Ancient Painters Of The Colorado Plateau

The Barrier Canyon Style
Findings of the BCS PROJECT
1991 — 2011

David Sucec, BCS PROJECT
Utah Rock Art Research Association 2011
Great Gallery, large section of the lower wall, Canyonlands National Park
BCS PROJECT Photographer, Craig Law, at the Great Gallery, 1991. Spacing Between figures is representational.
*Three Shamans* composition, upper wall, Great Gallery. Spacing is Iconic, not representational. Figures about 10 inches in height.
Inset: Humped shoulder figure detail with double antenna, bighorn sheep image above head, with birds flanking each shoulder.
Bitter Creek Main Panel, Uintah County, 1998.
Vandalized *Bitter Creek*, 2007 (enhanced for visibility)
The concepts (involved in visual analysis) stress the appearance of objects rather than their purposes, their forms rather than their meanings...

J. J. Brody, *Anasazi and Pueblo Painting*

Barrier Canyon style: ca. 6750/5600 b.c.e. – ca. c.e. 300
As of August 2011

Selected *Barrier Canyon* style rock art sites on the Colorado Plateau.

Style area extends south from St. George and the north rim of the Grand Canyon on the west side of the Colorado river, north to the Uintah Basin/Vernal area. West from the Wasatch Plateau, east to western Colorado.

Based on 366 sites with BCS images over two decades.
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Greatest concentration of BCS sites appears to range from the Escalante River drainage, on both sides of the Colorado River, north to Uintah Basin.
Heart of the *Barrier Canyon* style territory, the confluence of the Green and Colorado rivers, Canyonlands National Park.
San Rafael Swell canyon, near the San Rafael River.
Cowboy and Walters caves, about 10 miles up-canyon from the Great Gallery. Figurines found in strata dating to 5600 through 4800 b.c.e.
Cowboy and Walters caves. Clay figurines with PLM found in Cowboy (right), unfired, and Walters (left), hardened with traces of red paint, dated 5600 through 4800 b.c.e.
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Barrier Canyon Style Form Motifs
The Barrier Canyon Style

— Elongated figure proportion, width to length, most often tapered

— Spirit Figures are bilaterally symmetrical
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— The *parallel line motif* with long vertical lines rather than the typically horizontal orientation (rake) of other Archaic styles
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- Round, large/oversized/goggle eyes
- Shoulder Bar
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— Compositions apparently representing friendly associations of animal, bird, snake and plant images with anthropomorphic spirit figures.

Spirit Figure with “peck-touches.”
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- Quadrupeds (dogs, cougar?) with tails curved over its back
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— Fletched or un-fletched spears (tall poles)
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Barrier Canyon Style Anthropomorphic Images

Spirit Figures
Citizen Figures
Composite Figures
Spirit figures
*Spirit* figures

*Citizen* figures
Spirit figure  
Citizen figure  
Composite figure
Spirit figures
Spirit Figure Variations (Working)

- Horseshoe Variant
- San Rafael Variant
- Salt Creek Variant
- Western Variant
- Northern Variant
- Maze Variant
Temporal variations
Working Temporal and Spatial Variations
Barrier Canyon Style Spirit Figure

Style wide: *Horseshoe* Variant
Regional: *San Rafael* Variant
Local: *V Arm Motif, Maze* Variant
Image–Making Techniques

• Painting
• Pecking
• Scratching
• Drawing
• Spray / Splatter
Left: Large *Spirit* Figure, Great Gallery. *Painted and pecked*, with *over-painting*; parallel lines, lines of dots.

Right: *Sprit figure* *drawn* with red ochre.
Left: Large Spirit Figure, Great Gallery. *Painted and pecked, with over-painting; parallel lines, lines of dots.*
Right: Spirit figure with *peck-touches.*
Left: Large Spirit Figure, Great Gallery. Painted and pecked, with over-painting; parallel lines, lines of dots.

