

SCULPTING: THE "MISSING" PART OF THE PANEL

Clay Johnson

As evidenced by Mallery's use of the term "picture writing" (Mallery 1893), rock art has since the late nineteenth century been treated as crude two dimensional "art". Depth of petroglyphs is assumed to vary more as a function of rock hardness or brute strength than for any purpose.

This assumption (which we are usually not consciously aware of) prevents us from actually seeing the richness, complexity, and scope of rock art. It was essential for Anglos in America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to think of Native Americans as crude savages. We go to war with "gooks" or "chinks" or "commies", not with other human beings as worthy of existence as ourselves. The trouble with thinking of other people in such terms is that biases linger long after hostilities have ended, and affect us at a level below that of conscious thought. The "dumb savage pounding on a rock" view of rock art still influences thinking today. For instance, Barnes (1982:90) goes so far as to state that three dimensionality in rock art was "...probably stimulated if not initiated by repeated contacts with the graphics of European cultures..." and was not attained at all by the Fremont. Barnes (1982:90) includes the concepts of perspective, and angled views of subject matter as examples of three dimensionality.

This view of rock art ignores the fact that most Historic period rock art displays no obvious use of perspective or three dimensionality, and the fact that some prehistoric panels do show obvious use of perspective, or of the third dimension. As one example of perspective, I offer (Figure 1) a heavily repatinated panel near Green River, Utah that depicts a line of sheep curving off into the distance.



Figure 1. Use of Perspective on Petroglyph near Green River, Utah



Figure 2. Interactive Perspective on Panel near Vernal, Utah.

New studies (Johnson 1990, 1991, 1993) reveal that one class of rock art, interactive rock art, uses not only three, but four dimensions. The fourth dimensional aspect is the fact interactive rock art is designed to be viewed at specific times of the day and year. Although rock art appears to the casual glance during most of the year to be an essentially two dimensional "picture", the appearance changes dramatically during interactive events on key dates. Interactive panels designed by the Uinta Fremont in Northeastern Utah predate Anglo presence (Uinta Fremont occupations date from AD 100-AD 1250). I will therefore use examples from Uinta Fremont interactive panels to illustrate that finding Native American use of three dimensions, perspective, and angled views of subject matter does not require European contact, but merely an unbiased view of rock art.

Figure 2 illustrates use of perspective as a technique in Uinta Fremont interactive rock art. A sun arrow (Johnson 1990:35) used in conjunction with the large anthropomorph at panel left appears as a ray of light coming from "behind", and emerging from the chest. Use of the third dimension (depth) in rock art design is obvious on interactive panels only on key dates (dates the panel was designed to be viewed).

I define panel design using the third dimension to achieve specific visual effects as *sculpting*. Sculpting is a purposeful manipulation of pecking depth to achieve a particular interactive effect. Since relief is fairly shallow, sculpting is usually not apparent except during the interactive event for which the panel was designed. Sculpting is commonly used in conjunction with the creation of Uinta Fremont en-toto pecked figures (anthropomorphs or zoomorphs).

Figure 3 and Figure 4 illustrate the effect sculpting can have on the appearance of panel elements during an interactive event. Figure 3a shows an en-toto pecked anthropomorph in flat lighting at a random time. Figure 3b shows the same anthropomorph during an interactive event. Note that the breasts of the anthropomorph are highlighted,

