ABSTRACT

TITLE:	Functionalism and Rock Art in Africa, Australia, and the American Southwest
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PRESENTED AT:	6th Annual Natural & Behavioral Sciences Undergraduate Research Symposium Program, Fort Lewis College, 2011

ABSTRACT: Valued for its context, rock art is an important tool for gaining knowledge about the past. It provides a glance into the values and beliefs of previous cultures in the form of imagery. As a reliable form of communication, rock art functions as a method of transferring social values through religious and mythical imagery, representational style, and the location in which rock art appears. Current rock art research focuses on the stylistic trends and meaning of the images themselves. However, applying a functional analysis rock art can provide a deeper understanding of how values and beliefs were passed on through the generations. From a functionalist perspective, rock art may be considered a social institution which mediates and maintains social structure. In times of conflict, rock art images are publically available to guide the community. In the three areas of the world, individual functional analysis was slightly different. In Africa, the representational images appear regionally and are easily recognizable by the general public. These images often depict religious and mythical imagery which can explain everyday misfortune. In Australia, animal images found in the rock art were found to be associated with clans and totemic religions, used as a method to show clan ownership. In the Southwest, various stylistic characteristics were found to communicate messages differently. Worldwide there are certain similarities among the way rock art images function, yet the individual messages presented differ. Although rock art analysis remains controversial, the fundamental ability to communicate ideas and values makes rock art crucial to our understanding of the past.