

The background is a photograph of a rock surface with various textures and colors, including brown, grey, and yellow. A large, stylized handprint is visible in the center, drawn with white lines. The name 'Cai' is written in white in the bottom left corner.

ROCK ART

YANG CAI

Cai

Rock Art
by Yang Cai

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Natural slates are ancient rocks that have been on earth for 500 to 800 million years. Compressed leaves and dust have formed layers of flat rock surfaces embedded with incredibly rich color and texture. For ages, slates have been used for construction materials such as roof tiles, walls and floors. In 2001, I purchased a few natural slates from Home Depot without any specific plan for an art project. I left these slates in the basement and almost forgot about them.

Three years later, I rediscovered the slates and took them to the Figure Drawing Studio, an open studio available every Sunday at Carnegie Mellon University. The model was a contemporary dancer and loved to experiment with artistic poses. I started to draw the figure on the slate with oil pastel sticks. The pastel didn't work very well on the rough surface. So I tried to use a wood carving knife to remove the oil pastel residue. To my surprise, the flat head knife carved a deep bold line into the slate. I kept going and improvised my first rock art ever.

Slate is perhaps the softest rock for carving. With an appropriate knife to surface angle, e.g. in 45 degree, one can make a continuous line. Rolling the carving knife can change the width of the line, even creating teeth-mark like lines. Natural slates have a variety of colors and textures. Every slate is unique! The only exception is to split a slate in two layers, creating mirrored images.

Slate carving in fact is a 3D artwork, similar to a relief. Lighting plays a critical role in viewing a slate artwork. A sharp angled spot light is recommended to highlight subtle texture details. When you change the lighting or viewing angles, you will see different surface texture and colors. Like many sculptures, the more you watch it, the more you discover.

Slate carving allows me to practice Minimalism. I only used half inch flat head wood carving knife. Sometimes, I used a scrap of hard rock to carve the slate. Slate carving also allowed me to improvise artwork based on patterns on the slate. Sometimes, I was lucky to have colorful slates so that I could use minimal strokes of carving to complete the figures out of the slate.

Slate carving is an experimental art in which there is no a formal media category for it. It can be viewed as a relief. How-



My first slate carving work at the Figure Drawing Studio



Valcamonica, Italy



Neolithic rock art - The Running Priest

ever, a slate surface is like a pastel painting. Any touch or wash on the surface may smear the color and texture. Ideally, slate artwork had better be a part of a wall for permanent display. For temporary exhibitions, I have invented a method to hang a slate like an oil painting by using super-glue to attach frame hooks on both sides. Then I take a thin metal wire to connect the two hooks for hanging to the wall.

Rock art is an ancient art media that has existed for more than tens of thousands of years. In 2007, after I posted the slate carving work on my blog page www.ambint-intel.blogspot.com I got a comment from Gierra, a Ph.D. student of archeology from Italy. She suggested for me to visit the Neolithic rock art sites in Valcamonica of the Alps in Italy. Through her friend, I got in touch with archeology professor Angelo Fossati who taught a rock art field school in Paspardo. I was traveling in Rome at that time, so I joined the field school within a week. Since then, I went to Paspardo every summer for nine years to participate in the rock art conservation, documentation, technical innovation, teaching, even to have my solo exhibition at the local museum in Cerverno.

There are over a quarter of million rock art in Valcamonica, where it has been viewed as the mecca of rock art in the world. Most of the rock artwork in the valley were carved on the smooth stones polished by glaciers. The ice moved slowly along the valley like a monster milling machine, leaving traces of horizontal lines on the stones. Alpine rock artists used a hard stone to hammer the rock surface to create tiny dots for lines and areas. Sometimes, they improvised artwork based on the shape and crack of the rock, creating amazing figures of their daily life: hunting, riding, cooking, and farming. After thousands of years, the rock art in the open space have been eroded. The colors were all gone; the textural contrast have been weakened. If you took a photograph of the surface, you won't see a clear pattern. Archaeologists used a low-angle LED light or a mirror to redirect the sunlight in order to see better rock art. This field experience has also been used in photographing my rock art in the studio. I also worked on the 3D scan technology to have a more portable, affordable, and accurate record of



The Home-Made 3D scanner in Paspardo site

vulnerable rock art surfaces. My home-made scanners have been evolving from laser diodes to photometry stereo, with 3D printed structural elements for the scanner frame.

