

B. Jane Bush

PREHISTORIC PERSPECTIVE

This presentation looks at drawing devices found in rock art that are used to create the illusion of space or depth of field.

In the thirty plus years I have been teaching children to draw, I have observed several devices children develop to depict space. These seem to be developed universally and I have observed some of these same devices in many rock art panels.

When children begin drawing, they go through a series of stages where they first learn to manipulate the materials. Someone probably asks, "What did you draw?" They name their scribbles, and begin to understand the marks they make can be representative. At this stage, the child will begin to develop symbols for everything. All the people in his family look alike, but Mom has curly hair and Dad has a necktie, and trees look like lollipops. (Family portrait drawing, Figure 1)

Most often the drawing is not representative of what they see, but what they know. They want to include all the information they know before they have the technical skills to do so. In the drawing shown in Figure 2 the child drew a school bus. He knew the bus had four wheels, but since he drew it from the side the only place he could figure out to include the third and fourth wheels was to stick them on top.

In the rock art panel from the Chew Ranch (Figure 3), we see an animal with an arrow entering his belly and coming out the back. Certainly, a culture that lived by hunting would know this is not a great shot. I suspect it is another incident where the information

exceeds the technical understanding of perspective. The same is true of the hunting scene from Nine Mile Canyon shown in (Figure 4). There is a situational awareness in the information portrayed. Without a little verbal repartee with the artist, you may have no clue.

One young man drew a very elaborate drawing of an airplane. Then he drew a box around the plane. I asked what the box was and he said it was "the hangar". By the time I came around to this young man again, he had colored the box completely black and the plane was no longer visible. I asked him why he colored the box black. He said he closed the hangar doors, so the airplane would be safe.

Developmental psychologists believe there are ages that correspond to the stages that children go through. I believe these ages are not that definite. If children are stimulated they develop skills much earlier, and on the reverse side, if someone stops drawing when he/she is in third grade, that is where his development stops. If later in his/her college years this same person decided to become an elementary school teacher and has to take my art methods class to certify, I find they still draw like an eight year old.

I have chosen four of the most common devices children use that are also found in rock art. These include: x-ray drawings, overlapping, size change and placement of objects (Figure 5).

An x-ray drawing such as the ant farm shows the insides of an area of space or an object. The pregnant buffalo from Nine Mile Canyon

(Figure 6) is an example of an x-ray drawing. Another example is found on an Acoma pot (Figure 7) showing a deer with a “heart line”.

Overlapping objects is a device showing that whatever object is closer to the viewer covers part of the object that is further away. An animal is in front of a figure shown in an example from Pleasant Creek, Utah (Figure 8). Overlapping horses with riders are found in a panel at La Barge, Wyoming (Figure 9).

Making objects smaller to appear as though they are far away is another device used to show space. This technique can be seen in a hunting scene from La Barge, Wyoming (Figure 10), and in a herding scene from the Martin Ranch, Manila, Utah (Figure 11). While this is not as sophisticated as the two and three point perspective developed in the Renaissance, it is still a form of perspective and very effective in showing depth of field.

Size may have other meanings, so it is a little tricky to use when you are looking at rock art.

It could be the artist intended to show the depth of field. He may also be indicating the smaller figure is not as important as a big figure. The bear and the hunters in a Potash Road panel (Figure 12) show a large animal and small figures. This may be to emphasize how scary it was to hunt this animal. A small figure by a large figure's head may be showing a guardian or a spirit visitor.

Placement of objects higher on the picture plane can make them seem further away. A panel containing Ute Horses in Nine Mile Canyon (Figure 13) is an example of this perspective device. Other examples can be found in the Bear and Deer Panel at Rochester Creek (Figure 14), a panel from Westwater Canyon (Figure 15), a panel from Birch Creek, Idaho (Figure 16), the Hunting Scene from Angle, Utah (Figure 17), and panels in Santa Clara Canyon, Utah (Figure 18), Fremont State Park (Figure 19) and Pine Canyon, Wyoming (Figure 20).

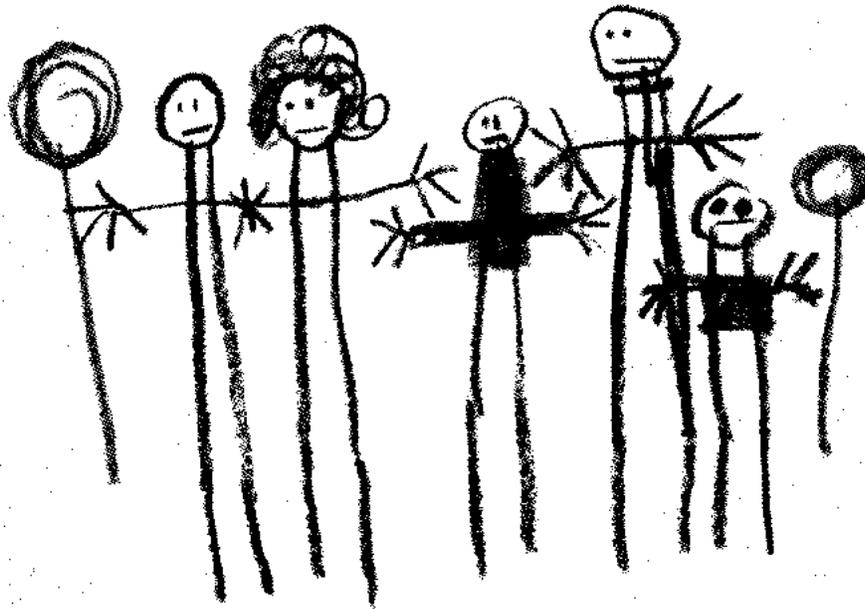
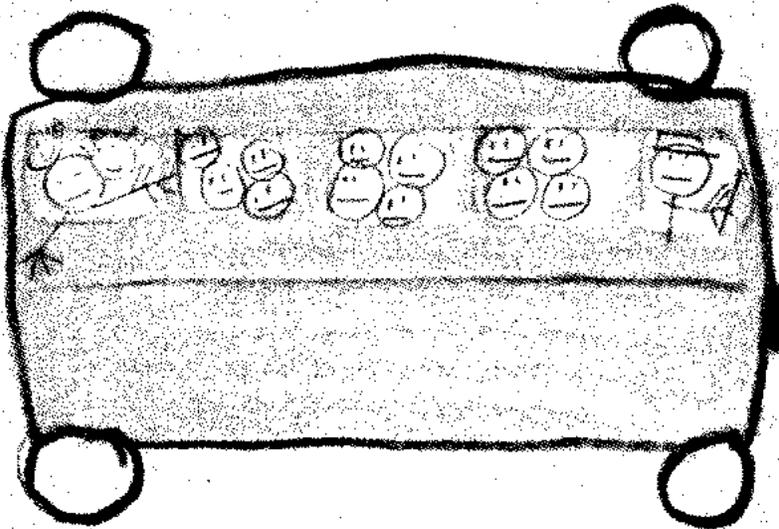


Figure 1: Family portrait

Figure 2: School bus with all four tires.