Right: Spirit figure with peck-touches.
Left: Small *pecked* figure with horizontal PLM superimposed on earlier images. Right: *Scratched* figure, near the Maze.
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Right: Spray, brush, and incising techniques, Holy Ghost, Spirit Figure, \( \frac{3}{4} \) profile.
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- Horseshoe Variant
- San Rafael Variant
- Salt Creek Variant
- Western Variant
- Northern Variant
- Maze Variant
Style / Images

> Individual
> Cultural Group
> Temporal Parameters
> Mixed Style Images
Spirit Figure Variations (Working)
Flat shouldered, sloped shouldered, and humped shouldered (right) types are typical of the *Horseshoe* variation. Style wide.
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San Rafael variant
Concave sides, very tapered, goggle-eye common.
Salt Creek variant figures – less elongated, finger smears, horizontal and vertical straight, wavy, and snake parallel line motifs.
Salt Creek variant figures – with inverted triangle-head motif (below) and tube-head motif (above).
✓ Holy Ghost In Space
✓ Parallel Line Motif
✓ Shamanistic Images
➢ Spirit Figure Variants
➢ Mixed–Style Images

➢ = working
Holy Ghost In Space
The *Holy Ghost Group* with three young women.
The *Holy Ghost* figure. Three-quarter profile showing the front and one side of the head.
The Holy Ghost figure. Three-quarter profile showing the front and one side of the head.
Parallel Line Motif

Water Family Symbol Complex
Archaic Parallel Line Motif

Glen Canyon Linear

Barrier Canyon

Left: “Rake,” “comb” or “brush” – vertical dimensions lesser, horizontal dimensions greater.
Right: “Broom” – vertical lines greater dimensions, horizontal dimensions lesser.
Holy Ghost figure detail, parallel line motif, painted and scratched. Head represented in \( \frac{3}{4} \) view. Inset: Detail of incised vertical parallel line motif with wavy lines between them.
Holy Ghost figure detail, parallel line motif, painted and scratched. Head represented in ¾ view. Above: small eared figure with humped shoulders, Canyonlands NP.
Parallel line motif figures
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Buckhorn Wash
- Left figure with parallel lines extending from fingers, holding a wavy snake.
- Right figure with wavy and straight PLM falling from arms. PLM arc over head and shoulders.
- Figures about four feet in height.

Inset, bottom right: San Rafael Swell, PLM falling from wing-like arms.
South Temple Wash. Barrier Canyon style dog/quad with parallel line motif.
Above: Ferron Box, *Barrier Canyon* style parallel line motif positive hand prints.
Left: Canyonlands NP, finger smears.
Craig Law, Art Professor Emeritus, Utah State University, Logan, Utah
From left: Nancy Mason, Craig Law, David Sucec, Chris Dunker, Michael Firnhaber, and Gary Cox (seated).
From left: Howard Risatti, Morris Wolf, David, Jim Farmer.
From left: Nancy Mason, Craig, and David
From left: Morris, Jim, and Gary Cox, Maze District ranger.
Jim, Gary, and Morris
Craig shooting in Grand Staircase / Escalante National Monument.
Matt Law photographing Green River panel, 80 feet below rim and 45 feet above ground.
The BCS PROJECT was formed in 1991 to record what remains of Utah’s threatened world-class prehistoric Barrier Canyon style rock art. The photographic inventory, description and analysis will reside in the Special Collections Division of the Marriott Library, University of Utah.

The PROJECT is also committed to increasing the chances for its preservation by increasing the public understanding and appreciation of Utah's prehistoric art through exhibitions, presentations, and publications.

As of March, 2011, the Project has photographed 362 rock art sites with Barrier Canyon style images in Utah, Western Colorado, and Northern Arizona.
Images are/were made by individuals... not groups.

What was an image-maker’s relationship to the conventions of his/her group visual history?

...or to the imagery of the area?
Parallel Lines Motif

Holy Ghost In Space

Spirit Figure Variants

Shamanistic Images

Mixed–Style Images

Spirit Figure variations

Curved tail quadrupeds (dogs, cougars, ?)

Billboard/Public Panels

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