The background of the slide is a photograph of a rock wall covered in ancient art. The art includes several dark, vertical, pillar-like shapes, some with horizontal lines, and other faint, reddish-brown markings. The rock surface is textured and shows signs of weathering. A dark horizontal line is visible near the top of the rock wall.

Holy Ghost in Space

A Consideration of Form in Prehistoric
Barrier Canyon Style Rock Art

David Sucec, BCS PROJECT
www.bcsproject.org



Framed by a shallow arch, the *Holy Ghost Group* is the physical and aesthetic center of the *Great Gallery*.



The size and elevated locations of the Holy Ghost images rarely fail to impress visitors to this well-known site



Colorado Plateau

The Great Gallery



The Colorado Plateau



Horseshoe Canyon from Devil's Point.



The Great Gallery, Canyonlands National Park.



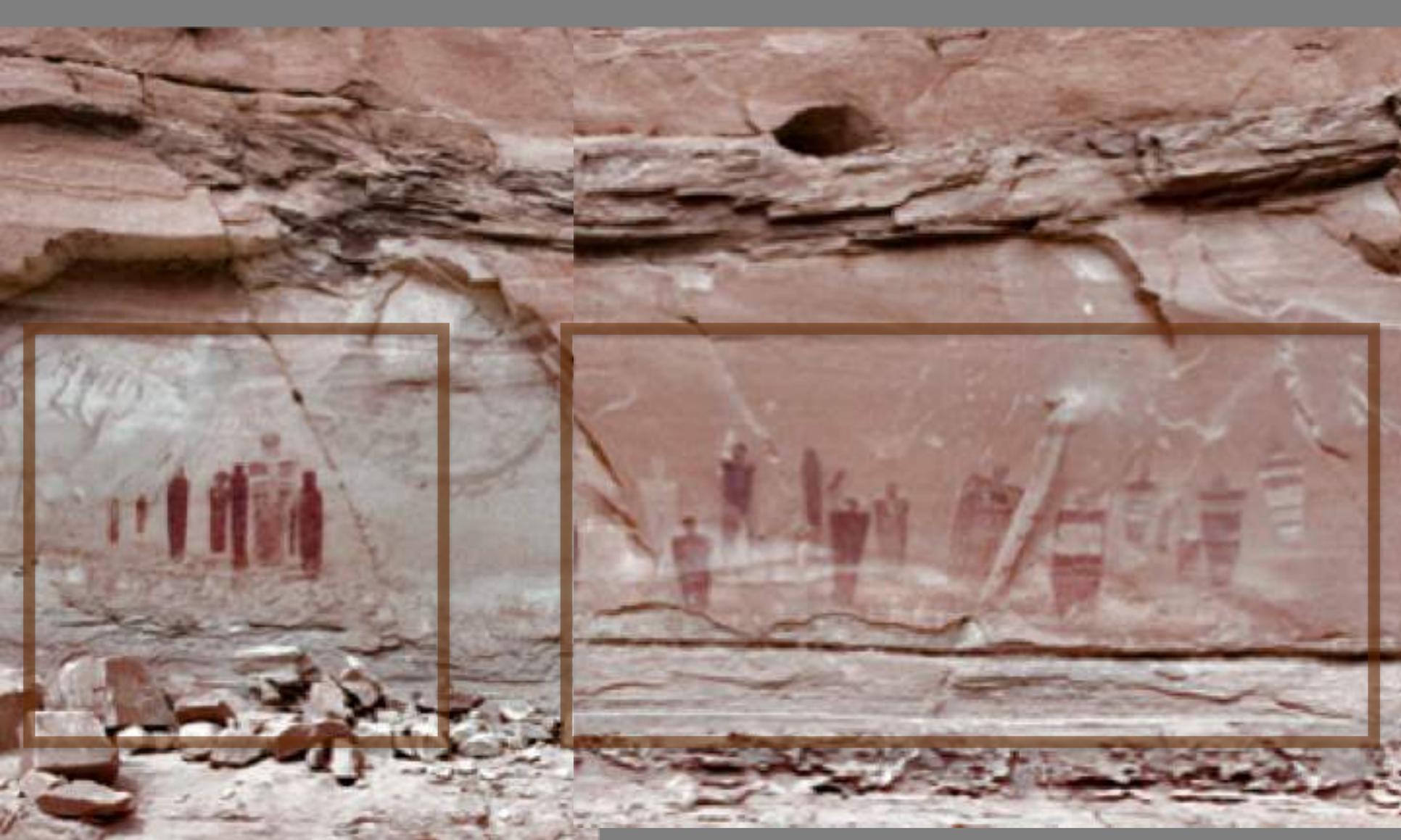
The Holy Ghost Group alcove.



Lower wall.



Compare tight grouping and consistent verticality of Holy Ghost figures with random spacing and angle of verticality.



Compare tight grouping and consistent verticality of Holy Ghost figures with random spacing and angle of verticality.