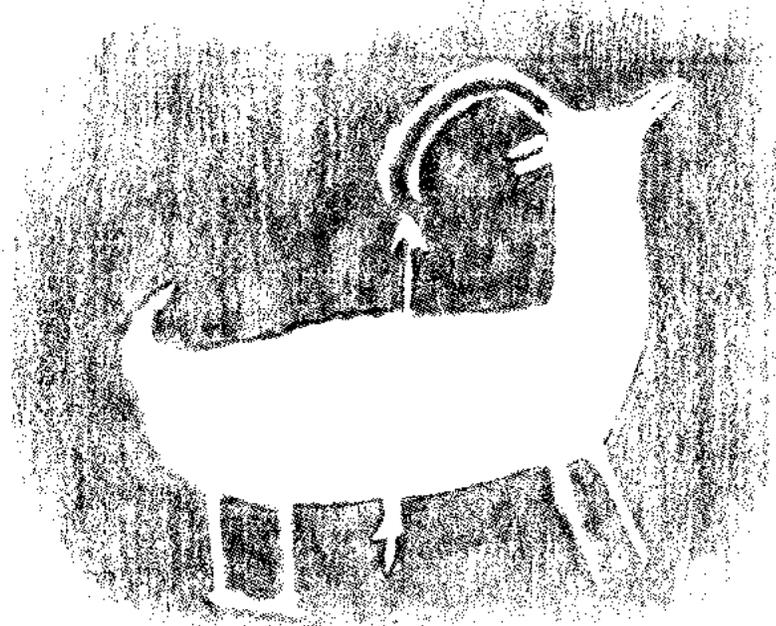


Figure 3: Deer from Chew Ranch, near Dinosaur National Monument

Figure 4: Hunting scene from Nine Mile Canyon, Utah

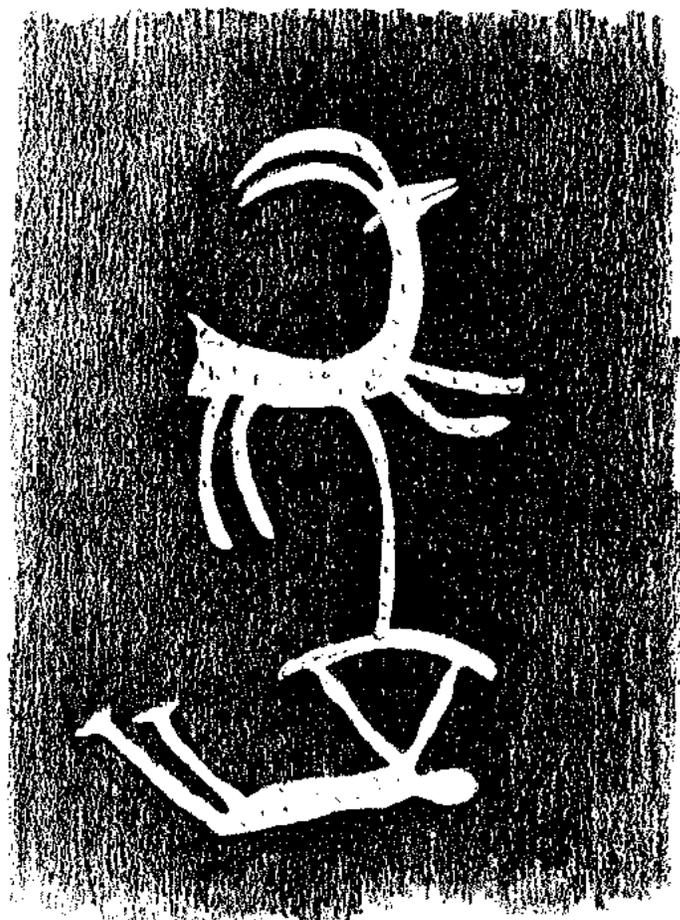
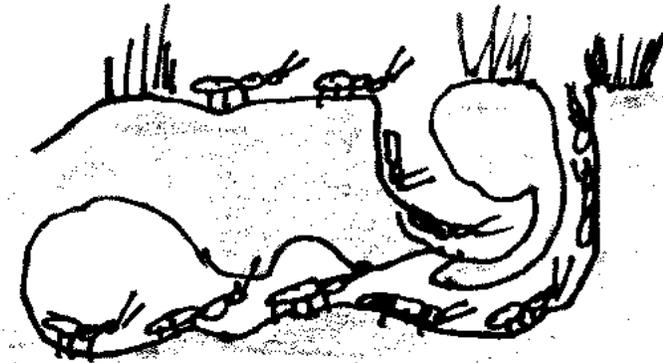
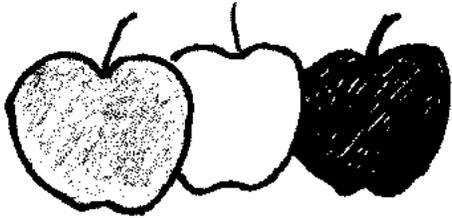


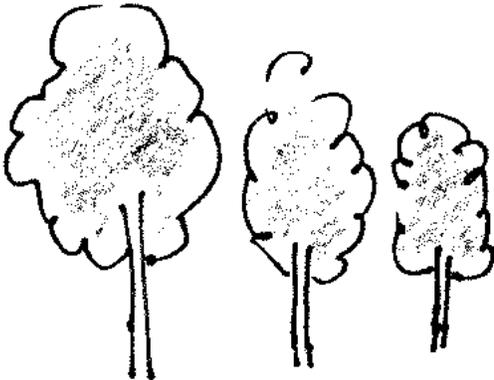
Figure 5: Common devices children use to depict space: X-ray drawings, overlapping, size change, and placement.