My venture in rock art archeology helps me to understand primitive art, Minimalism, and improvisation. Rock is the most durable media that can survive for millions of years, even beyond humans. So in my rock art, I wanted to make sure to have enough contents to inspire future archaeologists. Ideally, my rock art could survive longer if they are buried underground with a few clues on the surface.

This book presents selected 139 slates out of over my 300 slate artwork created from 2004 to 2015. The artwork are organized into four periods: Primitivism, Impasto, Surreal and Abstract. These themes show that slate is a versatile art media for sophisticated contents. Most of the photographs were taken by my assistant Reto Grieder. He setup a dark studio with a lamp above the slate. The digital post-processing includes color and texture enhancement and cropping.



My rock art exhibition at Cerveno Museum, Italy

Recent Exhibitions:

2007 Solo Exhibition, UC Gallery, Carnegie Mellon University

2009 Two-Man Exhibition, World Art Gallery, New York City

2011 Florence Biennale, Italy

2012 Solo Exhibition, Cerveno Museum, Cerveno, Italy

2015 AAP Annual Exhibition, Butler Institute of American Art, Ohio

2015 First Night, Pittsburgh CulturalTrust

2016 Group Show, Christine Frechad Gallery, Pittsburgh, PA



Yang Cai: «La mia rock art ispirata ai pitoti»

A Cerveno le opere del sinoamericano
che rimandano all'arte rupestre

Glietta su Internet se in questi giorni, fino al 10 agosto, Yang Cai - artista di rock art di origini cinesi, ma che vive e lavora a Pittsburgh, negli Stati Uniti - espone a Cerveno, in Valcamonica, dove d'estate, da sei anni, si reca regolarmente per seguire i corsi sulla civiltà degli antichi Camuni organizzati dalla Società cooperativa archeologica Le Orme dell'Uomo e dove ha trovato la propria seconda (o terza) patria, come dimostrano le numerose foto di luoghi e d'arte, rupestre e medievale, camuni reperibili sul suo sito.

Ma andiamo con ordine, seguendo il filo dell'intervista gentilmente concessa dall'artista tramite la traduzione simultanea di Angelo Fossati, fondatore e responsabile, appunto, de Le Orme dell'Uomo. Già in Cina, nella scuola superiore, Cai apprende l'arte del disegno dal pittore Wu Shitun, laureandosi poi in Ingegneria elettronica alla Zhejiang University; nel 1991 si trasferisce negli States, dove consegue il dottorato in Ingegneria di

l'Università della West Virginia, seguito dal post-dottorato in Psychology and Robotic Vision alla Carnegie Mellon University di Pittsburgh, dove ora è direttore del Laboratorio di Intelligenza visuale e Project leader per progetti di ricerca robotica, video analisi, visualizzazione e intelligenza artificiale.

Negli Usa, per un quindicennio, Yang Cai dipinge prevalentemente oli su tela e su legno, supporti più consistenti della carta, tradizionalmente nella pittura cinese come la tecnica dell'acquerello, simboli di caducità e divenire, oppure ocine è soddisfatto, finché un giorno, mentre guarda una casa in costruzione, nota delle lastre di pietra, fogli d'albano per una ruvida tecnica (il supporto è naturale, ma ha milioni di anni, e lo strumento per incidere è semplice e antico) e prova a dipingerli, poi a graffiare la superficie dipinta, infine lascia perdere i colori artificiali, opta per il colore della pietra e l'incisione con il bulino. Finalmente contento del risultato, pubblica queste opere di rock art su Internet e riceve un messaggio



L'ingegnere pittore

Yang Cai, l'ingegnere pittore americano di origine cinese da anni sulle orme degli antichi Camuni. In alto due sue opere, ispirate all'arte rupestre e realizzate con tecnica particolare

da una certa Chiara, studentessa di archeologia, finora non identificata, ma presumibilmente bresciana, perché gli parla della rock art degli antichi Camuni e gli suggerisce di rivolgersi, per saperne di più, ad Angelo Fossati, docente all'Università di Brescia e specialista nel settore.

