

The discovery of the Siega Verde and Côa Valley sites revolutionised the way people thought about Palaeolithic art.

Whilst the cave paintings of Altamira and those discovered along the French-Cantabrian coast provided an insight into the symbolic world of our early ancestors, the open-air art engravings of the Douro Valley defied the usual interpretations of these art forms, dispelling the notion that they were only for the initiated that served as intermediaries between human groups and the world of spirituality and symbolism. The discovery of open-art blurred the boundary between darkness and highlighted its public nature. It became clear that this art could be observed by all members of the group. Moreover, a further element contributes to their interpretation, the landscape, where the motifs may have been used as territorial markers.

The exhibition 'Côa Valley and Siega Verde: Limitless Art', which we invite you to visit, offers a vision of Palaeolithic art, the peoples that created it, their lifestyles and the landscapes they explored, and in particular the lands of the Douro Valley, home to the most important ensembles of open-air art.



EXHIBITION

LISBON | JULY - OCTOBER '22

MADRID | NOVEMBER '22 - FEBRUARY '23

MUSEU DE ARTE POPULAR
AV. BRASÍLIA 202, 1400-038 LISBOA

MUSEO ARQUEOLÓGICO NACIONAL
C/ SERRANO, 13, 28001 MADRID

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONSULT
www.limite-art.com

LIMITLESS ART
CÔA &
SIEGA
VERDE



Interreg

España - Portugal

PALEOARTE

Fondo Europeo de Desarrollo Regional
Fundo Europeu de Desenvolvimento Regional



UNIÃO EUROPEIA
UNIO EUROPEIA



Junta de
Castilla y León

Fundação CoaParque



CoaParque



Siega
Verde

ZONA ARQUEOLÓGICA



Património Mundial
Heritage - Património



REPÚBLICA
PORTUGUESA
CULTURA



REPÚBLICA
PORTUGUESA
CIÊNCIA, TECNOLOGIA
E ENSINO SUPERIOR



REPÚBLICA
PORTUGUESA
ECONOMIA E MAR



REPÚBLICA
PORTUGUESA
AMBIENTE E
AÇÃO CLIMÁTICA



FOZ CÔA

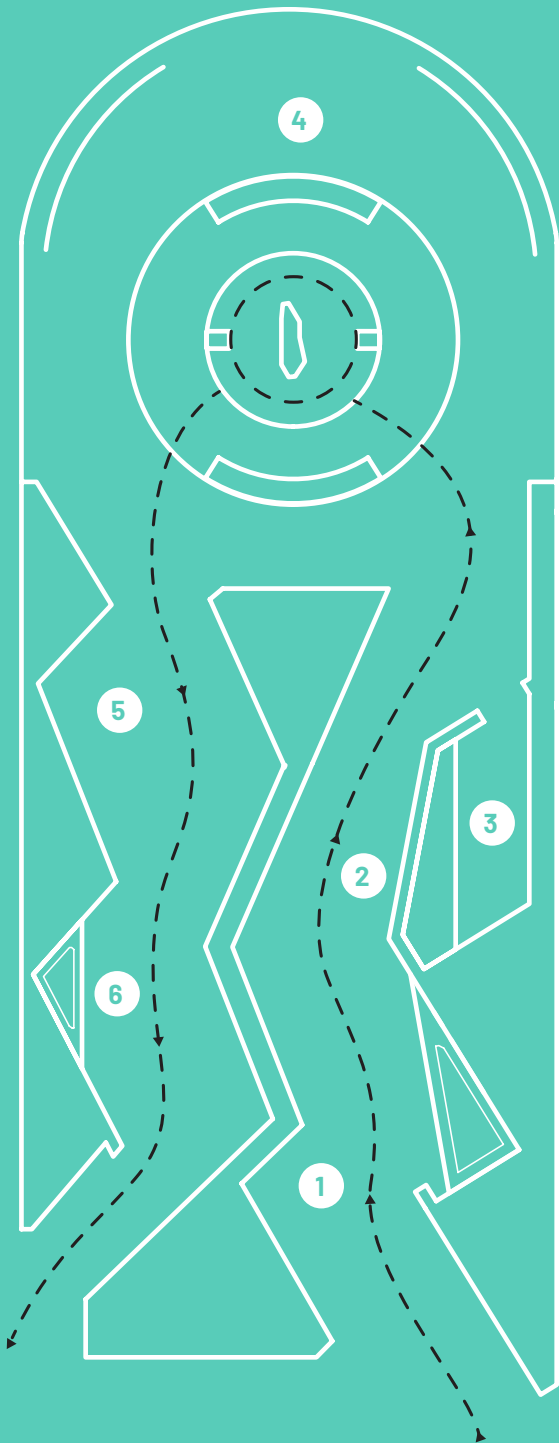
MAN MUSEU ARQUEOLÓGICO NACIONAL



MUSEU
NACIONAL DE
ARQUEOLOGIA

MUSEU DE ARTE POPULAR MUSEU NACIONAL DE ETNOLOGIA

MUSEU DE ARTE POPULAR | LISBON | PORTUGAL
MUSEO ARQUEOLÓGICO NACIONAL | MADRID | SPAIN



1 WHO CREATED THESE ART FORMS?

The Palaeolithic art of the Côa Valley and Siega Verde was produced by people like us during the Ice Age, which ended 12,000 years ago. Based on some findings in the Côa Valley, we know that these types of images have been produced in the region from at least 30,000 years. These populations, which originated in Africa, entered south-eastern Europe about 46,000 years ago and mixed with the Neanderthal populations that lived here, spreading across the continent and reaching this region at least 34,500 years ago.

2 LIFESTYLES