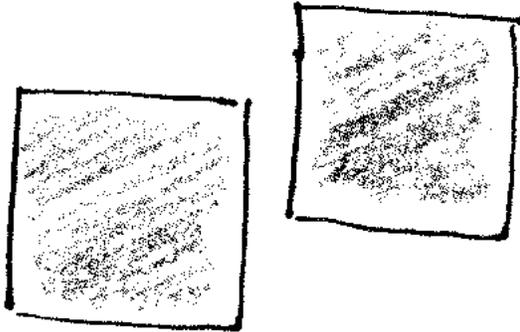
X-RAY



OVER LAPPING



SIZE CHANGE



PLACEMENT

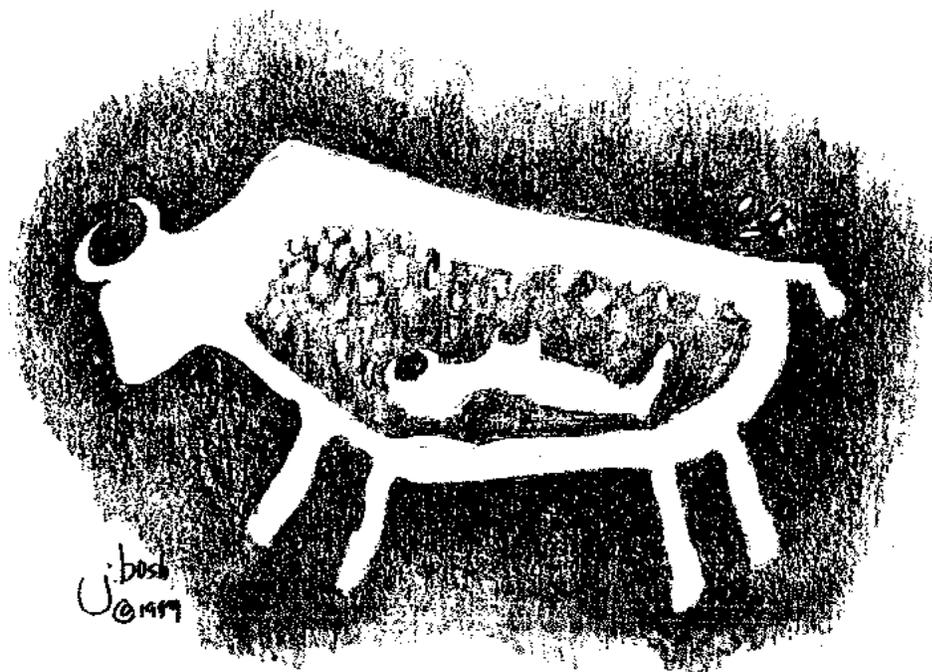
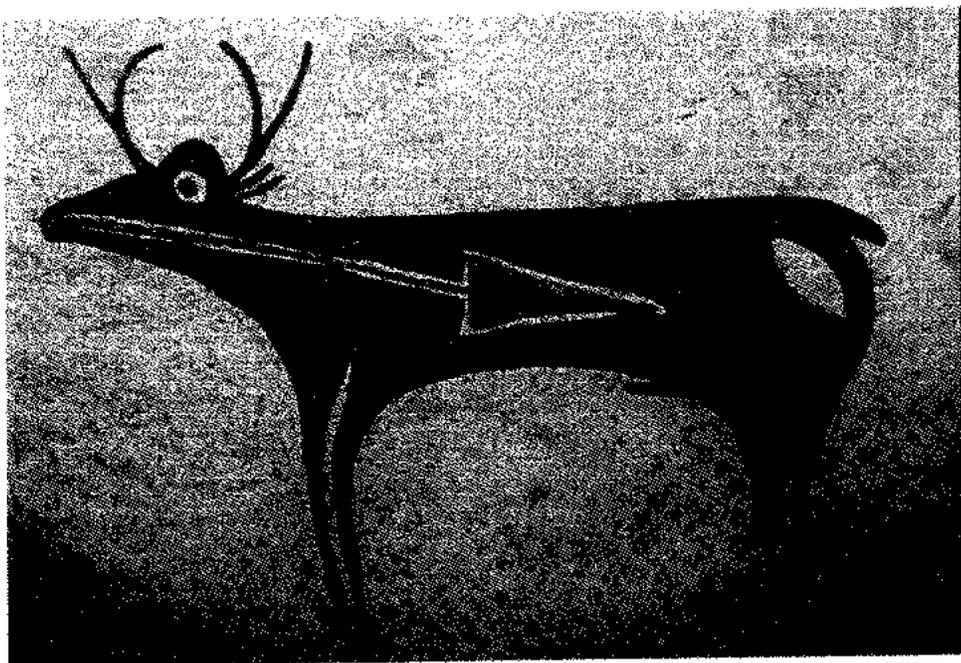


Figure 6: The pregnant buffalo from Nine Mile Canyon, Utah, is an example of an x-ray drawing

Figure 7: Acoma pottery with a “heart line” is another x-ray drawing.