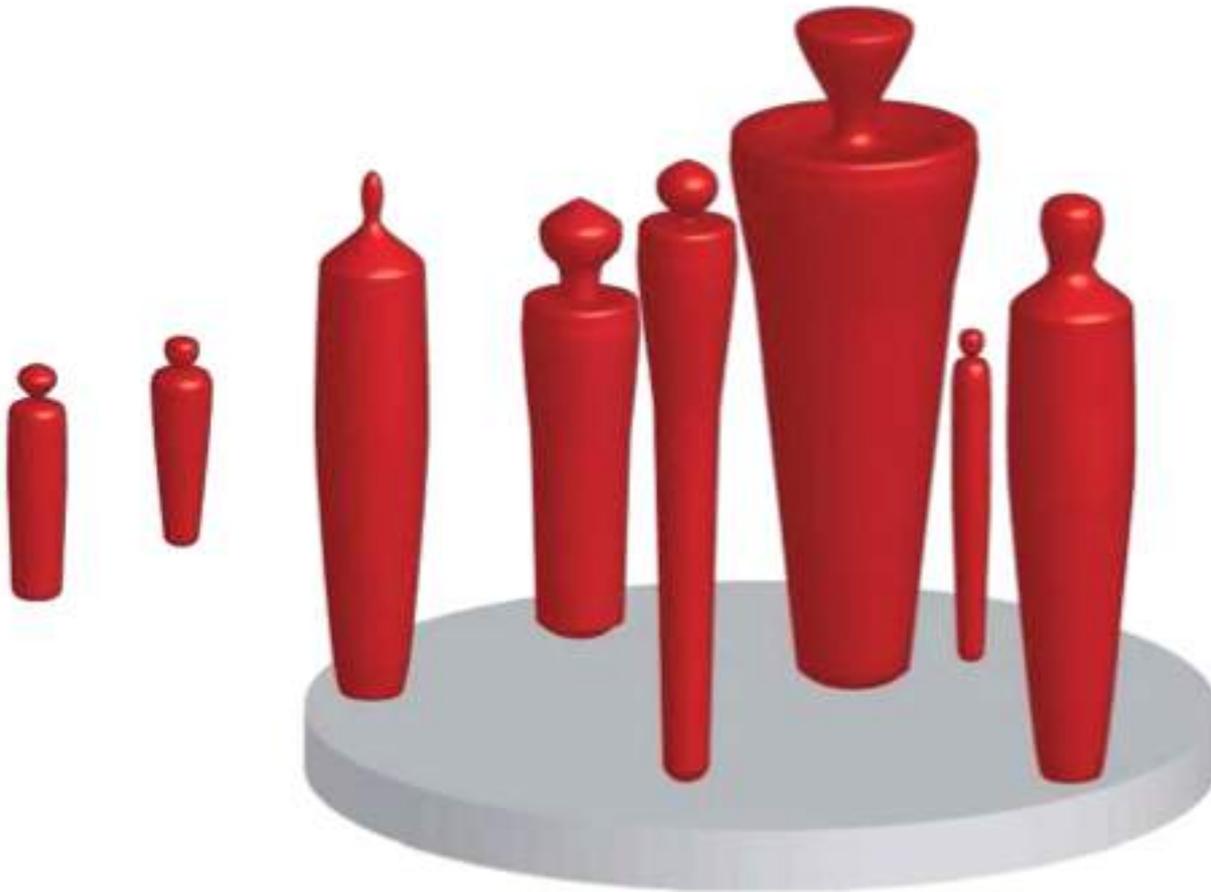


The Holy Ghost Group. A composition of figures in space.



Holy Ghost surrounded by figures schematic.

courtesy Joseph Ramirez



Holy Ghost surrounded by figures schematic.

courtesy Joseph Ramirez

The Holy Ghost Group

A composition of figures in space.

Reading the visual cues (clues).

The visual cues we use to perceive space are the same ones that image-makers use to suggest space.

The Holy Ghost Group

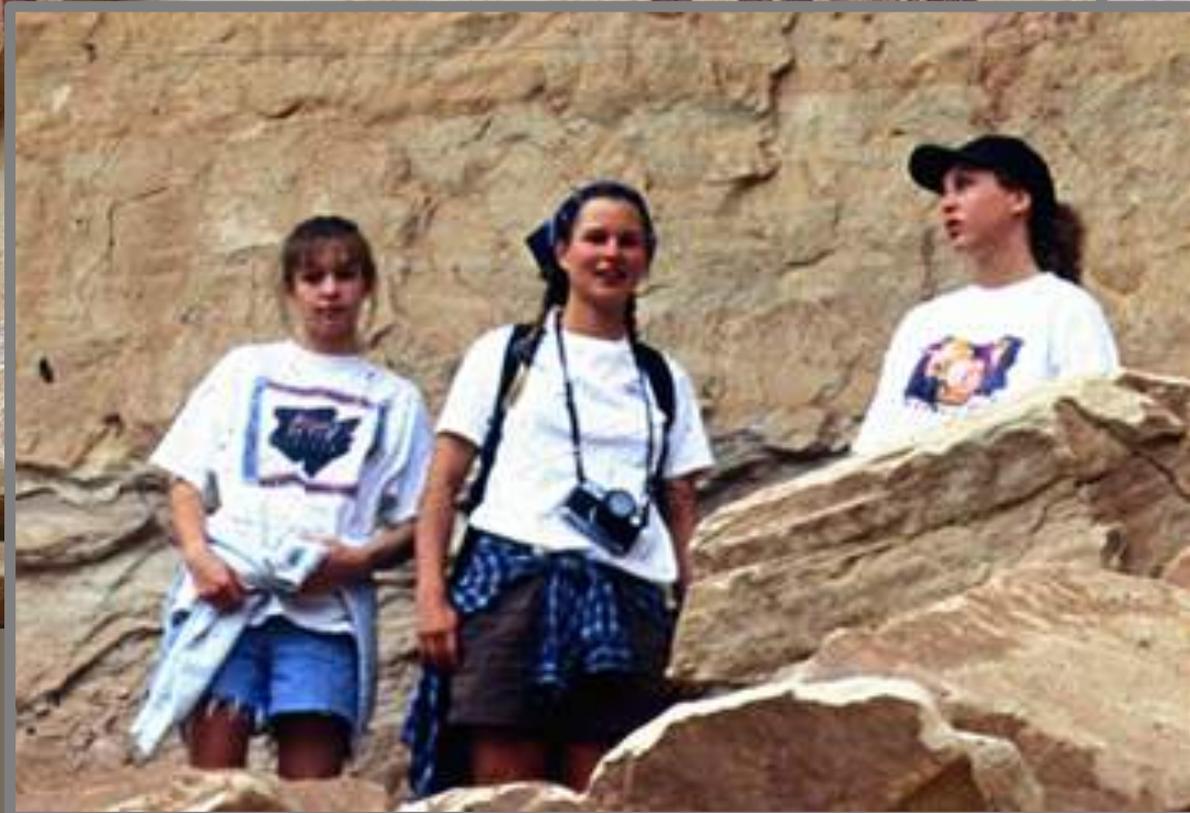
A composition of figures in space.

