

Representing Prehistoric Memory In Our Time



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Are we sharing the same concepts or feeling existed in the prehistoric world? Why modern and contemporary artists attempted to embody them in their work? I visited the exhibition *Prehistory, a modern enigma* at the Centre Pompidou Paris in 2019. The exhibition highlighted the link between prehistory to modern and contemporary art. The topic of prehistory is not just a source of imagination. We search the uniformities between it and our time.

At the beginning of the exhibition, I encountered prehistoric sculptures such as the female figure said *Venus of Lespugue*. Not only this but the majority of Palaeolithic sculptures portray animals or female figure. There were Yves Klein's blue silhouettes *Anthropométrie-ANT 84*(1960). 'imprints of female bodies, attempted to embody the mystery of our origins in a synthesis of aquatic, animal and human life'. (Centre Pompidou) If we assume that they share the motivation of embodying the mystery of life, they both choose female figure for representation naturally. In these two works here, there is no imitation. Even if they had different motivations, female figures are popular representation in both prehistoric and modern art. The mystery of human origins is the unsolved question asked and attracted us from prehistoric to the contemporary period. It is continuous, in progress, history, or passed down. The way they embody or represent with the female figure is more of repeating them without intent to do so. In contemporary time, cultural or social interpretation of representation of female figures is focused. The prehistoric sculpture of female figure suggests that we have the same elements of nature as prehistoric human beings had. It can be instinct, memory, or some kind of a sense.

Pierre Huyghe's (*Untitled*) *Human Mask* (2014) is the film which a monkey wearing a human mask and girl's costume "lives" alone in an abandoned restaurant. The film is inspired by the situation of Fukushima after the disaster in 2011. 'Throughout his various networks of objects and ideas, Huyghe explores the paradoxical rift between what we think we know about the world and what it can and cannot, in turn, tell us. *Untitled* (*Human Mask*) evokes many such themes: the monotony of work and the repetition of ritualistic behaviors, the possibility of a catastrophic future, and the power that living creatures hold over us as ciphers of ourselves.' (The Met

Museum) The setting in the film implies the ruin made by both natural and artificial. The monkey acting like a human being asks us what is the definition of us.

The cave is the iconic prehistoric space. One of the most famous caves is the Cave of Altamira in Spain, painted during the Upper Palaeolithic, around 36,000 years ago. Claudio Parmiggiani's installation work *Cripta* (1994) is a crypt. When the audience needs to stoop to enter. They allowed their eyes to grow accustomed to the dark space. The ceiling and walls are covered with hand prints. Parmigiani says 'This is a work that can only be seen with the eyes and in the dark because darkness is its own light; it is a work that can only be experienced by participating.' The work can be influenced by the cave paints and the installation space to achieve his intention. This work is quite relying upon the audience. Actions audiences need to take; stooping and trying to see in the darkness, are probably the same as human beings who got into the darkness of the cave to paint 36,000 years ago. Do my genes still have the memory of these movements from then?

In the Neolithic period, human developed the technique of polishing stone. Richard Long's *Snake Circle* (1991) uses rocks holding each other as a circle. [...] in the 1970's, minimalist and Land art artists saw here the foundation of a techno-industrial culture whose collapse they believed was imminent. Consequently, this identification of modern man with the Neolithic's various forms is infused with modern-day representations, fears and desires.' (Centre Pompidou) The contemporary artist uses the materials which already have symbolic meaning in prehistory to reflect and synthesis their ideologies. They found the meaning for imitating prehistory. The link between prehistory and modern and contemporary art in this case, is made by the artists. At the same time, this also depends on the shared knowledge about the Neolithic period for their artwork to achieve their intention in society.

At the last section of the exhibition, it approached in [...] parallel to works of science fiction: a powerful pop culture of prehistory [...] or extraterrestrial creatures from the future. Other projections, melancholic and poetic, gave rise to apocalyptic perceptions of the present and future. At the time of "the Anthropocene age", the exploration of the prehistory nourishes artists' imaginations as well as raising the question of the world future evolution and that of its disappearance.' (Centre Pompidou) Marguerite Humeau is one of the artists who create sculptures of anamorphic effigies. One of them has the silhouette can be identified Palaeolithic Venuses such as *Venus of Kostenki, a 35-Year-Old Female Human Has Infested a Marmoset's Brain* (2018) For those artists, prehistory is the source of imagination. The audience is able to get the same power as what they get from prehistoric art. It is not because the artists sometimes adapt the prehistoric work into their work. It is the feeling towards something unknown, enigma.

There are researches about prehistory and we learn them as historical knowledge. Some artists reflect them to a modern concept. Either with or without intentions of modern and contemporary artists, there are uniformities in the form of artwork with prehistory. Throughout the exhibition, the audiences were allowed to explore the connection between prehistory and modern time. The way they feel, imagine, and sense from the exhibition can be similar the way prehistoric human. The fear, desire, dreams, imagination, faith, instinct, and memory. Looking back prehistory is connected to what is the nature of human being which have not changed from prehistory and how they affect us in this modern time.

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