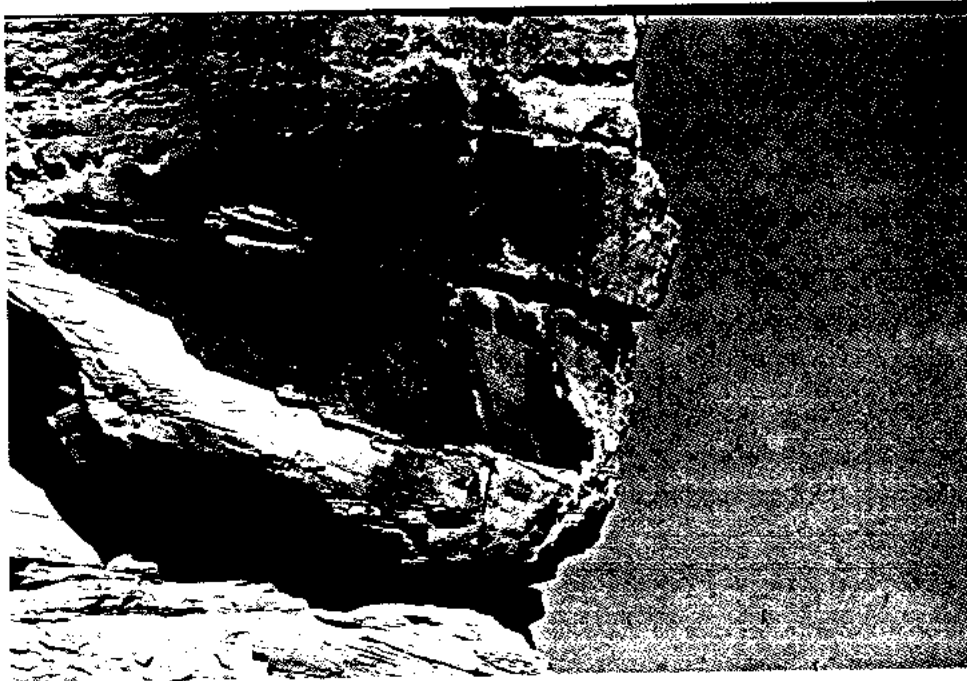


Fig. 3a: Appearance when fully lit

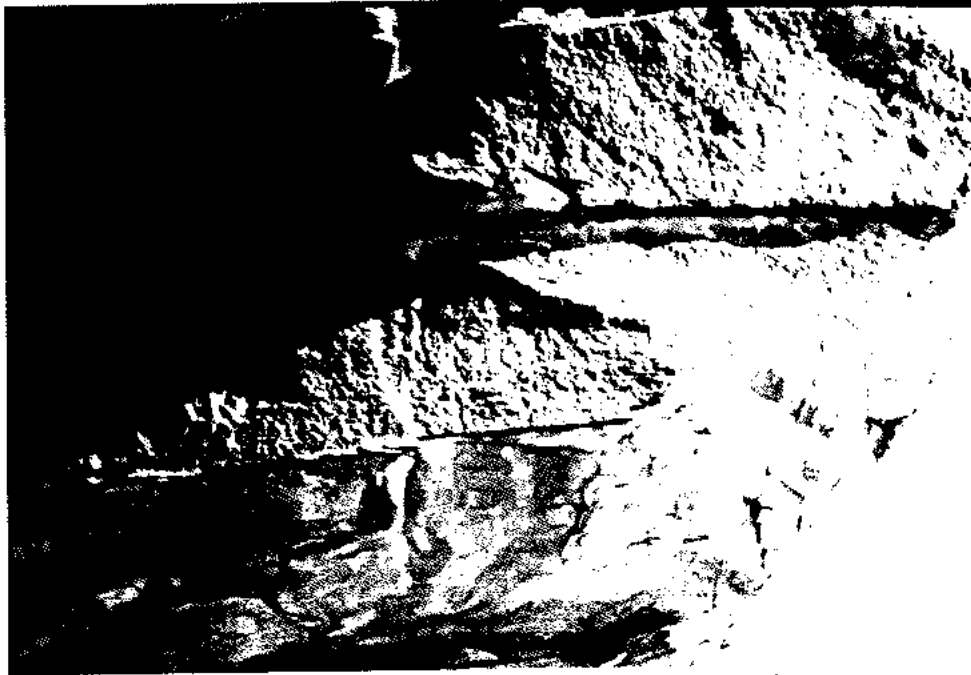


Fig. 3b: Appearance during interaction

Figure 3. Sculpting technique on Panel near Vernal, Utah

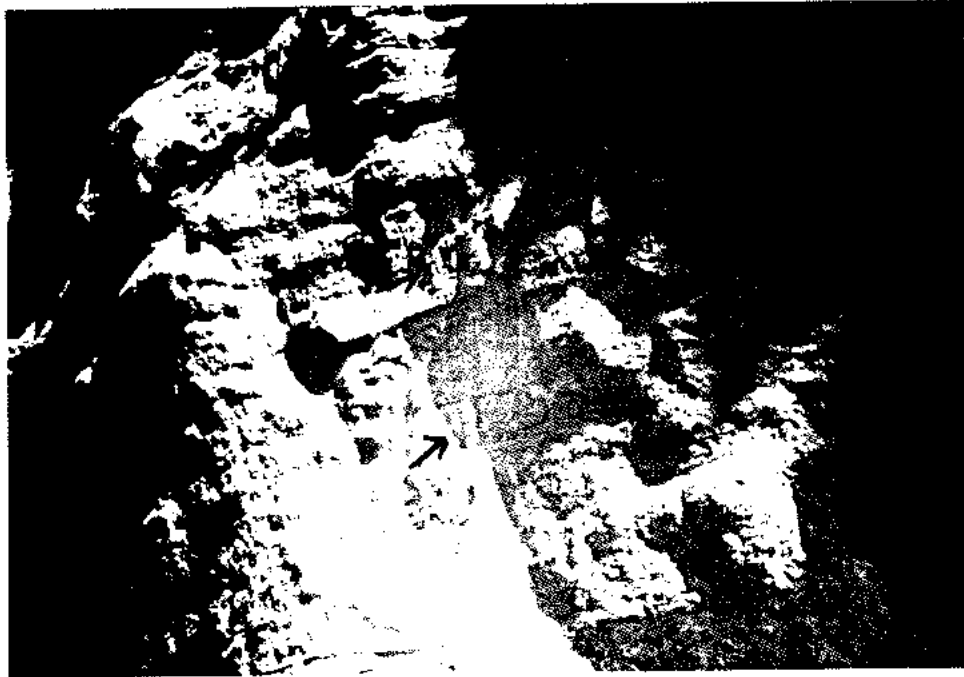


Fig. 4a: Anthropomorph at 1056 hours (Equinox)

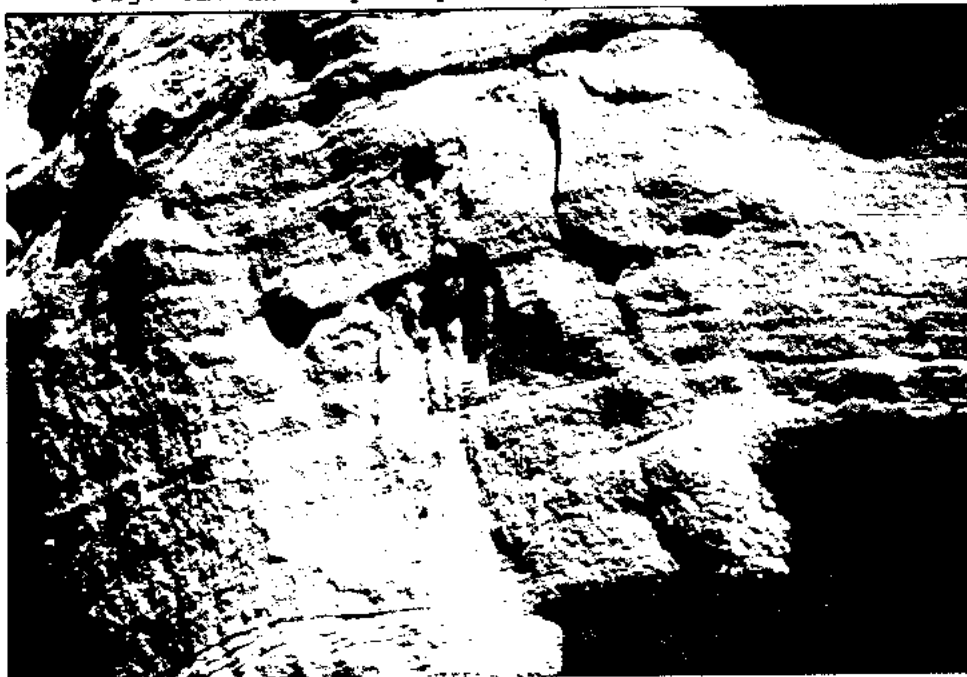


Fig. 4b: Anthropomorph at 1117 hours (Equinox)

Figure 4. Sculpting Used to Display Sexual Characteristics

as are two vertical stripes in the neck area. Highlighting of vertical neck stripes and of breasts also occurs on other Uinta Fremont panels nearby. Figure 4 shows an en-toto pecked anthropomorph at another site at two stages during an interactive event. In Figure 4a the anthropomorph has a fully sunlit left arm and leg, but is largely still in shadow. As indicated by arrows, the square head (and perhaps a nose) are highlighted, as is the (complete and erect) male sexual apparatus. The figure appears male. Approximately twenty minutes later (Figure 4b), the interaction highlights breasts, and reveals earbobs or a hairdo on the head of the same figure. Below the breasts are a pair of vertical columns (descending to the groin area) which look to me much like a small pair of upside down legs, complete with feet. The figure now appears to be female, perhaps giving birth. None of these sculpted details are apparent when the anthropomorph is viewed in flat light at a random time.

Figure 5 illustrates how sculpting can be invisible except at the proper time and key date. Figure 5a shows an anthropomorph that appears to lack a head. The area where the head should be appears to be damaged by either vandalism or exfoliation. Figure 5b shows the head area of the same anthropomorph at the proper time and key date for viewing. A somewhat bison-like face is revealed, complete with horns. Careful examination reveals the entire facial area has been pecked. To the unsuspecting observer, the head of this "headless" anthropomorph appears as if by magic during the interactive event.