- * Three quarter profile
- * Verticality
- * Natural spacing
- * Shape size



Impeccable design of head and upper torso.
White forms shaped by red paint.

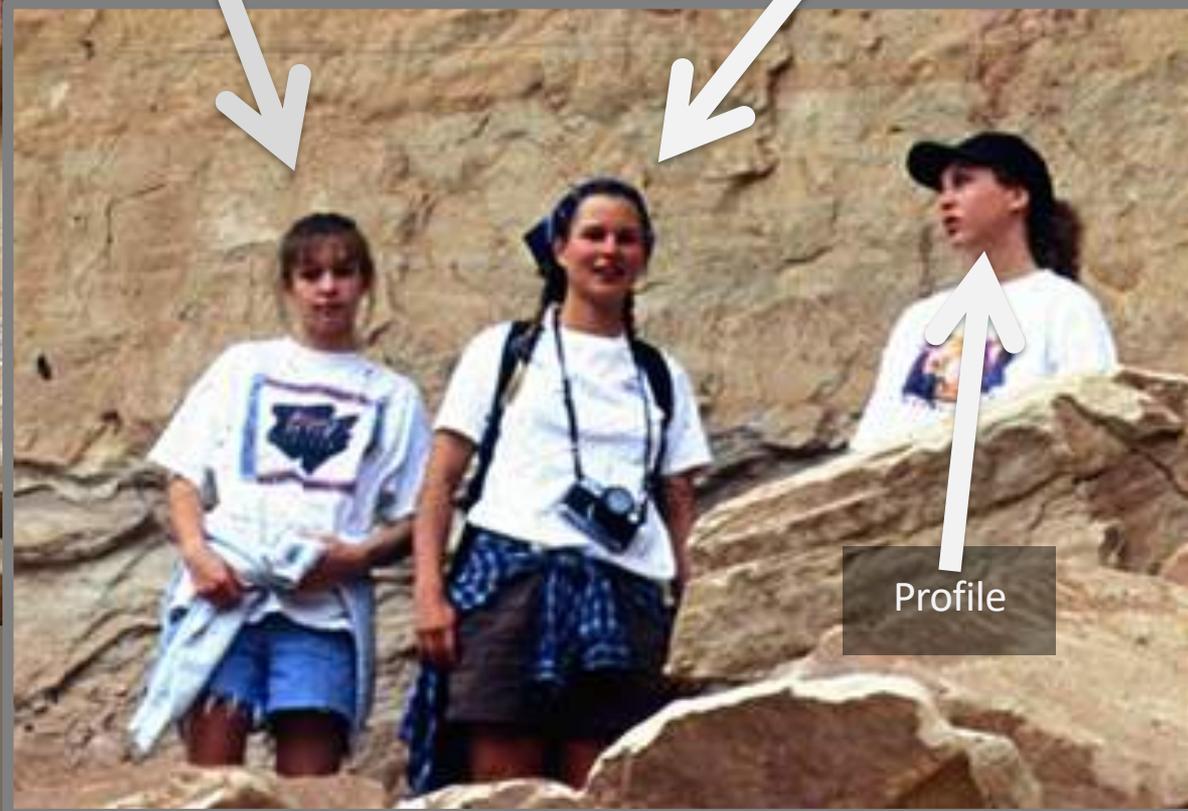
Three dimensional head
– front and side views.





Frontal

Three Quarter



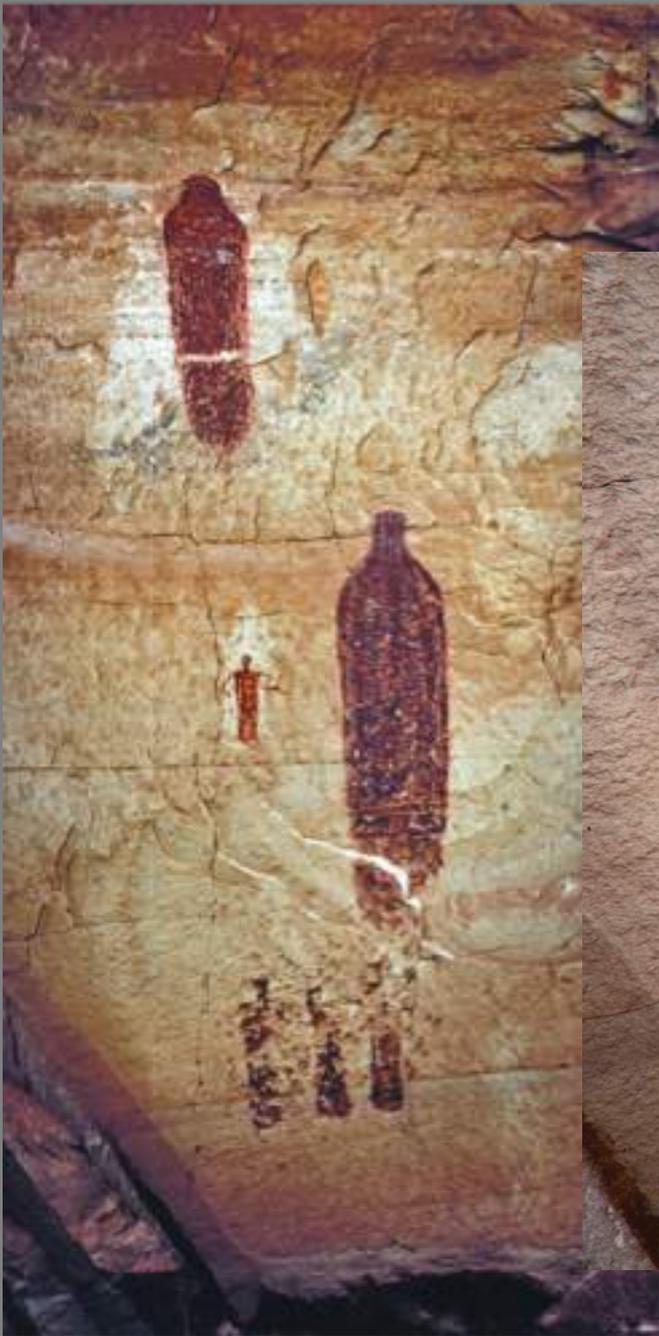
Profile





Natural spacing.

