Ice Age art
arrival of
the modern
mind

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Notes for primary and secondary teachers

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Using the exhibition

Entrance to the exhibition is free for school groups. All visiting groups must pre-book through the Museum’s Ticket Desk.

In advance
Use the PowerPoint presentation and the exhibition briefing sheet to familiarise students and accompanying adults with the exhibition.

Decide on any follow-up activity you plan to do after the visit and go through this with the students and accompanying adults to ensure they gather the necessary information from the exhibition to support the work back in the classroom.

On the day
Divide the class into small groups, with an adult assigned to each group, for working in the exhibition.

Give each adult a free exhibition guide, which is available at the entrance to the exhibition.

Remind accompanying adults about any specific objects which you will be using for follow-up work so that they can ensure students engage with these in the exhibition.

Remind accompanying adults to encourage discussion about the objects, stop at objects which particularly interest the students and share things they find out as they go round.

Remind students what information they will be gathering from the exhibition e.g. drawing different animals shown in the artworks, sketching different human forms shown across the figurines, writing detailed descriptions of individual pieces, creating annotated sketches of selected pieces.

Your visit will take place alongside the general public. Please remind students to behave calmly and politely.

Photography is not allowed within the exhibition space but students may take photographs in the Museum’s permanent galleries.

Afterwards
Discuss the students’ thoughts and responses to the exhibition.

Apply information gathered in the exhibition to the relevant follow-up activity.

Revisit any preparation resources, such as the PowerPoint presentation, which support follow-up activities.
Teaching suggestions

In the exhibition
The exhibition contains around 150 pieces of art and images of other pieces from the period such as cave paintings. As the students are moving through the exhibition you may find it helpful to engage them in some of these suggested exhibition activities.

Thinking about a big question
What types of materials are the Ice Age artists using to create their pieces of art?

What aspects of their world inspire the artists to create their 2D and 3D art pieces?

Which pieces do you think most evocative and why?

Collecting inspiration
Look for different types of mark making in the exhibition. Using a pencil and paper record some of the different marks (shape, size, thickness) and note what they are used for e.g. showing a horse’s mane, creating the outline of an animal’s body, suggesting fur.

Look at the variety of 3D figures in the exhibition. Using a pencil and paper draw a selection of models including a side view and a front view of each model. Note any ways in which the artist has added detail e.g. adding eyes, fur or expression.

Look at how artists have inscribed soft surfaces to create images. Using a pencil and paper draw an inscribed piece including the outline shape of the material onto which the image is inscribed. Note down whether you think the shape of the material influenced what the artist inscribed. Also look for examples of overlapping and draw one of these showing how the artist has shown more than one animal and the spatial relationship between them e.g. one following the other in a line, one standing next to the other.

Imaging the Ice Age
As you move through the exhibition generate an Ice Age word bank. Discuss suitable words in your group and scribe all agreed suggestions on to paper. At the end of the exhibition review your word bank and use IT to create a word cloud which reflects what you felt were the most important themes and aspects of the exhibition for your group.

At school
The following is a list of suggested activities which you can undertake in the classroom to support a visit to the exhibition. The primary school suggestions are grouped under four of the major artistic techniques which the students will encounter in the exhibition: mark marking, modelling, sculpting and inscribing. The final section contains discussion points and simple activities for secondary groups.
Primary

Mark making
*Starting point: cave paintings*
Activities: make bold marks on rough paper surfaces using chalk, pastels and charcoal. Emphasise creating different types of marks such as short, long, straight, curved, spiral, thin. Thick, heavy, light, crossing, overlapping. Create images of animals using bold outlines and selecting the best type of mark to use to emphasise a quality of the animal such as fur, mane, tail, eye, teeth.

Modelling
*Starting point: small clay figurines*
Activities: make real animals, imaginative creatures or small human figures. Emphasise the creation of form and capturing some of the essential characteristics of the animal or person such as strength, roundness, speed or power.

Sculpting
*Starting point: small carved ivory figurines*
Activities: carve a small sculpture using a soft material such as a block of plasticine or polystyrene. Emphasise the process of removing areas of unwanted material to create the desired shape without having to add pieces on as with clay work. Carve small animal figures or a small human figure using inscribing to mark on key features such as eyes or hair.

