

“The Art of Representation of...Sexual Intercourse”

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Abstract

Even though “realistic” 3-dimensional representations of sexual intercourse are the most evocative types of erotic messages, some oriental block prints and miniatures succeeded in overcoming their 2-dimensional limitation using vivid colours. In contrast, dull monochrome 2-D representations have to go beyond sheer realism. To achieve this difficult task, the focus is set on the “typical contour” of the partners, highlighting their sexual attributes.

The representation of a scene displaying sexual intercourse is strongly bound to the choice of medium and to the availability of appropriate technological tools. As erotic messages have a strong sensual component, three-dimensional techniques are most appropriate and are still used.

Stereoscopic pictures of sexual nature appeared as early as 1850’s. 3-D sex colour-movies on giant theatre screens had to wait until the 1980’s, whereas currently VR is on the rise.

In contrast, ca. 3’000 years ago, erotic clay modelling almost reached the mass-production level. Antonio Núñez Jiménez, the former President of the Academy of Sciences of Cuba, collected ^[1] such expressive clay figurines of the Tlatilco culture from central Mexico. These *terra cotta* figurines (see Fig. 1) express the celebration of the sexual act as a key part of human nature.



Fig.1: Tlatilco clay figurines : Sexual partners (Fundación A. Nuñez Jiménez; Photo: L. Dubal/ 2004)

Along with the progress in building' methods, carved statues started to be incorporated into the outside walls of temples. In groups of lovemaking partners, lascivious statues, about one thousand years old, found in Khajuraho, M.D., India, (see Fig. 2), are equivalent to their terra-cotta precursors, in terms of expressing their erotic power.



Fig. 2: Limestone statues: Lovemaking groups (Khajuraho, India; *Photo: L. Dubal/ 2011*)

However, representations in 2D are in many ways more difficult from an expressive point of view, and the question of how to avoid reducing a *vivid* 3D sexual act to a *dull*, monochrome 2D representation has been an arduous challenge for Rock Artists. A solution has been the production of “*openly non-realistic*” representations with focus on the sexual attributes of the partners, i.e. the exhibition of their “*typical contour*”, a term coined by Jan Deregowski^[2]. The depiction of the sexual attributes now becomes the relevant matter, not the visibility of those attributes in reality.

The images of the sexual partners at Brady Creek^[3] (Qld.) are an interesting example. The engraving on a large bed rock next to the river (see Fig. 3-left), has a "twin" on the roof of a shelter high above the creek. This twin is of an order of magnitude larger, and is painted (see Fig. 3-right). In order to exhibit the sexual attributes of those partners, the couple has been *opened-up along a transverse axis*, preserving the close proximity of the genital parts.

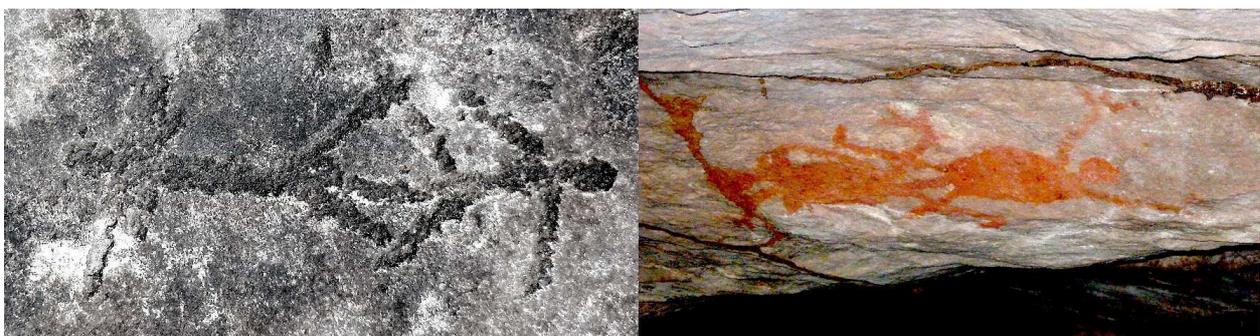


Fig. 3: Aboriginal Rock Art: Sexual partners (Brady Ck, Australia. *Photo: L. Dubal/ 2012*)

Such an opening-up approach has been found elsewhere. Fig. 4 belongs to Roger Boulay's portfolio^[4] from his "unrolled" life drawings of original erotic Kanak pictures, and are reproduced here with his kind permission. The originals were engraved on 25, resp. 40 mm diameter bamboo sticks, a particularly fragile medium. Those two nearly 150 years old sticks are conserved in Museums in Toulouse and Geneva^[5].

