

Upper Paleolithic Art

Symbolic thought lies at the heart of three hallmarks of modern human culture: language, art, and religion



Symbolism: any object, sign, gesture, or vocal expression that in some way refers to or represents something beyond itself

Our expanded cerebral cortex allows abstract thought through language, and ability to link symbols with complex meanings

The nature and extent of symbolic activities in Middle Paleolithic is debated:

Limited evidence, sharply different from what we find in Upper Paleolithic

But we see beginnings of symbolism in Middle Paleolithic in:

Use of color

Personal ornaments

Burials

Use of color: (Middle Paleolithic)

Find lumps of color pigments, especially ochre (red to yellow) and black manganese dioxide

Some with wear patterns, some on grinding stones

Some claims for ochre-stained animal bone and stone tools



70,000 yr old engraved ochre artifact from Middle Stone Age deposits at Blombos Cave, South Africa

<http://www.accessexcellence.org/WN/SU/caveart.php>