Iconic spacing.

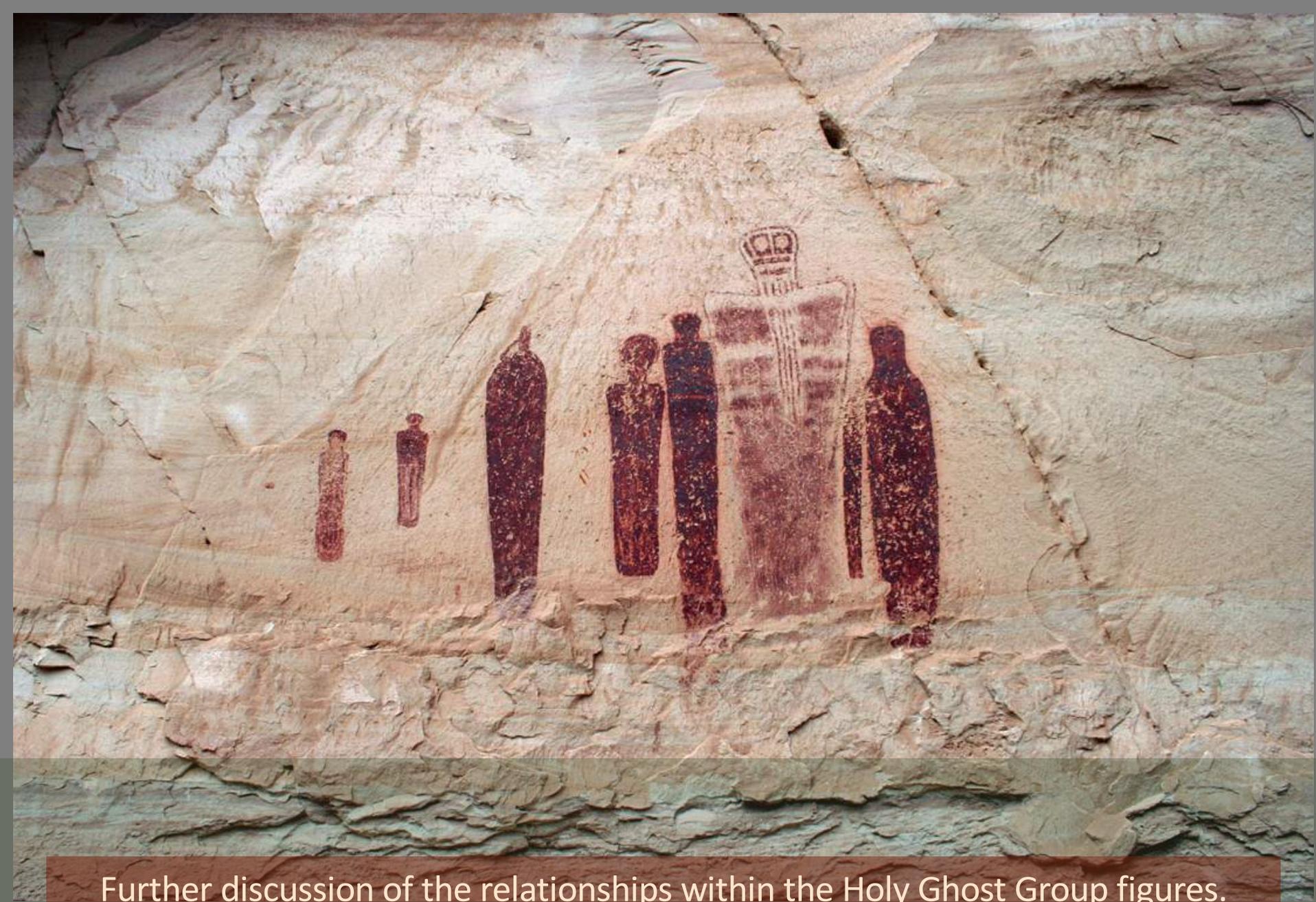




When representational shapes appear similar, the differences in sizes may suggest distance from viewer. Position in the visual field is another visual cue – lower: closer / higher: further away.