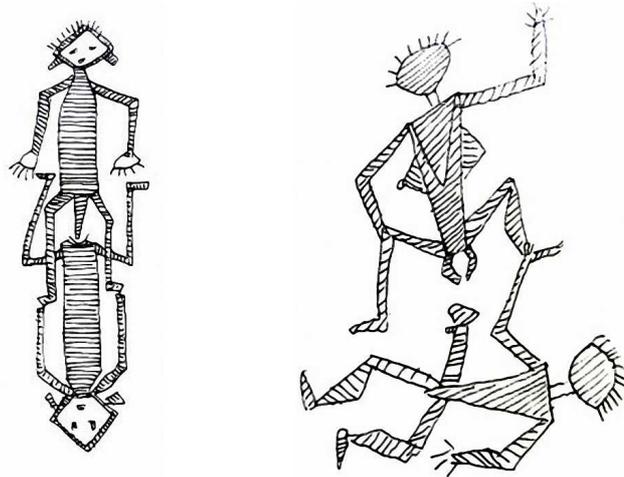


Fig. 4: Kanak bamboo engraving : Sexual partners (Coll. Savès/ Chambon / Drawing: R. Boulay)

Thanks to the fine grain of this medium, the details provided of the sexual attributes of the lovers are far richer than the ones of Fig. 3. Among the 230 known engraved bamboos, one tenth carries sexual images.

Another technique used to preserve the proximity of the sexual partners' genitals is the *side view*. The *face to face* position of "the lovers with their bent-up arms of Toca do Pau" painted on a rock wall at Serra da Capivara^[6], Piauí, Brazil (see Fig. 5), departs from the usual *from behind* position.



Fig. 5: Palaeoamerican Rock Art: Sexual partners (Toca do Pau d'Arco, Brazil; Photo Dubal/ 2009)

Interestingly, those innovative, palaeoamerican sexual partners are not alone, and stunned visitors are watching !

Another innovative method for displaying the act is the opening-up of the couple *along a parallel axis*. In this kind of representation the relative position of the sexual partners is no longer relevant. Such scene is that of the Kanak partners engraved on a boulder at Napwé Brangra^[7], in Eastern New Caledonia (see Fig. 6-*left*). Should one speak then of a *metaphorical coitus* ?



Fig. 6-*left* : Kanak Rock Art: Sexual partners (Napwé Brangra, New Caledonia; *Photo L. Dubal/ 1999*)
-*right*: Camunian Rock Art: Sexual partners (Foppe di Nadro, Italia; *Tactigram: L. Dubal/ 1993*)

The onion-like wrapping-up of the two protagonists in Fig. 6-*left* with their genitals in a separate inset is most interesting. The merging streams from the heads of the Kanak couple strongly remind the “paddle”, toping the head of the Camunian couple, engraved on a large outcropping rock at Foppe di Nadro, Brescia, Italy (see the tactigram^[8], Fig. 6-*right*).

In Fig. 6-*left*, the scene takes place near to the junction of the Nérihouen and the Nèûnè flowing into the Nimbaye River, while in Fig. 6-*right*, near the junction of the Figna flowing into the Oglio River. There, the ithyphallic Camunian male, surrealistically, keeps close contact to his partner !

Further innovations to overcome the handicap of representing the sexual act on a two-dimensional medium are found in some Japanese block prints and other oriental miniatures, which took advantage of vivid colours to carry their erotic messages^[9].

Among all sexual images in Rock Art, one should note that the representation of sexual intercourse is casual. I suggest that this scarcity reflects the technical-artistic difficulties rather than taboos regarding the communication of the act outside of initiatory rites.

References

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- [2] Jan Deregowski: “A Man is a difficult beast to draw”. NEWS 1996, Swakopmund, see: <http://www.archaeometry.org/swa1.pdf>
- [3] Brady Creek : S 15.8056° / E 144.2384°
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- [5] http://www.ville-ge.ch/meg/musinfo_public.php?id=041749
- [6] Toca do Pau d'Arco: S 8.6039° / W 42.4310°
- [7] Napwé Brangra: S 21.1080° / E 165.2830°
- [8] L. Dubal & al.: “La tactigraphie”, VCS 1993, Temù, see: <http://www.archaeometry.org/vcs93.pdf>
- [9] Erotic block prints, see: <http://www.artmemo.fr/estampes-japonaises/shunga.htm>