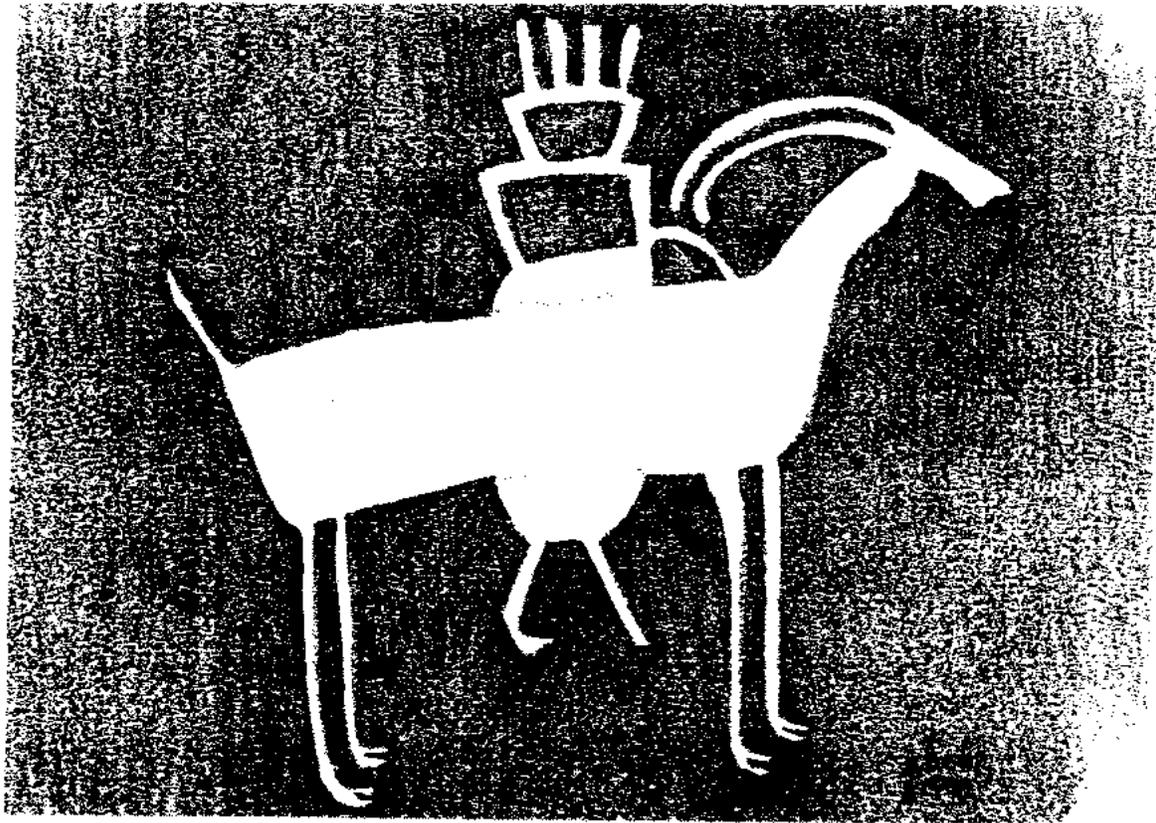
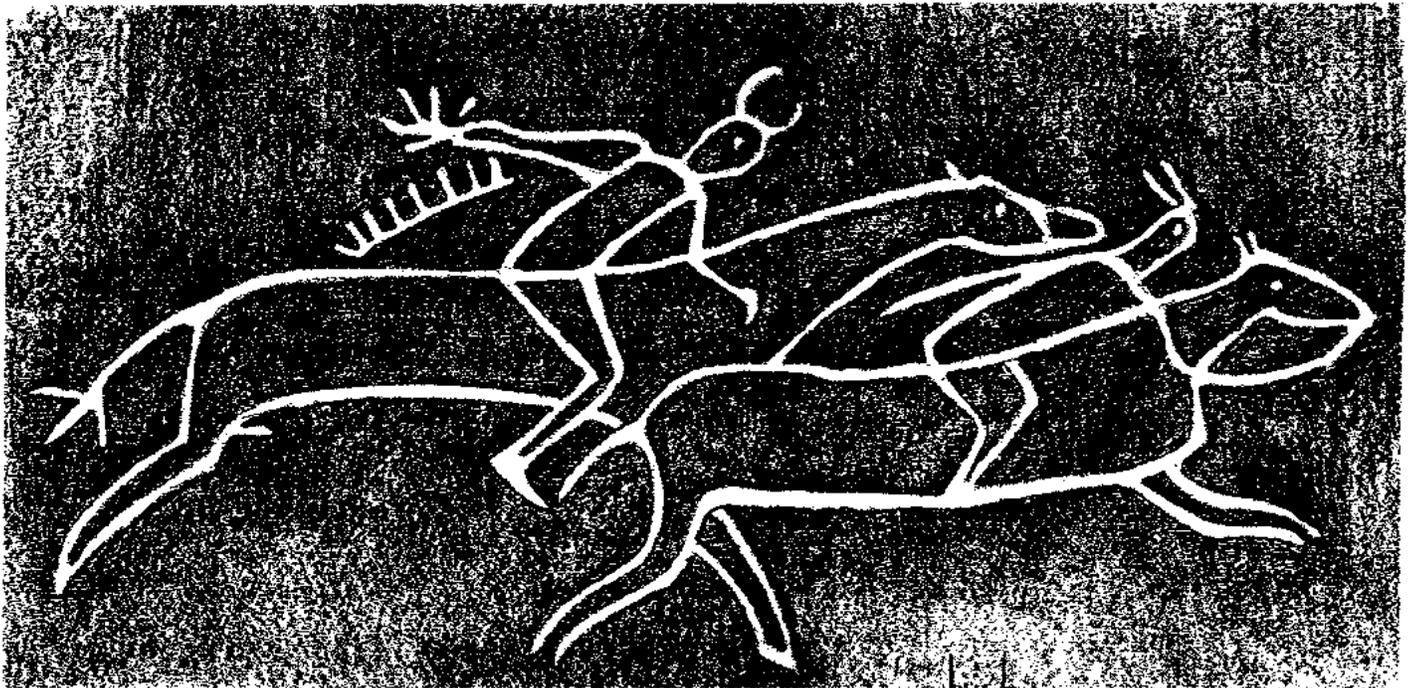


Figure 8: Overlapping figures from Pleasant Creek, Utah.

Figure 9: Overlapping horses from La Barge, Wyoming.