schematics courtesy Joseph Ramirez



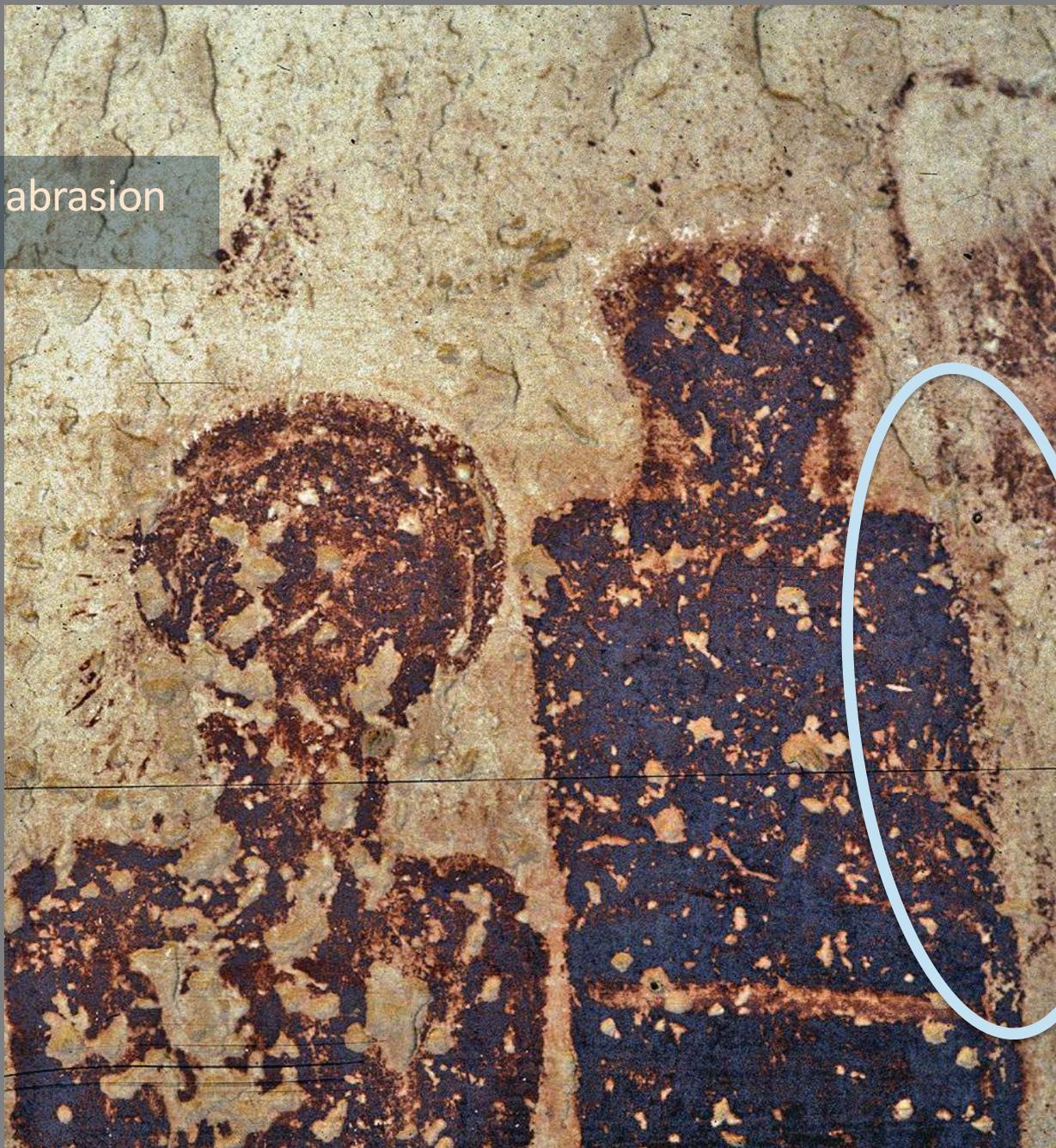
Further discussion of the relationships within the Holy Ghost Group figures.

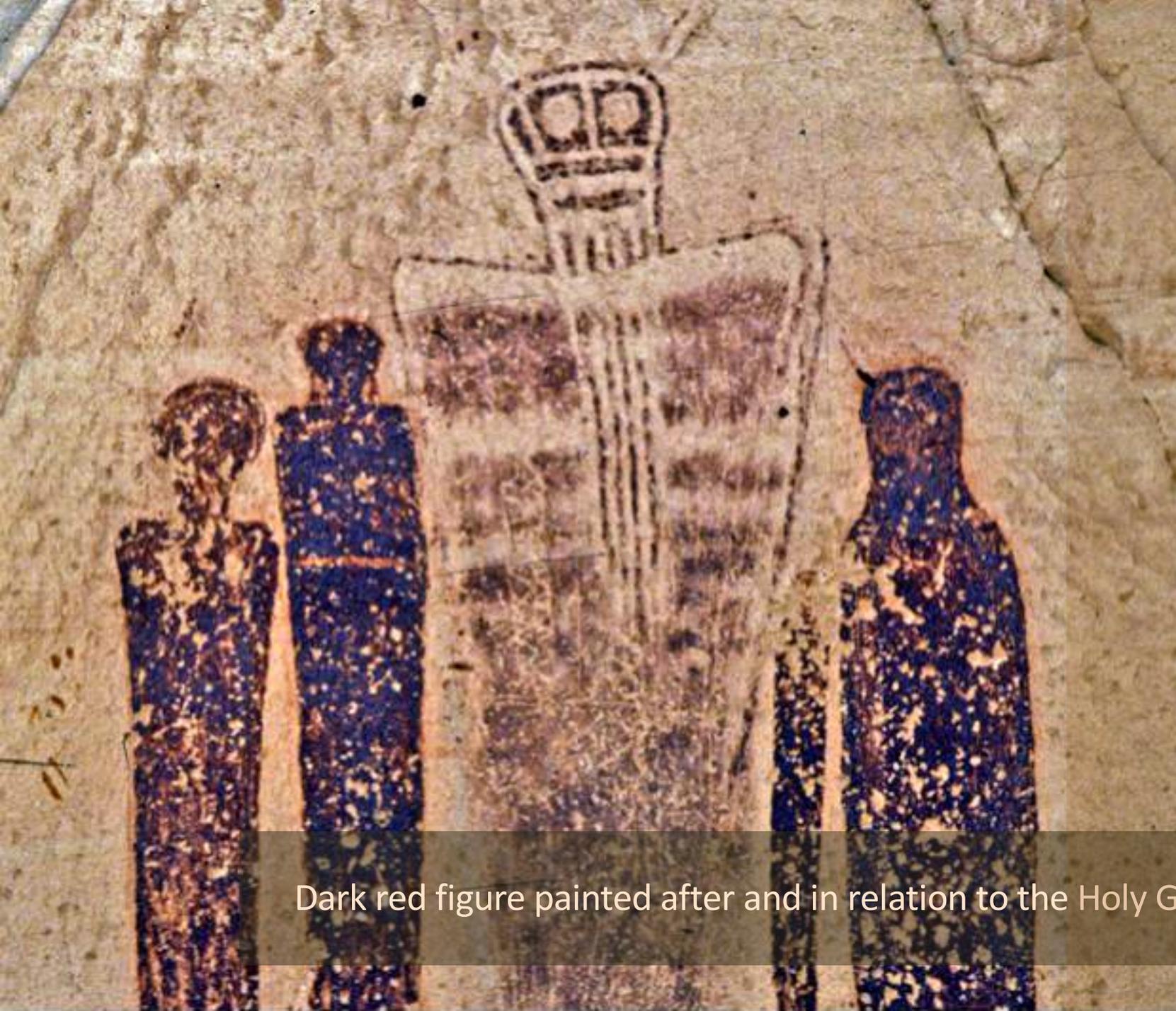


OVERLAP

Although, at a distance, the Holy Ghost figure appears surrounded by the dark figures, front to back and side to side; close up, the Holy Ghost appears to be in front of the dark red figure, left, in the upper body.

