

La Grotte Cosquer

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La Grotte Cosquer

Not too long ago Henri Cosquer was swimming, 110 ft. below sea level, through a long, narrow, and treacherous entry passage, the warm Mediterranean waters closing in all around him. The darkness was so thick he could almost feel it. Finally, after what seemed an eternity, Henri pulled himself out of the murky waters and onto the rough, dry floor of what seemed to be a large cave. After his eyes focused and his breathing had settled back to its normal [rhythm](#), Cosquer beheld a sight not seen by human eyes in over 12,000 years: an unmolested, unspoiled cavern last occupied by the mysterious Cro-Magnons who painted the spectacular designs on the soft stone walls of what would later be known as La Grotte Cosquer.

Cosquer cave was first discovered in 1985. Professional deep-sea diver Henri Cosquer discovered the 175-[meter](#) tunnel below Cabo Morgiou near Marseilles, France ("The Cosquer Cave"). It was not until 1991, when Cosquer returned to the grotto, that he noticed a single hand print silhouette that led to the discovery of several dozen prehistoric paintings and engravings ("Grotto Cosquer").

As soon as the cave was reported to authorities at the [French](#) Ministry of Culture, Jean Clottes and Jean Courtin were sent to oversee the research of this incredible find. Jean Clottes currently serves as General Conservator of the National Heritage and Advisor on Prehistoric Art to the French Ministry of Culture and the French Community. Jean Courtin was previously in charge of antiquities in the Provence region of France and Co-Director of Research for the National Center for Scientific Research (“The Cave Beneath the Sea”).

Under Clottes and Courtin many facts about the origin of these paintings have been uncovered. Apparently the creators of these prehistoric works of art used a pallet of colors consisting of hematite or ochre for the red mineral pigment, and manganese dioxide for the charcoal black pigment. Only about one third of the total artwork in Cosquer is done using paint; the others are engravings done in the cave’s soft limestone walls (“Grotto Cosquer”).

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