

ROCK ART

The materials used to make these paintings were generally different kinds of minerals. Red is the most commonly used colour and was made from ferric oxide(**YSTER OKSIED**) and ochre of various shades.(**ROOI EN GEEL**) Black pigment was prepared from charcoal and specularite(**HOUTSKOOL EN SPECULARIET**) White, the most ephemeral colour, was made from silica, china clay and gypsum.(**KLEI**) Other media used by the San used include plant sap, egg white and perhaps water. Sometimes antelope blood, which for the San held complex significance of the 'other world', was used. The paint was applied with brushes made from reeds, feathers, quills, hair or directly with the fingers. Finger dots and handprints are found extensively in the Western Cape, eastern Free State and the Eastern Cape.

Southern African rock art is essentially religious. San religion, like many others, used ritual practices to generate supernatural powers. Trance states were used as a source and demonstration of power. The paintings and engravings recorded the experiences of shamans or medicine men and women in an altered state of consciousness. The San believed they could activate supernatural potency through autosuggestion. They 'became' animals in order to enhance their power as healers, rainmakers or to control game during a hunt.

During the first stage of the trance the shaman saw patterns of light (entoptics) like grids, wavy lines, dots, vortices and zigzags. During the second stage, animals or objects of significance were seen; the eland being particularly important to the San. During the third stage of the trance all the images from the previous stages are merged. All of these experiences are depicted in San art and images of people with animal heads and hooves (therianthropes) were frequently recorded.

The site where the artwork is done is also significant. Generally, rock paintings and engravings are found in places that are easily accessible. This suggests that the images were intended to be viewed and that no taboos limited access to the sites. It is believed that certain sites were auspicious for rainmaking rituals while others may have been used for initiation ceremonies or were places where important events took place. The great variety of images in some places suggests that they may have been important for different reasons at different times in the past.