No abrasion





Dark red figure painted after and in relation to the Holy Ghost.



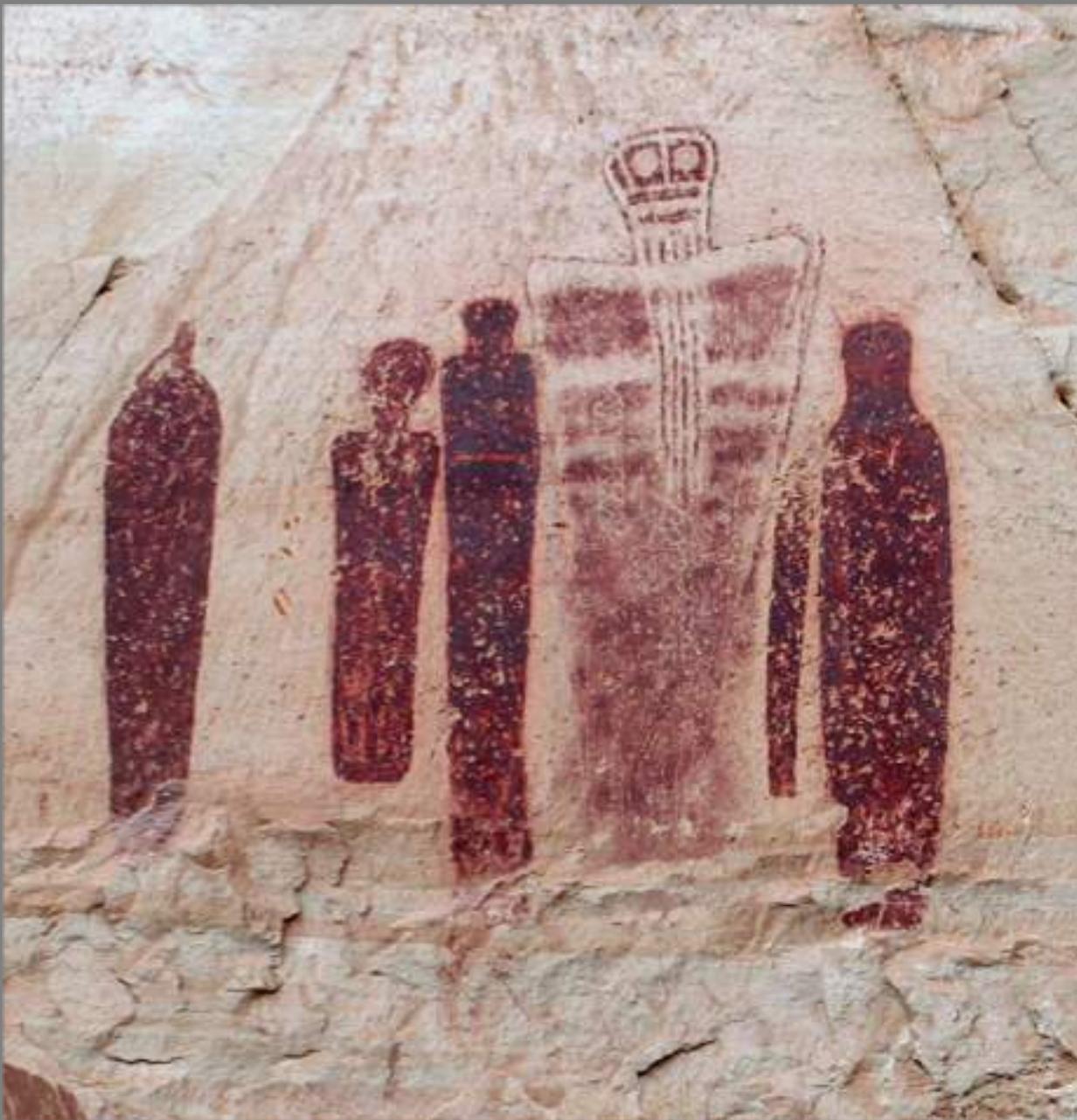
Large dent pecking before and
after abrasion



