



“Museum of Art and Archaeology of the Coa Valley”

Permanent Exhibition <http://www.arte-coa.pt/>

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1. Exhibition Concept

The “**Museu de Arte e Arqueologia do Vale do Coa**” (**Museum of Art and Archaeology of the Coa Valley**), located in the North of Portugal, was built following the discovery of an important finding of rock engravings along the valley of the river Coa. The various groups, with outdoor engravings dating from Paleolithic (from 22 000 years BP), stretched along 17 km of the Coa Valley, and were considered the largest outdoor Paleolithic museum. After a turbulent history, the Parque Arqueológico do Vale do Côa (Archaeological Park of the Côa Valley), opened to the public in 1996, allowing guided tours to see several groups of engravings, which given its importance were declared World Cultural Heritage by UNESCO in 1997/1998. In 2010, the World Heritage Committee approved the extension of the Côa Valley rock art site to Spain’s Siega Verde on UNESCO’s world heritage list, due to the fact that it is a few kilometers away from the Portuguese border of Vilar Formoso.

The first drawings of the Côa Valley (between 22-20,000 years BC), consist of zoomorphic imagery of nature. Between 20-18,000 BC (Solutense period) a secondary group of animal drawings included examples of muzzled horses. Later, during 16-10,000 years B.C. (Magdalenense period) the rock art consisted essentially in anthropomorphic and zoomorphic designs that included horses, aurochs and deer. Anthropomorphic designs also appeared in the Chalcolithic and Bronze Age, and between the 5th and 1st centuries (BC) organized groups were responsible for anthropomorphic and zoomorphic designs, that included weapons and symbols.

Given the specificity of the findings, which adds to the difficulty in accessing the pictures, it became necessary to build a museum that would allow visitors to understand the findings and their context. On the other hand, given the difficulty of access to the pictures, the Museum enabled the visualization of these in a more accessible way.

As the context of the engravings is inseparable from the landscape, there is a strong link between the theme and the place where they were made. So, the concept behind this museum aims to establish a link between the landscape and the building. Through a contemporary architecture and design, the oldest examples of outdoor art in Europe and the evolution of rock art, representative of societies who lived in that space, are shown to the public .

As the museum integrates a protected area, the archaeological park, the Coa Museum is in constant transformation, following the archaeological and scientific research developed in the Coa Valley, working as a center for rock art research.

2. Reception

Opened in 2010 and until the end of 2012 it had exceeded the 132 000 visitors.

3. Exhibition design

The building of the museum was made in a place where it is possible to observe much of the Coa Valley, allowing a better understanding of the landscape. Inserted in the landscape, the whole building has a coating of schist, which supports the engravings and extends over four floors comprising a hall, an educational service, an administrative area, a shop and exhibition rooms. The entry into the corridor also refers to the narrow river valley, with high walls, some of which feature zoomorphic engravings, referring to the reality of the symbolic places. In the inside, large rooms allow the visitor to admire some replicas of the engravings found, in the original support of schist or in a digital format.

Some of the artifacts, found in archaeological excavations are also visible.



4. Visitors Approach – Activation/Participation

The explanation of this complex of engraving art is made in the museum by specialized technicians that work for several years in this project. This type of approach is important given the complexity of the issue and the interpretation of the engravings, allowing establishing a closer contact with the visitor, stimulating their own interpretation of the engravings and their symbolic meaning. This first approach allows a better understanding and visualization of the engravings in their original location.

5. Conclusion: “Museum of Art and Archaeology of the Coa Valley”, Permanent Exhibition in respect to COP 1 and COP2

Toolkit 1 – Making Europe visible. The **Museum of Art and Archaeology of the Coa Valley** allows a viewing and an interpretation of the Upper Paleolithic rock-art of the Côa valley, an example of the sudden flowering of creative genius of human cultural development. The engravings throw light on the social, economic and spiritual perspectives of our ancestors, adding new data to the knowledge acquired through other examples like Lascaux or Altamira.

Toolkit 2 – The Museum as a „social arena“. The work in this museum allows new approaches and new knowledge about our ancestors. In another aspect, this museum has allowed the cultural, economic and social development of a rural population affected by desertification.

Toolkit 3 – Bridging-the-gap. The use of new technologies and attractive design allows an easier perception of rock art, complemented later with a visit to the engravings in their original locations.

Toolkit 4 – Synaesthetic translation and transformation of contents. The study of rock art, allows multiple perspectives and interpretations of the symbolic ideas of our ancestors, so the subject of this museum allows reflecting on the journey of humanity.

Toolkit 5 – Social web and interaction with new media. Information about the exhibition, can be found at:

<http://www.arte-coa.pt/>

<http://www.cm-fozcoa.pt/index.php/turismo/museu-do-coa> <https://pt-pt.facebook.com/museudocoa>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iN4Q9Gq2SAg> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uO6xq3CEvgk>





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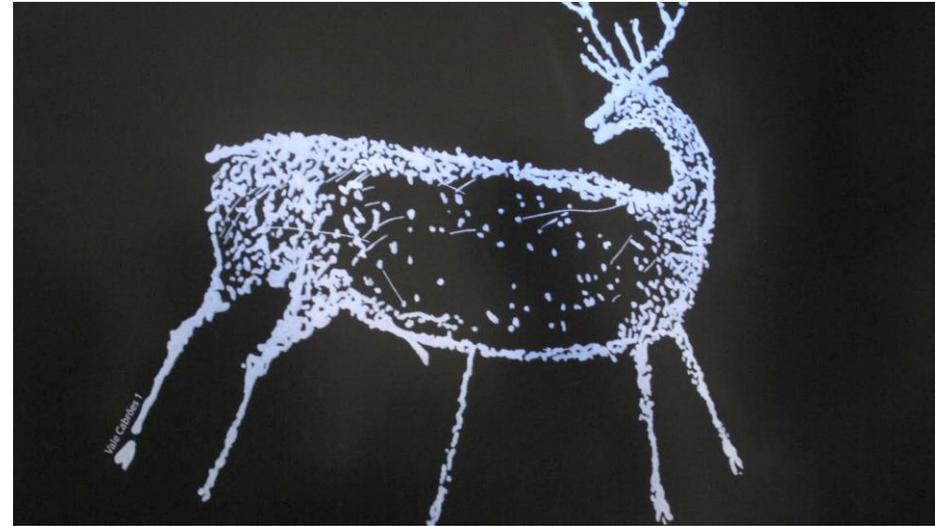
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