simple fiber brushes or blown through tubes. Engravings were done with bone-carving chisels. Many of the paintings were detailed depictions of animals, or human hands outlined with blown paint. Humans may have considered the animals around them to be on the same level as they were, and it is speculated that they drew the animals as a way of paying tribute to them.

Some of the earliest and best-known cave paintings are found in Chauvet Cave in Southern France. The site, discovered in 1994, contains hundreds of paintings. The majority of the paintings are representations of animals that were common at the time. Although this is some of the oldest known art, it

is as well done as many later pieces. This suggests that early humans were as skilled in this area as their later ancestors.

The evidence and artifacts that archaeologists have found, such as cave paintings, burial sites, stone tools, and hearths, have provided a lot of information about how early humans lived. Archaeologists have determined that early humans worked together in social groups, had complex social structures that helped to care for members, had religious beliefs about an afterlife, created and used tools for specific purposes, and developed art and culture. These characteristics still define societies today.