Large denting before abrasion



Large denting after abrasion



Tonality of red paint

Lines of dots and
vertical parallel lines

Proportional
figure motif



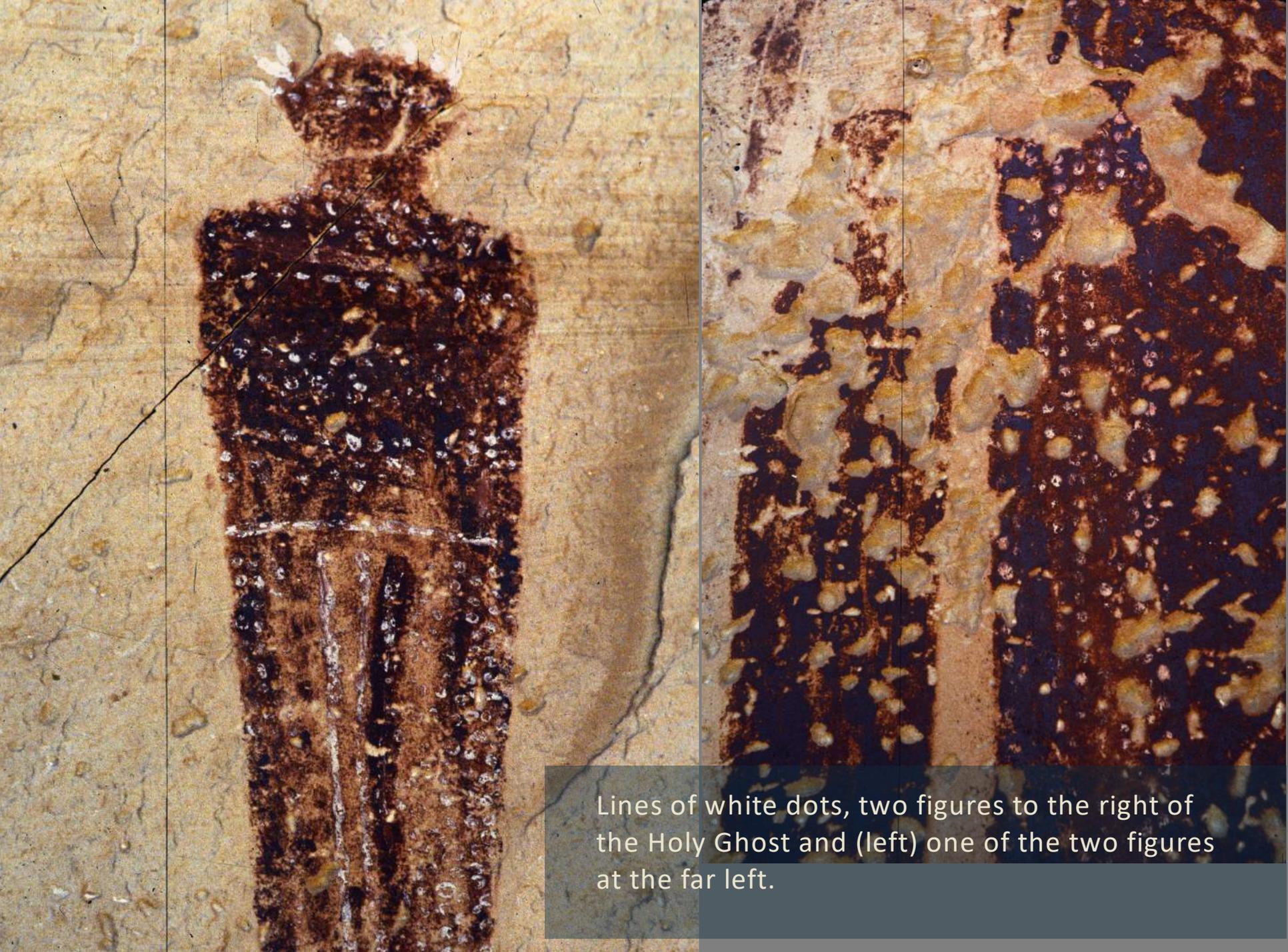
Purple Paint Figures, lower wall. The only three figures formed with a wash technique. The difference in tonality may indicate different pigment sources and separate painting episodes between the left and two right figures.



The two small figures on the left share the same tonality of red, lines of dots and parallel line motif.



Lines of dots motif. These two figures appear to have been painted at or near the same time and are of a kind as two sloped shouldered figures, outside the alcove.



Lines of white dots, two figures to the right of the Holy Ghost and (left) one of the two figures at the far left.



Same technique, motif, and tonality.



Same technique, motif, and tonality.



Crown of feathers.



Initial thoughts were that the Holy Ghost figure and the immediate surrounding dark figures were placed in one episode of painting.



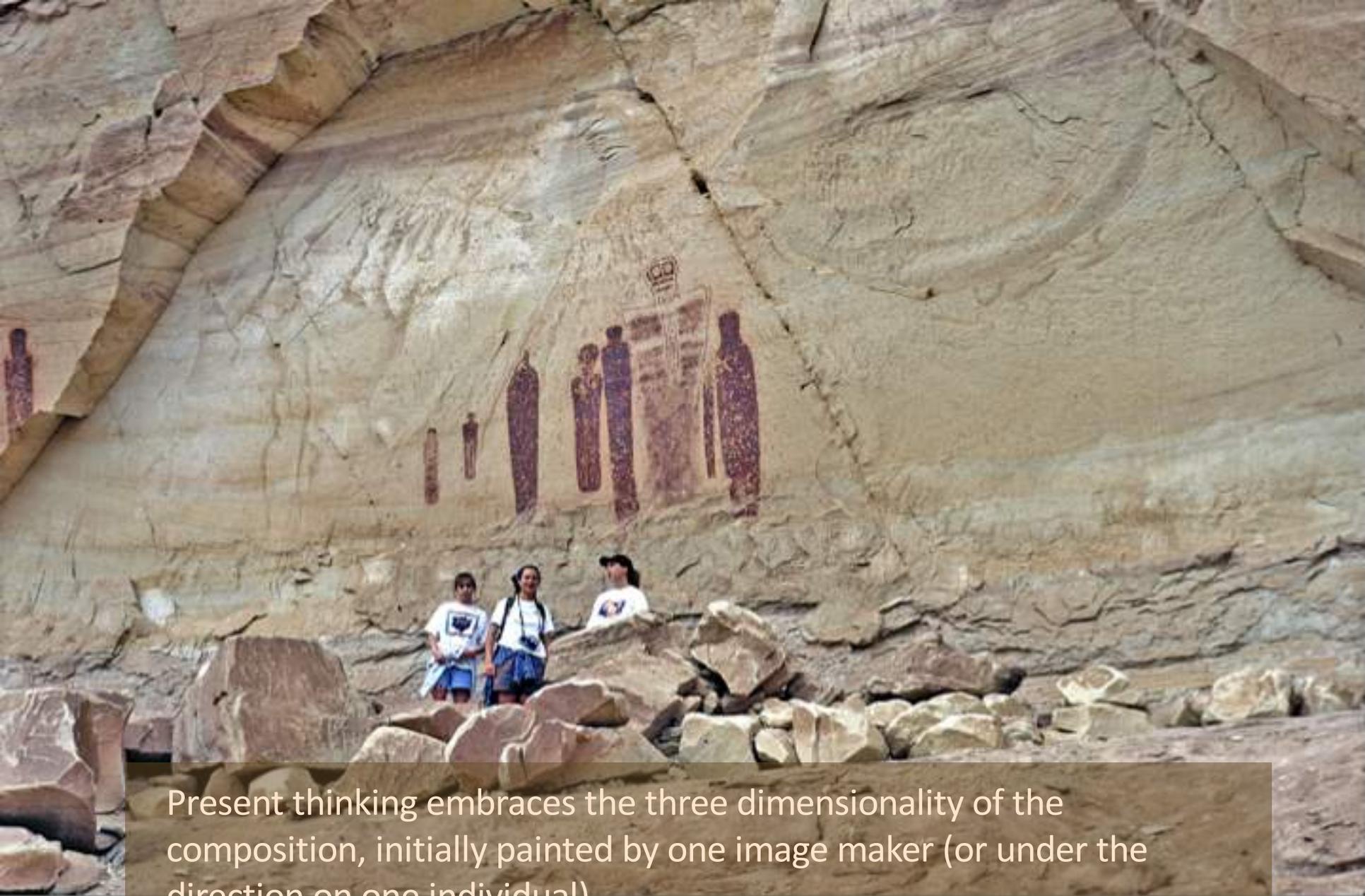
At that time, the assumption was that the two small figures on the far left were placed, fortuitously for the composition, at another time — during another episode(s) of painting.