Besides use of perspective, Barnes included angled views of subject matter as a technique introduced by Europeans. A large and impressive Uinta Fremont panel near my home has a small, plain, en-toto pecked anthropomorph placed almost off the left edge of the panel. It appears to be a minor feature, and badly eroded. However, during the interactive event, it becomes (Figure 6) a three dimensional angled view of a human face, and the focal point of the entire panel. This example also demonstrates that one cannot judge the importance of individual panel elements or figures before observing the interactions.

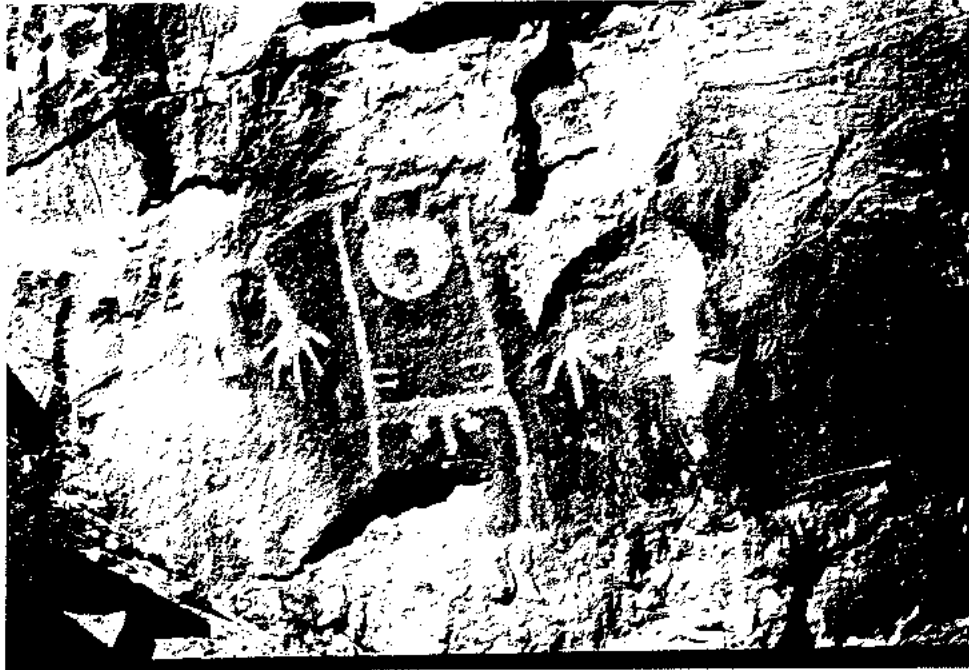


Fig. 5a: A "Headless" Anthropomorph



Fig. 5b: Appearance of Sculpted Head during interaction

Figure 5. Sculpting technique on "Headless" Rock Art Figures



Figure 6. Sculpting an Angled View of Subject Matter.

Conclusions

One hasn't seen an interactive rock art panel until one sees the interactions.

A headless figure may not be headless. A missing element may not be missing.

A male anthropomorph may be more than a male anthropomorph.

An ambiguous anthropomorph (lacking apparent sexual characteristics) may be very clearly defined during the interaction for which it was designed.

Uinta Fremont rock art may portray a much higher percentage of females than previously recognized.

The Uinta Fremont and (probably) other natives of North America understood and used three dimensionality, perspective, and angled views of subject matter long before the advent of any "European influence". The hidden assumption that prehistoric Native Americans were capable of only crude constructions allowed their sophisticated use of the third dimension in rock art to hide in plain sight for nearly a hundred years.

REFERENCES CITED

Barnes, F. A.

1982 *Canyon Country Prehistoric Rock Art*. Wasatch Publishers, Inc., Salt Lake City, Utah

Johnson, Clay

1990:33-45 "Establishing a Uniform Terminology for Description of Solar Interactions With Rock Art Panels". *Utah Rock Art, Volume X*. ed Nina Bowen. Salt Lake City, Utah

1991 "Accuracy and Declination: Using Panel Activity to Answer Rock Art Questions". *Utah Rock Art, Volume XI*. ed B. Jane and Sarah Bush. Salt Lake City, Utah

Johnson, Clay

1993 "Rock Art As An In-Situ Artifact". *Patina*, Volume
1. Compiled by Vernon Bush. Utah Rock Art Research
Association. Salt Lake City, Utah

Mallery, Garrick

1893 "Picture Writing of the American Indians", *Tenth
Annual Report of Ethnology for the Years 1888-9*,
Unabridged republication: 1972, as *Picture Writing of
the America Indians*, Vol. One and Two. Dover
Publications Incorporated, New York