Era il 2006: da allora, puntualmente, Yang Cai segue i corsi estivi de Le Orme dell'Uomo, facendo interagire suggestioni di arte rupestre (dagli impressionisti a Picasso) e preistorica (le grotte di Altamira, dove «l'uomo paleolitico aveva già sperimentato tutte le principali tecniche artistiche») con l'arte più propriamente rupestre della Cina meridionale, della Peninsularia pechinese e della Valcamonica.

Il suo è un itinerario a strascico, rispetto alla tradizione occidentale incarnata da Marco Polo e Cristoforo Colombo: trovare l'antico Occidente, l'Europa, partendo dall'Estremo Oriente, dall'antica Cina, e proseguendo verso oriente, attraverso il Pacifico e gli Stati Uniti, dalla modernità americana e dalle radici pechinesa alle radici e alla modernità europee, o meglio eurasiatiche, perché nel linguaggio dei «pitoti» camuni Yang Cai ha ritrovato echi e stili della sua patria cinese.

Dalle sue opere - oggi esposte in diversi musei americani e alla Biennale di Firenze 2011 - Yang Cai ha tratto la mostra «Rock, paper and rocks», aperta alla Casa Museo di Cerveno fino al 10 agosto (oggi dalle 14.30 alle 17.30 martedì e venerdì dalle 14.30 alle 16.30 giovedì dalle 9 alle 12; info Casa Museo, Vicolo Sonvico - Cerveno, tel. 0364/434012 - 327/6647200, casamuseocerveno@gmail.com).

