# Neanderthals created symbolic art, challenging human uniqueness



Recent research from Spain has spun a compelling narrative, proposing that Neanderthals might have created art akin to that of modern humans. Discoveries made at the San Lazaro rock shelter in central Spain have revealed a pebble dating back approximately 42,000 to 43,000 years, which appears deliberately marked with a red dot intended to represent a human face. This assertion challenges long-standing beliefs that the capacity for artistic expression was exclusive to Homo sapiens.

According to David Alvarez-Alonso, the lead author of the study published in the *Archaeological and Anthropological Sciences* journal, the significance of the find cannot be overstated. "From the outset, we could tell it was peculiar," he remarked in an interview. The pebble, deemed to have been purposefully brought into the living space of early humans, bears a red dot that forensic analyses confirmed to be a Neanderthal fingerprint, making it one of the most complete of its kind identified. This adds another layer of intrigue, as it positions this artifact as potentially one of the earliest examples of symbolic thought and artistic expression in the prehistoric record.

Neanderthals, often depicted as brutish and intellectually inferior, were in fact contemporaries of modern humans, inhabiting Europe, Asia, and the Middle East until their extinction around 40,000 years ago. Emerging evidence highlights that Neanderthals were capable of complex thought and creativity. Supporting this notion, previous research conducted by the University of Southampton and the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology indicates that Neanderthals created the world's oldest known cave paintings over 64,000 years ago—20,000 years before modern humans arrived in Europe. This discovery suggests a significant level of symbolic expression, including geometric patterns and images of animals, further validating the suggestion that Neanderthals had similar artistic sensibilities.

Additional findings have illuminated various artistic practices attributed to Neanderthals. Research has shown their use of red ochre pigments, likely for body decoration or symbolic purposes, as well as making personal adornments such as necklaces crafted from eagle talons. Such behaviours not only implicate Neanderthals in artistic expression but also indicate a cultural dimension previously underestimated.

Recent insights from La Roche-Cotard cave in France have reinforced these revelations. Engravings discovered there, meticulously documented using advanced imaging techniques, underline Neanderthals' intentional creativity, indicating cognitive capabilities comparable to modern humans. The breadth of evidence emerging about Neanderthal artistry intricately blurs the line previously drawn between our species and theirs, challenging preconceived notions of what it meant to be "modern" in the context of ancient creativity and cultural expression.

This convergence of archaeological discoveries reshapes our understanding of human history, suggesting that the roots of artistic expression run deeper than previously thought. As these findings continue to surface, they pave the way for a reassessment of Neanderthals, no longer viewed solely as primitive beings but rather as individuals capable of the same complex thoughts and emotions that are central to humanity today.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.coastfm.co.uk/news/technology/neanderthals-may-have-made-art-just-like)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.coastfm.co.uk/news/technology/neanderthals-may-have-made-art-just-like), [[2]](https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/02/180222144943.htm), [[5]](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/science/a-look-at-the-new-discoveries-that-make-neanderthals-more-knowable-now-than-ever)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-43115488), [[4]](https://www.southampton.ac.uk/news/2018/02/neanderthals-art.page), [[6]](https://news.cnrs.fr/articles/neanderthals-were-artists-too)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.coastfm.co.uk/news/technology/neanderthals-may-have-made-art-just-like> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/02/180222144943.htm> - A study led by the University of Southampton and the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology provides evidence that Neanderthals created the world's oldest known cave paintings. The research indicates that these paintings, including images of animals, dots, and geometric signs, were made more than 64,000 years ago, 20,000 years before modern humans arrived in Europe. This discovery suggests that Neanderthals had a symbolic and artistic sense similar to modern humans.
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-43115488> - Research published in the journal Science suggests that Neanderthals were capable of creating art. The study indicates that cave paintings in Spain, including stencilled handprints and geometric patterns, were made by Neanderthals over 65,000 years ago, predating the arrival of modern humans in Europe by 20,000 years. This challenges the traditional view that art was exclusive to Homo sapiens and suggests that Neanderthals had symbolic thinking abilities.
4. <https://www.southampton.ac.uk/news/2018/02/neanderthals-art.page> - Scientists from the University of Southampton and the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology have found evidence that Neanderthals created cave paintings in Spain over 64,000 years ago. The study used uranium-thorium dating to determine the age of the paintings, which include images of animals, dots, and geometric signs. This discovery indicates that Neanderthals had a symbolic and artistic sense similar to modern humans.
5. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/science/a-look-at-the-new-discoveries-that-make-neanderthals-more-knowable-now-than-ever> - Recent discoveries have revealed that Neanderthals engaged in artistic and symbolic behaviours. Evidence includes the use of red ochre pigments, perforated and painted shells likely used as jewellery, and the creation of personal adornments such as necklaces made from eagle talons. These findings suggest that Neanderthals had cognitive and cultural practices similar to modern humans, challenging previous assumptions about their capabilities.
6. <https://news.cnrs.fr/articles/neanderthals-were-artists-too> - Research in the La Roche-Cotard cave in France has identified engravings made by Neanderthals, indicating that they were capable of creating art. The study used various techniques, including high-resolution photogrammetry and reflectance transformation imaging, to document the engravings. The findings suggest that Neanderthals engaged in intentional and creative processes, challenging previous perceptions of their cognitive abilities.
7. <https://www.newsweek.com/what-makes-us-human-discovery-neanderthal-art-rewriting-what-we-know-about-821185> - A study published in the journal Science demonstrates that Neanderthals created cave art in Spain over 64,000 years ago, predating the arrival of modern humans in Europe by 20,000 years. The research indicates that Neanderthals produced red lines, dots, and hand stencils in caves across Spain, suggesting they had symbolic and artistic capabilities similar to modern humans.