These nomadic hunter-gatherers lived in groups of up to 20 people. Each of these groups join others at regular intervals in larger camps. They lived from hunting, fishing and gathering fruits and vegetables. These groups camped in the open air, in rocky shelters or at the entrance of caves. They were part of broad socioeconomic networks, which explains both the great uniformity of their artistic and technological productions and the presence of tools made from lithic raw materials sourced hundreds of kilometres away from the places where they were found.

3 PALAEOOLITHIC ART

The earliest images produced by humans date back at least 65,000 years, as evidenced by the dating of some examples of hands, abstract figures and pigment patches found in a number of Spanish and French caves. These images were produced by Neanderthals. About 40,000 years ago, the first figurative images began to be produced, mainly of animals, but also some of humans. The animals represented are basically large herbivores, especially horses and large Palaeolithic bovids: aurochs or bison. The ibex and the red deer are also of great importance. In addition, some human figures and a vast abstract repertoire have been identified.

4 THE DISCOVERY OF PALAEOOLITHIC ART

The first Upper Palaeolithic images to be discovered were those represented on small stone, bone or antler supports. Since they appeared within archaeological sediments, there was no doubt about their chronology. However, when images of the same type were found in the Altamira cave in 1880, a great controversy arose as to their age. The discovery of caves not accessed since the late Palaeolithic and of decorated walls covered with Upper Palaeolithic sediments put an end to this debate. Another controversy arose 100 years later, when the same types of images were discovered in the open air, a controversy only surpassed by the discovery of panels with engravings buried since the Palaeolithic. Today, it has been proven that our Upper Palaeolithic ancestors produced the same types of images in the open air as they did inside caves. Most of the former are found in the Douro Basin, and especially in the Côa Valley and in Siega Verde.

5 THE CÔA VALLEY AND SIEGA VERDE

The rock art of the Côa Valley and Siega Verde is justifiably included on the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. In fact, it is here that most of the open-air Palaeolithic art known today is found. This type of art was probably far more common than cave art, although it has only been conserved in areas with suitable geological conditions. The sites on the Spanish-Portuguese border are therefore unique testimonies of a facet of human creativity that for the most part has irretrievably disappeared. The majority of the images at these sites were engraved, but some were also painted.

6 THE UPPER PALAEOOLITHIC IN THE DOURO VALLEY

The figures identified on the nearly 800 decorated panels distributed across these sites indicate that they were produced between 30,000 and 12,000 years ago. But the creation of rock art in the same places, or in their surroundings, has continued practically to this day, as a visit to this exhibition will also reveal.



LIMITLESS ART

CÔA &
SIEGA
VERDE