Nino Morandini

1. PRIMITIVISM PERIOD



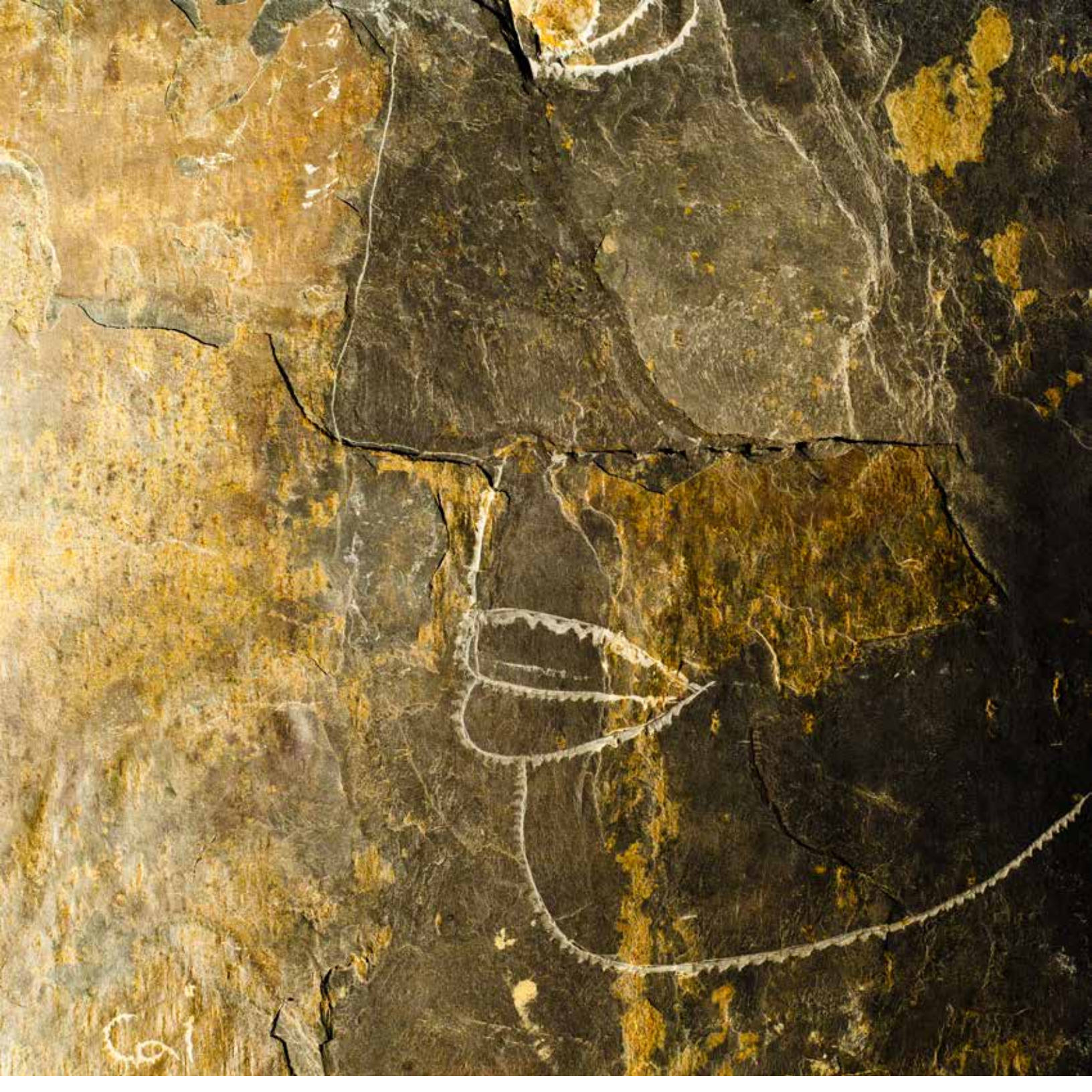