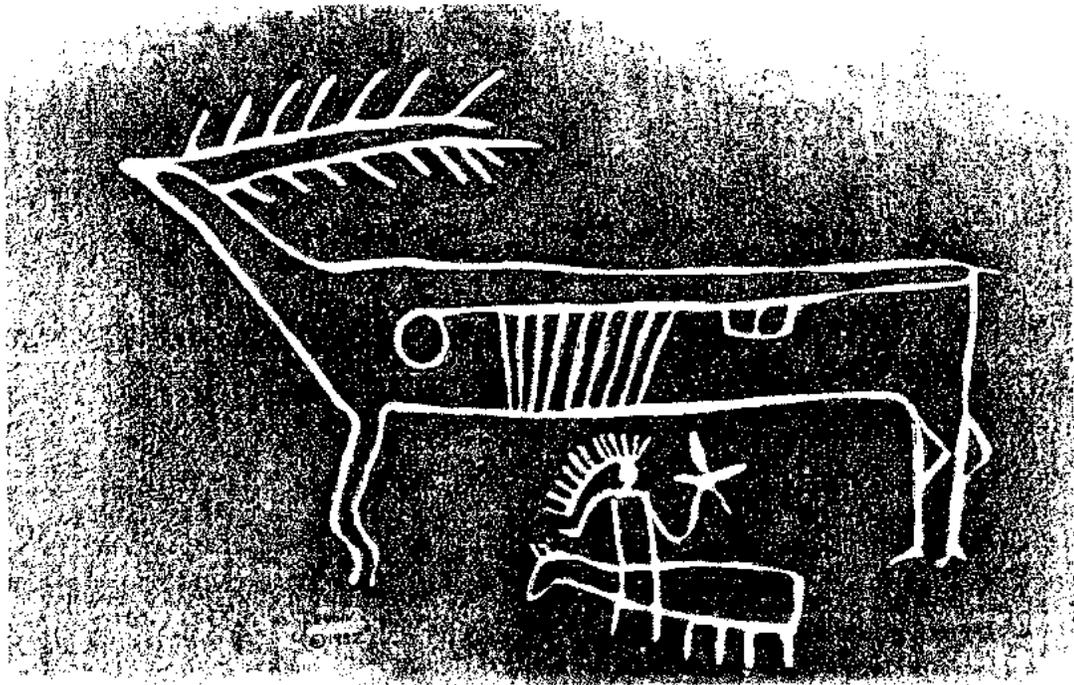
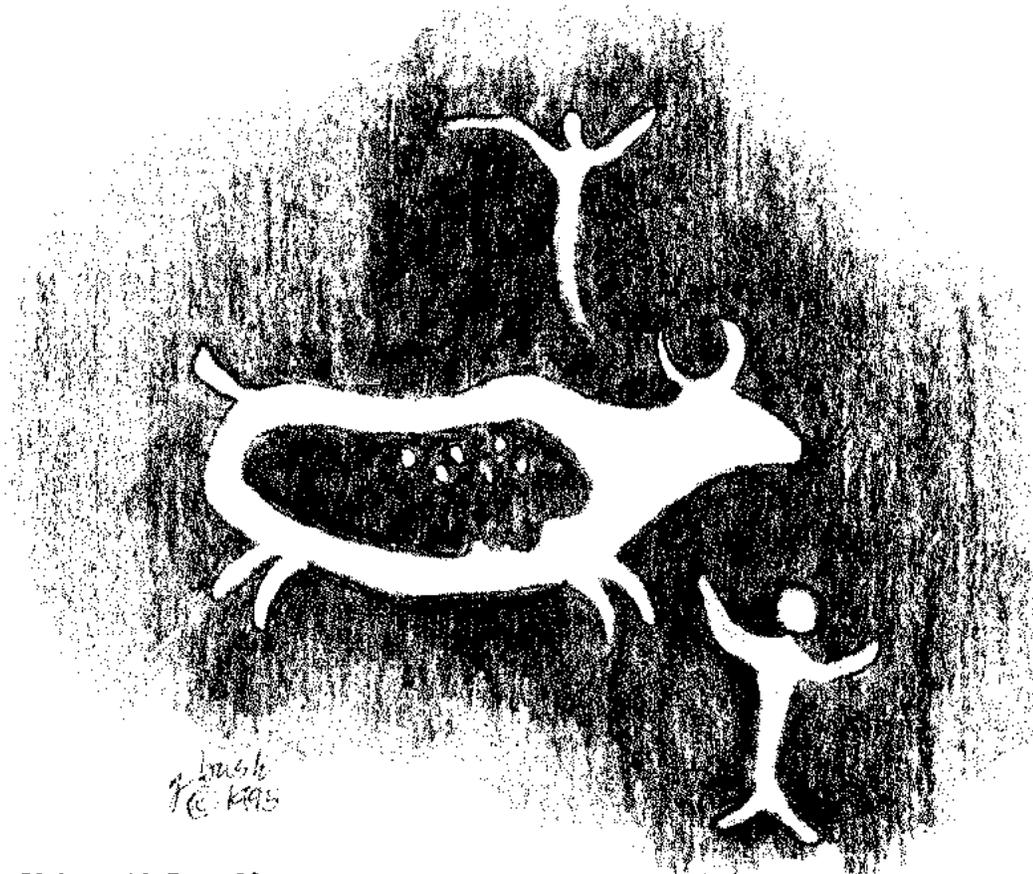


Figure 10: Making objects smaller makes them seem further away. This is a hunting scene from La Barge, Wyoming.

