Siegfried A. Fruhauf
CAVE PAINTING
A 2022 | 2K DCP | Farbe | Dolby 7.1 | 15 min

A few years ago I had the opportunity to spend two weeks in the southwest of France, in the Lot Valley. During the stay, a trip to the municipality of Cabrerets resulted. In the municipal area of the village, which has about 230 inhabitants, lies the Pech Merle stalactite cave. Impressive prehistoric cave paintings can be found in the extensive underground ramifications of the cave. However, photography is prohibited in this stalactite cave. However, I understood this prohibition not as a restriction, but as a gravitational field of present reality. I also found a stage of such gravitational fields right next to a hiking trail along the Lot River. There I discovered in a rock face an opening in the rock about the size of a man. Behind it was an insignificant little cavity where trash had been left. As a substitute for pitch merle, this place with its traces of civilization seemed to me immediately very well suitable. I was preoccupied with the idea of cinema as modernist cave painting, and I began to make references to contemporary reality.

CAVE PAINTING starts with a search for the entrance into a cave and finds it on the cinema screen. A stream of individual images races across this screen. Abstract painting, details of contrast and color, which at the beginning also briefly hint at cinematic carrier material. Through the rapid alternation of individual images, spatial perceptions can be evoked with skillful application. My approach is to generate a spatial experience purely by means of montage. These obviously real physically and not digitally generated image structures define the space at the beginning of CAVE PAINTING. This leads in two directions of a cave, which we call cinema. On the one hand, the space spreads out from the screen into the real cinema hall, and on the other hand, one penetrates into an imaginary space via the screen. The suction of the abstract flow of images becomes a wormhole between these two spaces.

This draws the viewer more and more into the interior of an imaginary cave and thus also more and more into the structure of digital image generation and alienation. There inside, the immaterial digital structure meets imprints of hands as the signature of the human trace. They are negatives of my own hands, which finally overlap with the image of a prehistoric handprint. A handshake. The prehistoric handprint comes from an imprint on a merchandising item, an ordinary plastic cup. In a souvenir store at Pech Merle, I was able to purchase for one euro this wonderfully archaic paradoxical object with a replica of the charcoal drawing of the spotted horses from the so-called Hall of the Broken Column, as an area of the cave system is called. As a found object, this civilization object made of polypropylene fits perfectly into the setting I used for this film: the small filthy rock alcove next to the hiking trail. This cup was filmed with a 16 mm camera and the motif was layered several times. This results in an analogy to the creation of the prehistoric images in the caves, in which over thousands of years the motifs were likewise superimposed and constantly expanded.

In CAVE PAINTING, the early signs of civilization overlap with traces of civilization of our time, which will last for centuries in the form of plastic and spread across the entire planet as microplastic. The recycling symbol, which flashes briefly in the film and is taken from the cup, seems almost ironic in view of this. Back to the Cave. The shimmering imagery that characterizes this film suggests the experience of flickering torches. I photographed the entrance to the Civilization Traces Cave, this hole in the rock beside the hiking trail, from a variety of perspectives, with flash and varying exposures. For the most part, I used a rechargeable flashlight as lighting, a contemporary flashlight, so to speak, to remain figuratively speaking with the reference to a prehistoric cave experience. With this light source I made drawings on the rock face after dark. The traces of the light were captured photographically by long exposure. In the prehistoric caves where rock drawings are found, scratch marks of cave bears are also found everywhere. Also, the petroglyphs themselves were partially scratched into the rock and not painted with color. These scratch marks and the carvings in the rock gave me the idea to resort to a most fundamental processing of film material, namely scratching on analog film. For this processing, I used approximately 70,000 year old claw legs from real cave bears

and also make myself scratching tools from flint (flint stone) to process a roll of 35 mm black film. Thus, in making the scratched light drawings, I tried to transfer the tactile traces of the rock wall onto the cinema screen. The return to the original film medium and an archaic production methodology corresponds directly with my flashlight drawings on the rock face. This results in a bridge to prehistoric rock drawings and the cinema as cave painting of our time.

Based on the impressions of the visit of Pech Merle and with the motives of my Civilization Traces Cave, in CAVE PAINTING I want to gain new aspects from the connection between cave and cinema in the sense of avant-garde film. A basic research that advances the medium of film, starting from historical references, and sets new points of reference. The connotation of the cave with cinema is probably as old as cinema itself. From a condensation of light images and light drawings, I have tried to weave a haunting web and generate a piece of intense cinema. (Siegfried A. Fruhauf)