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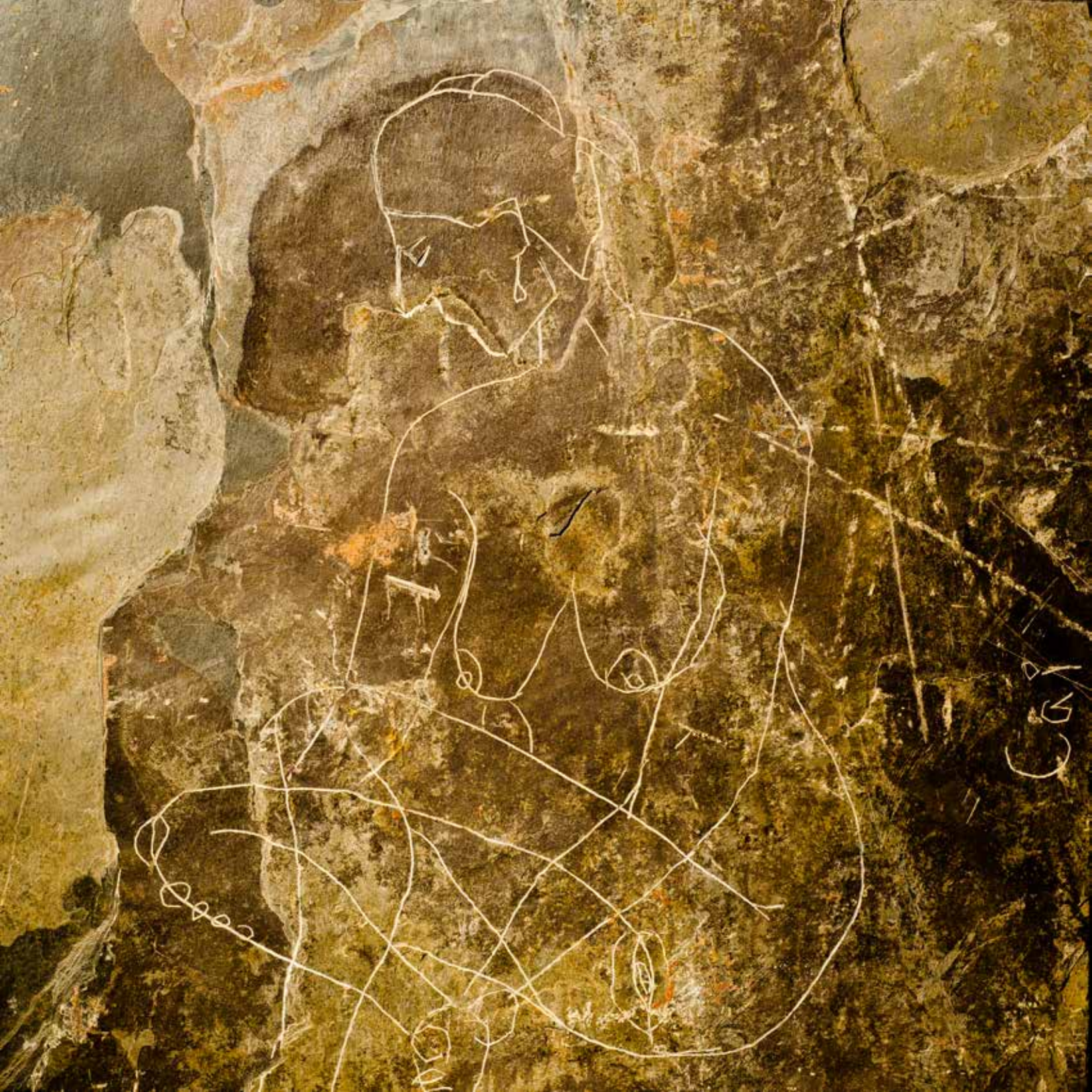