Figure 11. Martin Ranch, Manila Utas



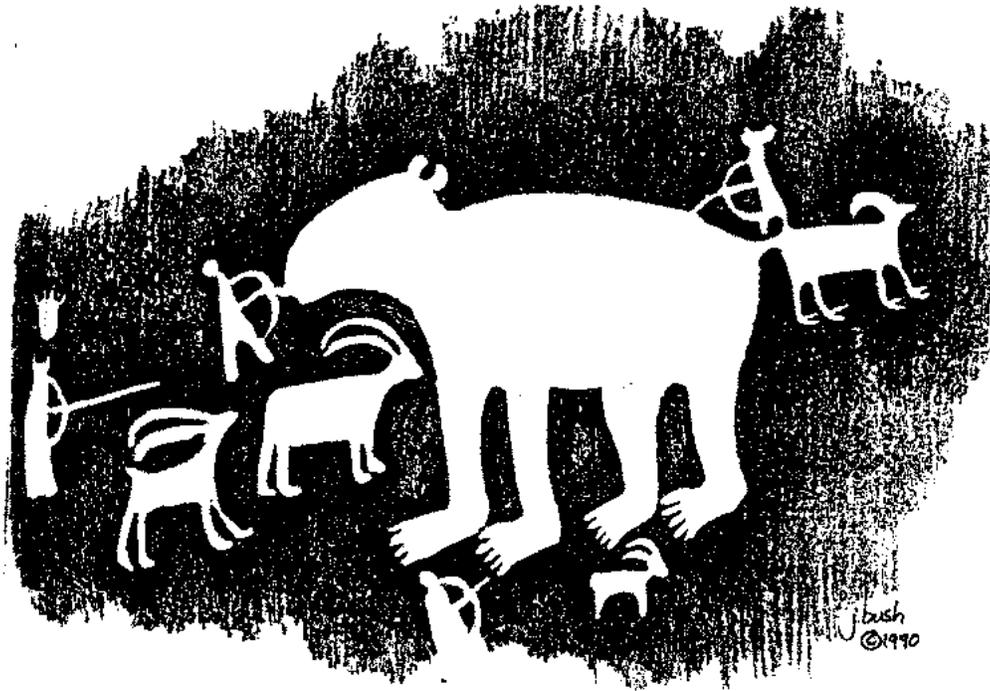
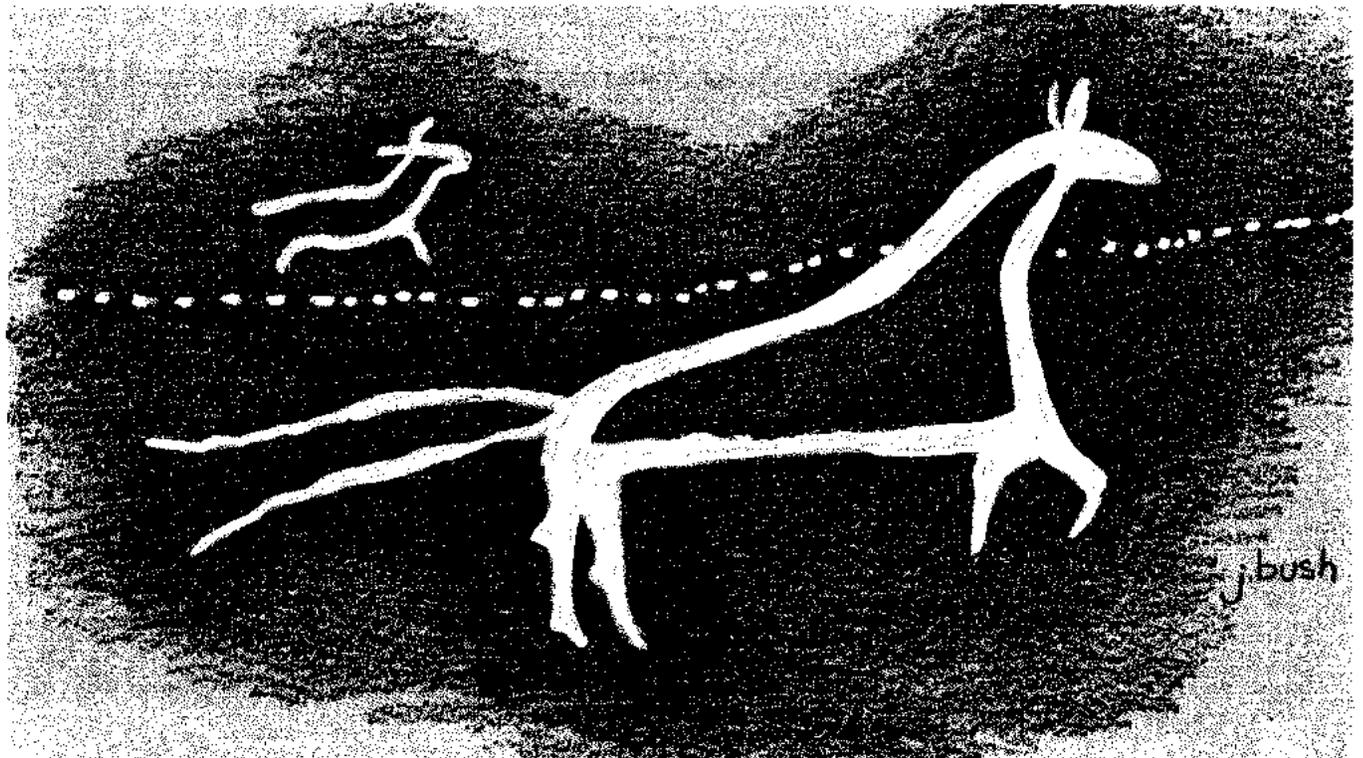


Figure 12: Bear and hunters from Potash Road, near Moab, Utah.

Figure 13: Placement of objects can make them appear further away. Ute horse from Nine Mile Canyon, Utah.



