Rock art research, the study of paintings and drawings on rock surfaces made by peoples from time immemorial up to the present, is a field that is growing in importance in such disciplines as archaeology, anthropology, and art history. This book is the first treatment of the subject to analyze it from the perspective of aesthetics.

Contents: Foreword; Preface; Aesthetics and rock art: an introduction, Thomas Heyd. Part I: Theory: The Role of Aesthetics in Rock Art Research: Palaeolithic cave painting: a test case for transcultural aesthetics, Peter Lamarque; Rock art aesthetics: trace on rock, mark of spirit, window on land, Thomas Heyd; Aesthetics across time and place: an anthropological perspective on archaeology, Howard Morphy; Considerations on the art and aesthetics of rock art, Reinaldo Morales, Jr; San Art: aesthetically speaking, William R. Domeris. Part II: Aesthetic Appreciation of Rock Art: Constitutive Factors: The archaeology, anthropology and aesthetics of understanding parietal rock images at La Grèze, Cosquer and Wangawangang, Michael Eastham; Integration in Franco-Cantabrian parietal art: a case study of Font-de-Gaume Cave, France, Masaru Ogawa; Perception and ways of drawing: why animals are easier to draw than people, J.B. Deregowski; “We make lines, follow this direction, then I look and go the other way”: excerpts from an ethnography of the aesthetic imagination of the Pitjantjatjara, Ute Eickelkamp; Aesthetics, rock art, and changing states of consciousness, John Clegg; Evolutions of Lascaux, Rowan Wilken. Part III: Case Studies: Opportunities and Tension in Cross-Cultural Appreciation: Illuminations and reflections: looking at Scandinavian rock carvings, John Coles; The visual as a site of meaning: San parietal painting and the experience of modern art, Pippa Skotnes; Divine stalagmites: modified speleothems in Maya caves and aesthetic variation in classic Maya art, Andrea Stone; The aesthetic value of textual images: Pallava script and petroglyphic images on semi-portable stones from Bandung Museum, Indonesia (Western Java), George Nash; Seeing is deceiving: rock art and the non-visual, Sven Ouzman. Bibliography; Index.

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Rock art constitutes a significant cultural testimony, providing insights into the visual imagery of lifeways that are fundamentally different from those of people today. The extant corpus of humanly-made markings on rock is an extraordinary testimony of peoples’ cares, interests, and capacities, preserved thanks to its emplacement on (relatively) durable surfaces. In this chapter, the author explores misconceptions of art and aesthetics that have contributed to this gap in research and outlines the value of closely attending to the aesthetic sensibilities and artistic capacities of those who made, and originally appreciated, these remarkable manifestations. Do you want to read the rest of this chapter? The interest of Aesthetics and Rock Art, edited by Thomas Heyd and John Clegg, is that its subject has become possible through an expanded notion of art made available through a critique of beauty and traditional forms of artistic practice. Interesting questions emerge. Like Dessoir’s project, this book’s approach is multi-disciplinary (philosophy, anthropology, archaeology, and art history), and its central problem is the viability of an aesthetic approach to its subject. Heyd’s introduction usefully spells out the issues and rehearses.