“A THIN RED LINE: THE ‘PRESENCE’ OF PREHISTORIC PICTORIALITY”

WHITNEY DAVIS
Art History, UC Berkeley

WEDNESDAY
OCTOBER 7
12:30–2pm
SOS 250

Please RSVP to vsri@usc.edu by 10/05

The discovery of the astonishingly naturalistic Aurignacian paintings at the Cave of Chauvet (c. 32,000 BCE), as well as the release of Werner Herzog’s intriguing film Cave of Forgotten Dreams (2010), have reopened long-standing questions about the status of virtuality, illusion, animacy, and “presence” in prehistoric pictorial art, perhaps shaped in shamanistic cultural contexts. Recent neuro-cognitive and kinaesthetic-affective aesthetics have added novel theoretical terms to older conceptions of the magical-ritual, immersive, and deeply corporeal nature of the “cave art experience.” Still, questions remain about the “presence” of prehistoric pictures—about the visibility and efficacy of pictoriality as such, of the “work” of picture making, as distinct from the virtual object-worlds it creates. The talk explores a general model of the “recursion” of the pictorial in the virtual with special reference to the diversity of early Upper Paleolithic image making.

Image: Two Lions, Painting in the End Chamber, Grotte de Chauvet, c. 32,000 BCE. Photo by Jean Clottes.