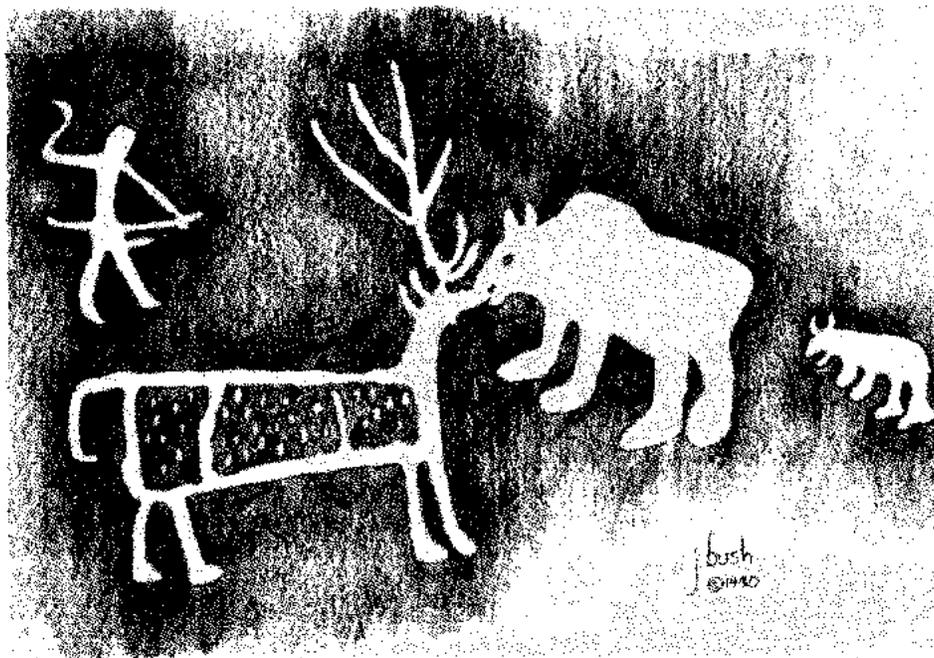
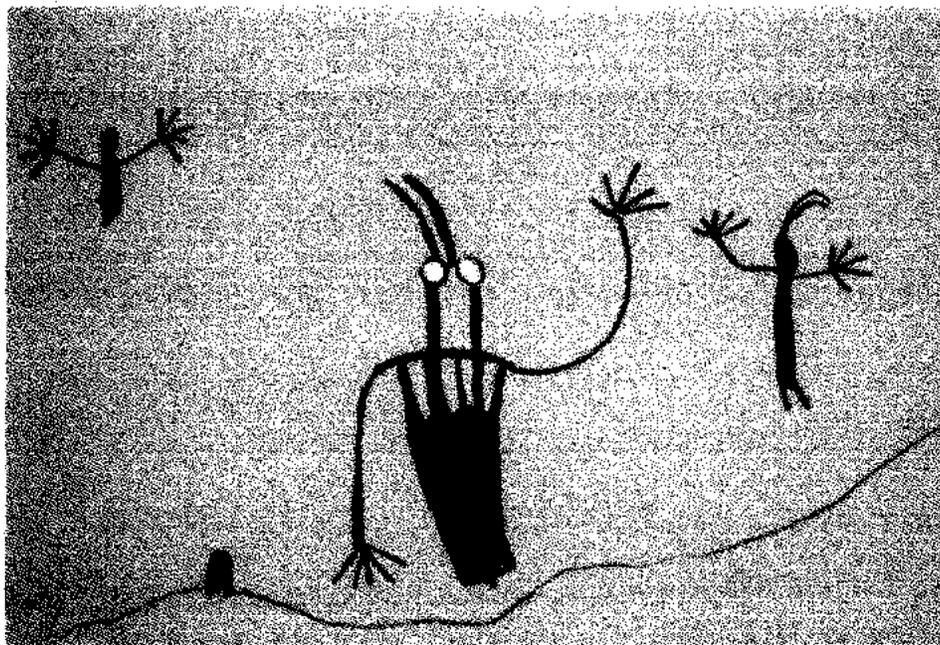


Figure 14: Bear and deer from Rochester Creek, Utah.

Figure 15: West Water, Utah.



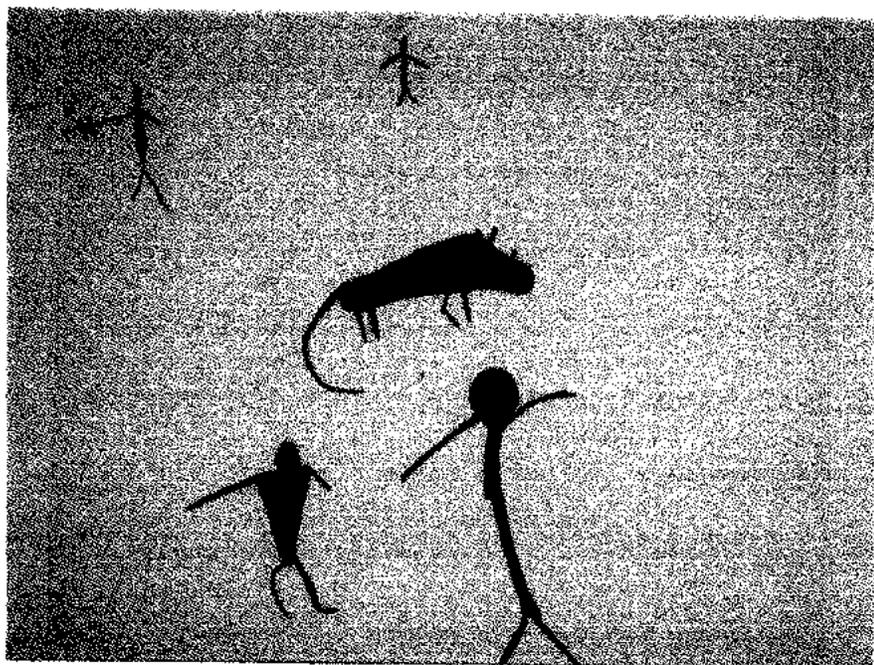
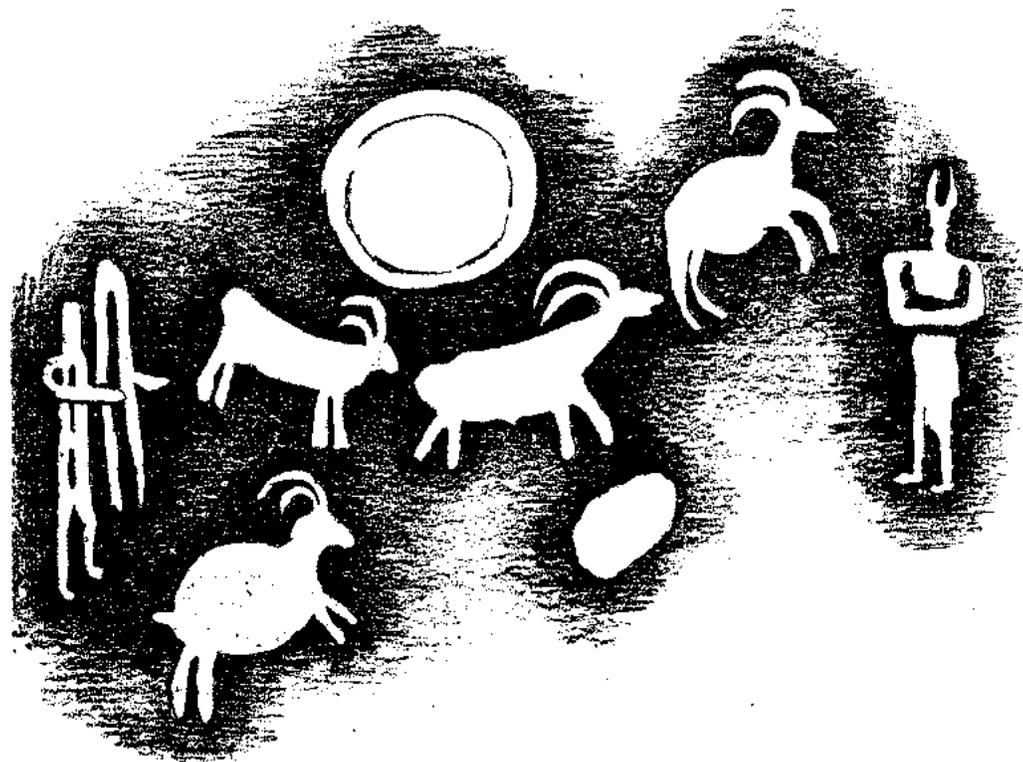


