



Ice Age Art: Arrival of the Modern Mind

Jill Cook

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The accompanying title to the major exhibition at the British Museum: Ice Age art: arrival of the modern mind, 7 February - 26 May 2013. This is a thought-provoking exploration of the masterpieces of sculpture, drawing and decoration of the last Ice Age. Produced between 40,000 and 10,000 years ago, this is some of the oldest known figurative art in the world. Looking at these art works provides a fascinating insight into the earliest modern minds and their capacity to express ideas symbolically through art. Over 100 objects are featured, including small but exquisite sculptures made from mammoth ivory, engraved drawings, ceramic models, decorated objects and jewellery from the age of the great painted caves. Some are celebrated masterpieces such as the Swimming Reindeer (13,000 years old), the so-called Willendorf Venus (25,000 years old), the Vogelherd Horse (32,000 years old) and the Lion Man (32,000 years old); others are lesser-known treasures from the collections of European museums. The author examines them in a new light, as works of aesthetic - not solely archaeological - interest, and as such forming part of an unbroken continuum of human creativity. The compelling narrative is also illustrated with a wealth of images, from classical sculpture to twentieth-century painting and even contemporary advertising campaigns, which demonstrate surprising aesthetic parallels between these ancient works and familiar modern pieces. In this way, Ice Age art will bring home the point that the minds that created these objects in all their diversity and inventiveness were modern minds like our own, capable of highly sophisticated thought and expression.

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