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2. IMPASTO PERIOD





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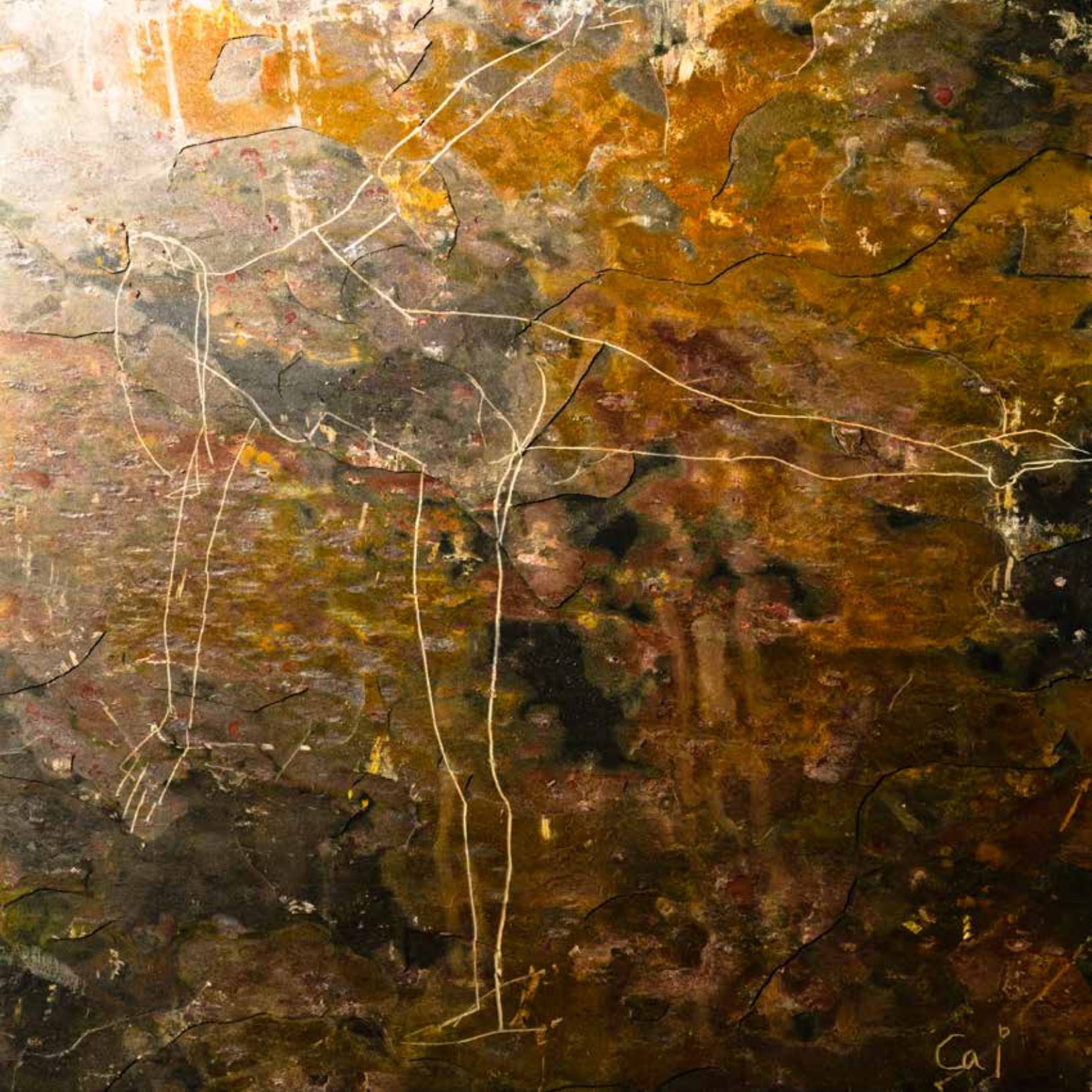
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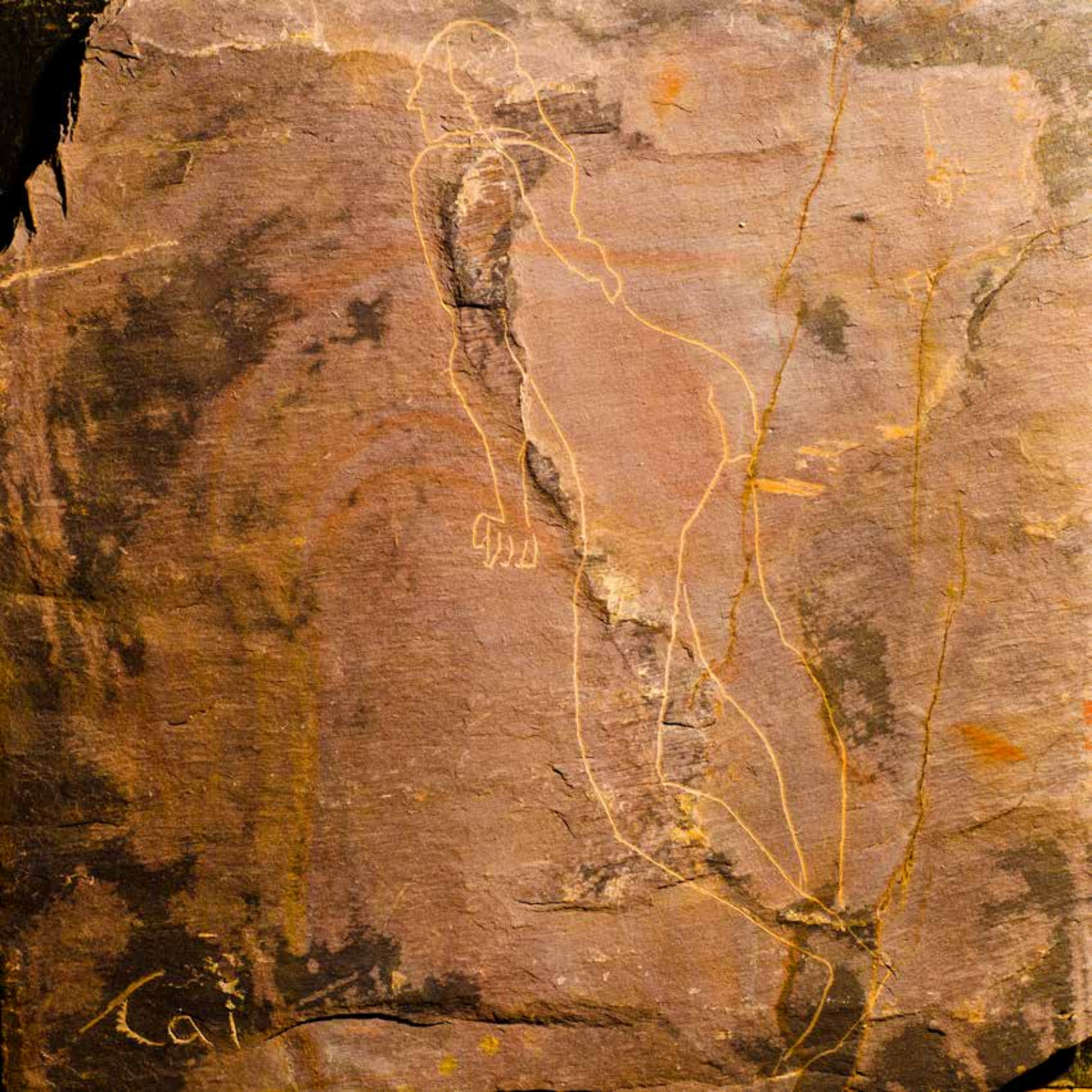












