



1-5 RECONSTRUCTION DRAWING OF MAMMOTH-BONE HOUSES

Ukraine. c. 16,000–10,000 BCE

Credit: Jack Unruh/National Geographic Creative

The world's earliest examples of art come from South Africa: two 77,000-year-old, engraved blocks of red ocher (probably used as crayons) found in the Blombos Cave (FIG. 1-4). Both blocks are engraved in an identical way with cross-hatched lines on their sides. Archaeologists argue that the similarity of the engraved patterns means these two pieces were intentionally made and decorated following a common pattern. Thousands of fragments of ocher have been discovered at Blombos; there is little doubt that people were using it to draw patterns and images, the remains of which have long since disappeared. It is highly likely that the ocher was used to decorate peoples' bodies, as well as to color objects such as tools or shell ornaments. In an earlier layer on the same site, archaeologists uncovered more than 36 shells, each of which had been perforated so that it could be hung from a string or thong, or attached to clothing or a person's hair; these shells would have been used for personal decoration. An ostrich eggshell bead from the same site would have served the same purpose. The Blombos finds are enormously important. Here our early ancestors, probably modern humans but possibly their predecessors, used the earth's raw materials to decorate themselves with jewelry and body art.

Shelter or Architecture?

"Architecture" usually refers to the enclosure of spaces with some aesthetic intent, and building even a simple shelter requires a degree of imagination and planning deserving of this term. In the Upper Paleolithic period, humans in some regions used great ingenuity to build shelters that were far from simple. In woodlands, evidence of floors indicates that our ancestors built circular or oval huts of light branches and hides that measured

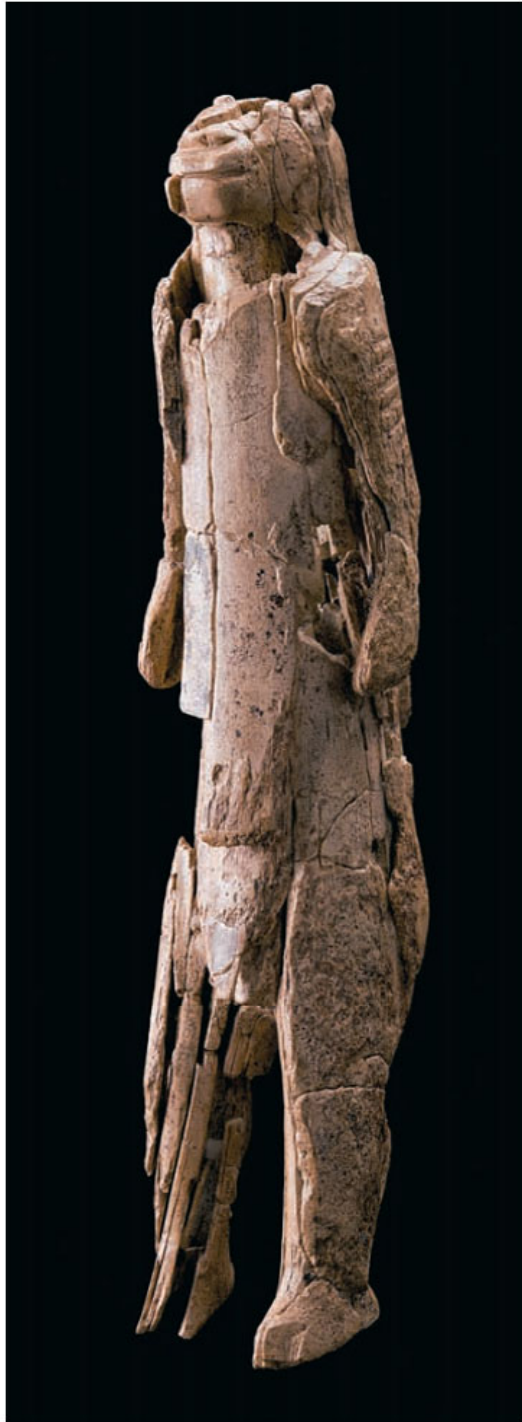
as much as 15 to 20 feet in diameter. (Modern tents to accommodate 6 people vary from 10- by 11-foot ovals to 14- by 7-foot rooms.)

In the treeless grasslands of Upper Paleolithic Russia and Ukraine, builders created settlements of up to ten houses using the bones of the now extinct woolly mammoth, whose long, curving tusks made excellent roof supports and arched door openings (FIG. 1-5). This bone framework was probably covered with animal hides and turf. Most activities centered around the inside fire pit, or hearth, where food was prepared and tools were made. Larger houses might have had more than one hearth, and spaces were set aside for specific uses—working stone, making clothing, sleeping, and dumping refuse. Inside the largest dwelling on a site in Mezhirich, Ukraine, archaeologists found 15 small hearths that still contained ashes and charred bones left by the last occupants. Some people colored their floors with powdered ocher in shades that ranged from yellow to red to brown. These Upper Paleolithic structures are important because of their early date: The widespread appearance of durable architecture concentrated in village communities did not occur until the beginning of the Neolithic period in the Near East and southeastern Europe.

Artifacts or Works of Art?

As early as 30,000 BCE small figures, or figurines, of people and animals made of bone, ivory, stone, and clay appeared in Europe and Asia. Today we interpret such self-contained, three-dimensional pieces as examples of **sculpture in the round**. Prehistoric carvers also produced **relief sculpture** in stone, bone, and ivory. In relief sculpture, part of the surrounding material is retained to form a background for the projecting figure.

THE LION-HUMAN An early and puzzling example of a sculpture in the round is a human figure—probably male—with a feline head (**FIG. 1-6**), made about 30,000–26,000 BCE. Archaeologists excavating at Hohlenstein-Stadel, Germany, found broken pieces of ivory (from a mammoth tusk) that they realized were parts of an entire figure. Nearly a foot tall, this remarkable statue surpasses most early figurines in size and complexity.



1-6 LION-HUMAN

From Hohlenstein-Stadel, Germany. c. 40,000–35,000 BCE. Mammoth ivory, 12¼" × 2⅞" (31.1 × 7.3 cm). Ulmer Museum, Ulm, Germany.

Credit: Photo: Yvonne Mühleis © Landesamt für Denkmalpflege im RP Stuttgart

Instead of copying what he or she saw in nature, the carver created a unique creature, part human and part beast. The figure may have been intended to represent a person wearing a ritual lion mask—or someone who had actually taken on the appearance of an animal. Archaeologists now think that the people who lived at this time held very different ideas than ours about what it meant to be a human and how humans were distinct from animals; it is quite possible that they thought of animals and humans as parts of one common group of beings who shared the world. What is absolutely clear is that the Lion-Human is evidence of the uniquely human ability to conceive and represent a creature never seen in nature.

FEMALE FIGURES While a number of figurines representing men have been found recently, most human figures from the Upper Paleolithic period are female. The most famous of these, the **WOMAN FROM WILLENDORF** (**FIG. 1-7**), Austria, dates from about 24,000 BCE (see "The Power of Naming" opposite). Carved from limestone and originally colored with red ocher, the statuette's swelling,



1-7 WOMAN FROM WILLENDORF

Austria. c. 24,000 BCE. Limestone, height 4⅜" (11 cm). Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna.

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