Inscribing
*Starting point: inscribed bone and antler*
Activities: scratch a design onto a soft surface such as a polystyrene tile or a thin slab of clay. Emphasise the process of pressing into the surface to leave a sharp line which forms the image. Practise inscribing different types of line onto a reusable surface such as plasticine before creating a permanent image on a polystyrene tile.
Secondary

Mark making
Marks are the fundamental components of graphic arts, whether a line, scratch or incision. Examine the examples of mark making on the Ice Age cave paintings and the sculptures, and think about how economical these artists were in creating an image with very few marks or lines. Look at the cave paintings and discuss how the rocky surface of the cave wall acts as the canvas. Discuss how at times the artists use the uneven surface to add a 3D dimension to a wall painting by incorporating a protrusion into the overall shape of the animal's body. Experiment with making marks into a variety of different surfaces (paper, wood, lino, acetate, canvas), comparing the effects of cutting into a surface with marking on to it. How does the effort needed to make the mark affect the line? Think about how the texture of the surface determines the kind of marks – try both incising and mark-making onto the same surface.

Choose a form from nature and select the most appropriate surface and material through which to depict it in the simplest possible way, using different mark making effects.

Sculpture
The sculptures in the Ice Age were made either by building up a malleable material, such as clay, or by cutting away from a block of a more solid material such as ivory or bone. Look at the examples in the PowerPoint and work out which technique has been used. If it has been carved, think how the original form of the material (tusk/antler) affects the shape and form of the finished piece.

Experiment with sculpting a human or animal form by using carving into a bar of soap (or another soft material) planning first how the shape of the block at the start will affect the final form.
Exhibition briefing sheet for adults and older students

Exhibition summary
From 40,000 to 10,000 years ago, during the last Ice Age, there was a creative explosion in Europe. Figurative art appeared for the first time and ideas were expressed in paintings, reliefs, engraved drawings, sculpture, carvings and jewellery. Artistic variation in content and style is evident in different regions and at different times. In particular there was a notable change after 20,000 years ago and again 15,000–10,000 years ago.

Each section of the exhibition explores a different period of early human art in Europe. Below is some key information for each section.

Europe during the last Ice Age
During the Ice Age (40,000–10,000 years ago) the climate and environment in Europe was quite different from today. People in the Ice Age were fully modern humans – just like us. They lived by hunting and gathering. The oldest figurative art dates from this time. It is sophisticated and often took many hours to create.

40,000–30,000 years ago
By 40,000 years ago the modern human brain had fully developed. Artworks from this period include 3D sculpture, inscribed pieces and paintings. Works show naturalism, composition and perspective. The oldest works depict humans and dangerous animals.

30,000–20,000 years ago
During this period highly individualised female figures were a constant theme of the sculptors’ art. Female figures were rarely depicted on cave walls. In contrast, male figures, seen more commonly in the caves, are seldom found in 3D. The amount of time and skill invested in making these sculptures, and in decorating the functional objects in this section, point to a degree of wealth, status and hierarchy in these societies.

15,000–10,000 years ago
During this period the climate in Europe was warming up. Plentiful food supplies freed people up to produce art and devote time to religious practices. Technological accomplishments allowed people to develop wealth and status. There was a revival in the production of small portable pieces with growing realism. For the first time, it is possible to identify the work of individual artists.
Exhibition PowerPoint presentation

There is a whiteboard resource relating directly to the exhibition which you can download from the Ice Age exhibition page.

Supporting information for the objects included in the presentation is available in the Notes section of each slide.

You can use the images in the presentation to introduce students to the types of objects they will encounter in the exhibition.

You can also use the presentation as a source of images which can be used as starting points for follow-up activities back in the classroom.

Individual images can be printed out for use during small group work.

The images included in the presentation are from Europe and date from the Ice Age:
1. Chauvet Cave.
2. Lascaux Cave.
3. Ivory mammoth.
5. Ivory head of a woman.
6. Ivory ‘lion man’ figure.
7. Swimming reindeer.
8. Low relief of horse on antler.
10. Engraving of deer on bone.
11. Engraving of lions on bone.
12. Engraving of horse on antler.