However, the two far left smaller figures share several formal and technical characteristics with the other members of the composition.



There is nothing to suggest they were painted in a different episode of painting except the notion that questions whether an ancient image-maker would or could compose such a representation of space.



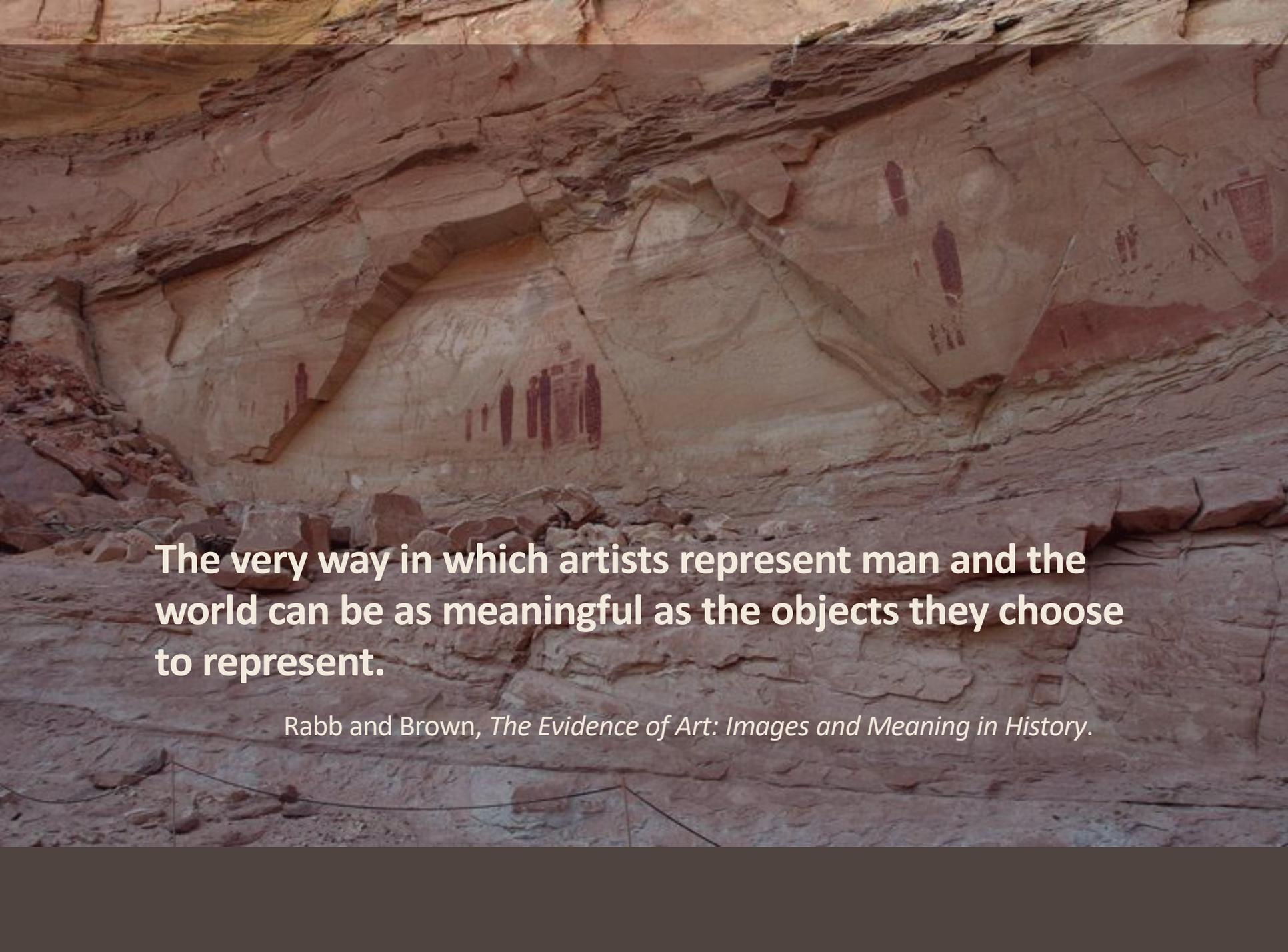
Present thinking embraces the three dimensionality of the composition, initially painted by one image maker (or under the direction on one individual).



However, there are suggestions that the composition was "maintained," perhaps "refreshed" via abrasion and over-painting.



In any case, the Holy Ghost Group is seen, today, as a clustering of figures in natural world space. And, my bet is that it has been seen this way ever since it was painted...whether intended or not.

The image shows the interior of a rock shelter with a curved rock wall. Several red ochre paintings of human figures are visible. One prominent figure is a tall, slender, upright form. To its right, a group of smaller, similar figures stands in a line. Further right, another tall figure is visible, and to the far right, a more complex, possibly seated or crouching figure is partially seen. The rock surface is textured and shows signs of weathering and cracking. The lighting is somewhat dim, highlighting the red pigments against the lighter rock.

The very way in which artists represent man and the world can be as meaningful as the objects they choose to represent.

Rabb and Brown, *The Evidence of Art: Images and Meaning in History*.