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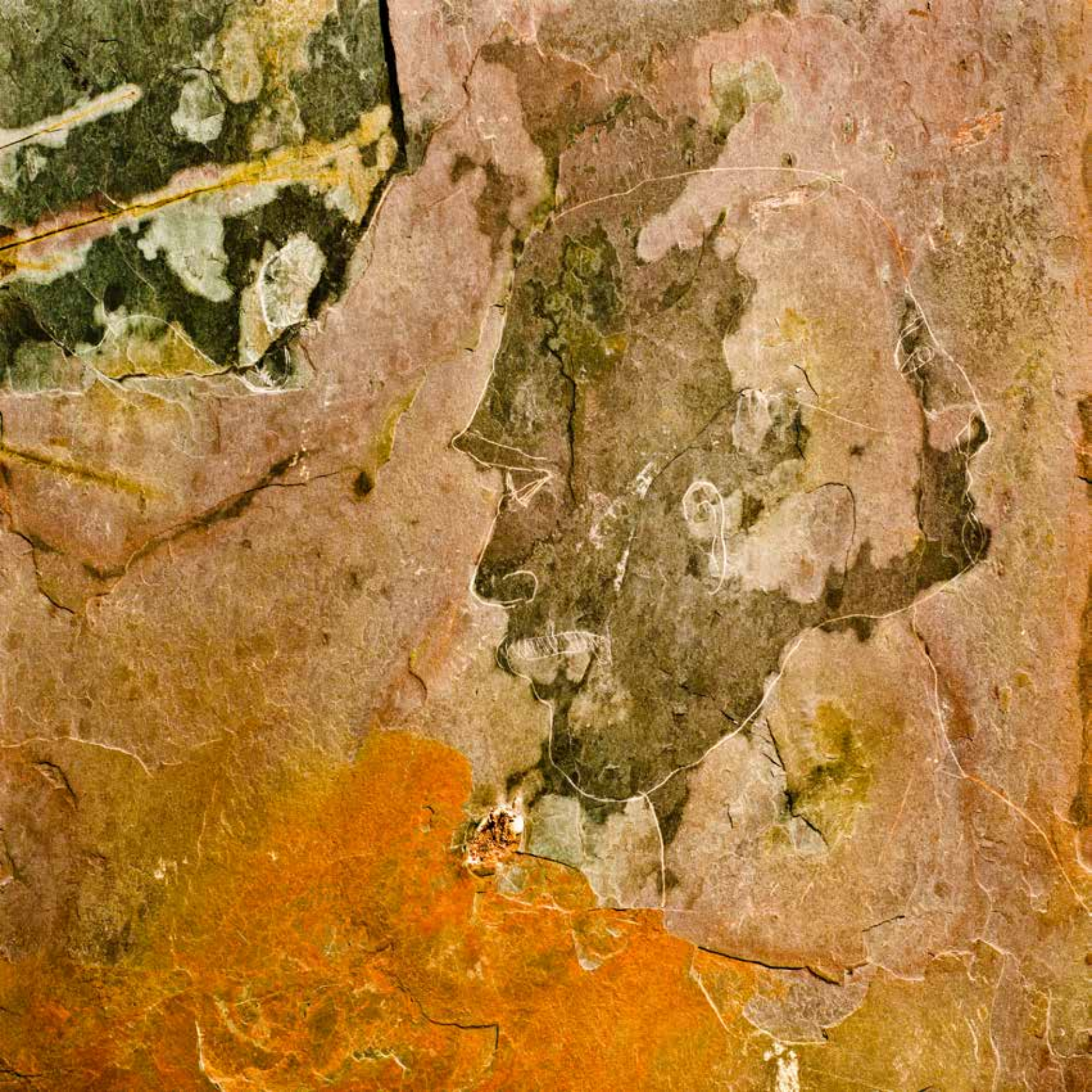
3. SURREALISM PERIOD











































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4. ABSTRACT PERIOD

