Figure 16: Birch Creek, Idaho.

Figure 17: Hunting scene from Angle, Utah.



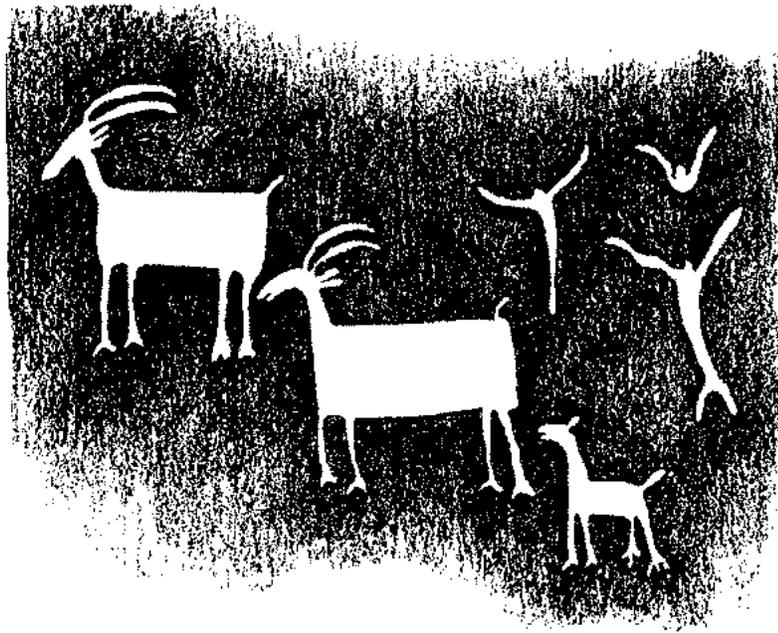


Figure 18: Figures herding animals over a jump site, Santa Clara Canyon, Utah.

Figure 19: Fremont State Park, Utah.

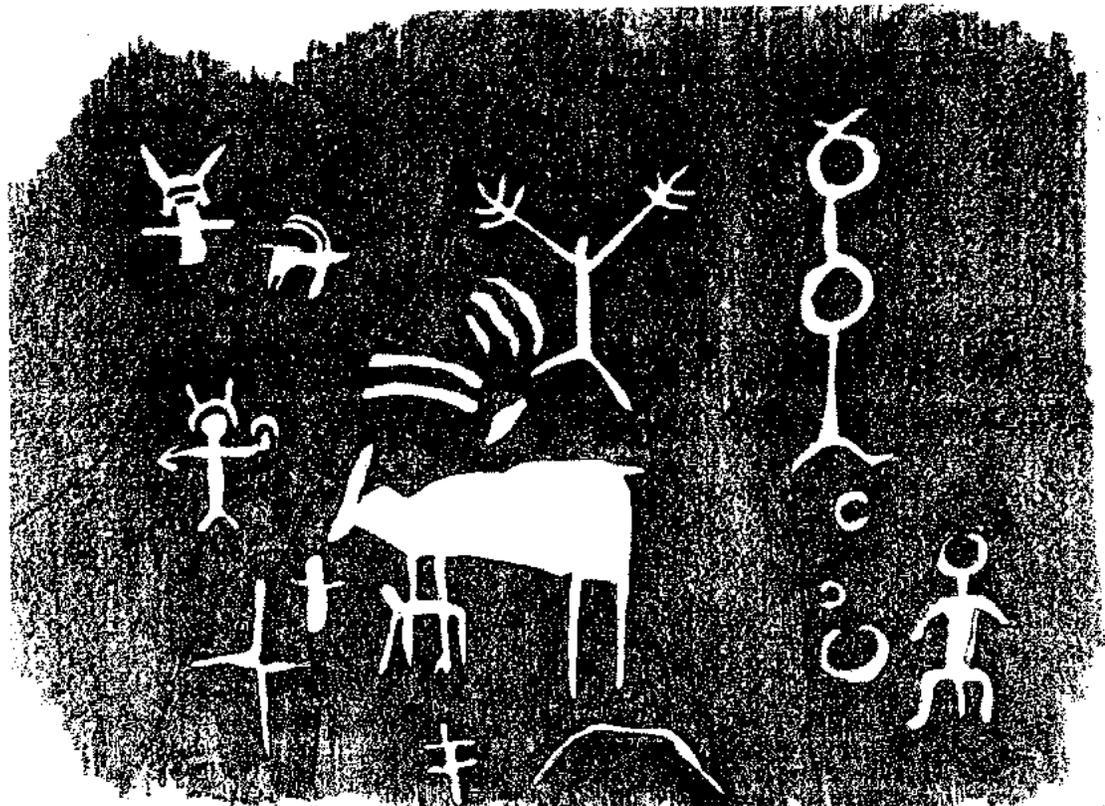




Figure 20 : This panel shows a bear with a baby in it's mouth. Spears come toward the bear from all directions, and there are trees and figures in the background. It is found in Pine Canyon, Wyoming.