

Rock Art in India: An Exhibition on India Art Architecture and Design Biennale- 2023

The Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India has organised its First, India Art Architecture and Design Biennale- 2023 from 9th Dec 2023 – 31st March 2024 at Red Fort Complex, Delhi. As a part of this esteemed event, the IGNCA's, Adi Drishya Division has been requested by, Cultre an NGO, who sought the Division' valuable input to present a captivating rock art exhibition.

The biennale is built around a uniquely conceptualised theme, complimented by exclusively curated exhibitions. The exhibitions, accompanied by interactive installations, has been designed in both physical and digital forms for an immersive experience.

Among the diverse themes presented at the biennale, the exhibition in rock art is specifically themed under '***Bagh-e-Bahar***': **Gardens as Universe**. This theme showcases a myriad of creative expressions- from paintings, photographs, and cinema to poetry, music, architecture, and more. It illuminates how gardens influence Indian imagination and the diverse ways in which artists interpret the themes. Through a blend of artworks and documentary materials, the exhibition uncovers the intricate relationship between Gardens, **Rock Art in India**, and the broader Indian imagination.

Highlights:

Ibtida: The beginning, is the origin of the earliest form of expression in mankind. Rock art is considered as the first creative piece of art by the early humans. It leads to various human expressions like hunting, gathering, fighting, dancing and social activities along with flora-fauna. The portrayal of flora in rock art represents the earliest interaction between human consciousness and the natural world's canvas.



India houses one of the largest, richest and diverse repositories of rock art traditions. Rock art has been found throughout the length and breadth of the country.

As for the exhibition at the Biennale is being organised into distinct sections, revealing images from rock art sites based on six regions: Northern, Eastern, Central, Western, Southern and North-East India.

Northern Region

The states of Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh forms parts of northern region. Rock art of Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh has large number of pictographic representations whereas, rock art of Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh is exclusively petroglyphs with small percentage of pictograph. The rock art of Haryana and Delhi are found in the northern Aravalli range and mostly consists of petroglyphs. The art represents scenes of flora, fauna, humans and affiliations with Buddhism.

Eastern region

The Eastern region encompasses the states of Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Odisha. Characteristic features of the rock art in Jharkhand, Odisha and Bihar include the predominance of pictographs. The rock art of Jharkhand and Odisha has monochrome paintings either mostly in red, white or rarely in yellow. Bi-chrome paintings are mostly in red and white. Odisha also has rock

art in the form of painted petroglyphs. Chronologically, the rock art of both the states dated from Mesolithic to Early Historic period. The art offers patterns made of a host of spiral lines, cross hatches, geometric and non-geometric figures etc.



The execution of rock art paintings of Eastern region.

Central Region

Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh forms a major part of the Central region. Both the states have the largest concentration of rock art sites in India. The rock art sites in both the states features petroglyphs and pictographs. Petroglyphs are an important features of the rock art repertoire of Madhya Pradesh. The paintings are mainly figurative and thematic dated from Upper Palaeolithic to Historic period.

Western Region

The states comprising the Western region are Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Goa. Both petroglyphs and paintings are found in Rajasthan's rock art repertoire. The common themes in the painted rock shelters are flora-fauna, human figures, geometric and decorative motifs along with cupules or cup marks. The rock art of Gujarat consists solely of pictographs.

Southern Region

The states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala form the southern region. Rock art of south India comprises of both pictographs and

petroglyphs. Rock art of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka has humped bull figures both in pictograph and petroglyphs. Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have painted figures depicted on the walls of Megalithic burials. Kerala has a number of sites with painted figures, motifs and engravings.



The execution of rock art paintings of Southern region.

North Eastern region

The north-eastern part of India comprises eight states marked by ecological and ethnic diversities. Some of the important rock art sites in north-eastern India are Unakoti (Tripura), Dimapur (Nagaland), Salangthal (Manipur), Ridawpi Jung (Mizoram), and Suryapahar (Assam). The only form of rock art that has been reported from the region so far is petroglyphs from the Historical period. The themes which has been depicted are mainly mythical animals, birds, flowers, leaves, daggers and decorated designs like circles, semi-circles and straight lines. The themes are mainly floral, leaves, decorative design patterns. Megaliths of different shapes and sizes with or without engravings are spread in the hilly region of North Cachar and Karbi Anglong, Kamrup and Nagaon districts.

Therefore, rock art scenes are highly inspired from the sights and scenes of nature.

In addition, the exhibition has also highlighted cultural continuity in rock art tradition by further showcasing the rock art from Jharkhand and Odisha, emphasizing the significance of paintings on house walls during auspicious occasions.

Collectively, the biennale exhibition masterfully weaves together the rich tapestry of India's rock art, offering visitors a captivating journey from the origin of art to its evolution into modern forms. The exhibition underscores the country's deep rooted cultural continuum with the diverse rock art themes leading to timeless resonance of its artistic expressions. The exhibition thus reflects the enduring connections between art, nature and human existence.

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