Secrets Of The Ice Age: The World Of The Cave Artists

Evan Hadingham

Secrets of The Ice Age: The World of the Cave Artists. By Evan Hadingham. 342 pages. Walker & Company. 314.95. On a winter’s day some 35,000 years ago an artist lay on his, or her, back on a stone outcropping in a cave and painted a bison on the ceiling. It was no crude caricature, but strikingly sophisticated art in reds, browns and black. Paleolithic (Old Stone Age) artistry included sculpture and carving as well as painting. The work spanned many thousands of years, a time longer than all of recorded human history. The origins and purposes are a mystery. Some of the paintings were discovered more than a century ago and at first denounced as frauds. They have been studied sporadically ever since with varying degrees of sophistication. The patterns in the ice age markings offer tantalizing clues to the development of abstract human thought and graphic communication. "My work allows me to visit places that most people will never have the chance to see," she writes, "to spend time communing in the dark with the silent images that bear witness to our ancestors’ dawning awareness of their own humanity." Long before this country was called Spain, people lived in this land. They survived the challenges of an ice age world in the relative stability of this region. With its protected river valleys and abundant marine resources, this landscape provided ancient humans with a suitable environment in which to live and thrive.