ANTH 2103 - Lab #13

Rock Art

One of the most common kinds of prehistoric art found by archaeologists is rock art. Pictographs are paintings on rock walls or inside caves. Petroglyphs are carved into the rock itself. Most pictographs that are found are in caves or other sheltered areas, for what should be obvious reasons of preservation. Petroglyphs last much longer in exposed areas and are thus found much more commonly on rock outcrops and cliff faces, as well as in caves and rockshelters.

Today's lab is designed to expose you to the thought processes and social reasons that might be involved in the creation of rock art and to the difficulties involved in interpreting ancient art.

While art can of course be created for its own sake, it can also have a variety of functions, such as the transfer of information, the promotion of group (or sub-group) cohesion, or even attempts to influence nature.

Each group will be given a scenario describing the circumstances and reasons for their art-production, as well as markers and posterboard with which to produce its art. DO NOT reveal your group's scenario or any aspect of it to another group! Groups will be separated (with most leaving the lab) so that each group can discuss their art project freely.

The drawing(s) you produce may NOT include writing. You may use commonly known modern symbols if you so desire, but you are encouraged to be creative.

Once all groups have completed their artwork, we will return to the lab and the other groups will attempt to interpret each group's drawing.

Write-up
For your write-up (as usual, around two pages in length):

1. Describe the symbols and arrangement in the drawing(s) produced by your group, and discuss the process by which your group arrived at those symbols.

2. Discuss what was easy and what was difficult about interpreting the other groups' artwork. How would this have been different if you did not have a shared cultural context with the other groups?