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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

The “Sistine Chapel of Prehistory” at HMNS
Scenes from the Stone Age: The Cave Paintings of Lascaux opening Oct. 18



HOUSTON ó On September 12, 1940 in Dordogne, France, in the commune of Montignac, four boysó Marcel Ravidat, Jacques Marsal, Simon Coencas and Georges Agniel, and their dog stumbled upon a long forgotten caveó a jewel of prehistoric art and a major archaeological revelation. The cave was named Lascaux.

Now a World Heritage site, Lascaux has been dubbed the “Sistine Chapel of Prehistory.” With their evocative imagery,

the cave paintings quickly gained recognition as the world’s premier example of prehistoric art. Lascaux (pronounced Lass-KOH) attracted over one million visitors between 1948 and 1963, when the French government closed the cave to the public in order to preserve the ancient masterpieces.

Now visitors to the Houston Museum of Natural Science can experience the same thrill of discovery felt by those young cave explorers more than 70 years ago. On Oct. 18, 2013 through March 23, 2014, explore ***Scenes from the Stone Age: The Cave Paintings of Lascaux***, a special exhibition featuring full-size replicas of the paintings, including some shown for the first time to the public. They are the most technically accurate reproductions of the cave paintings ever done.

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Visitors walk through a cave-like gallery and discover paintings such as the *Great Cow Panel*, *Swimming Stags Frieze*, *Crossed Bison Panel*, and *Shaft Scene*, which have never before been reproduced.

The show also features an amazingly life-like stone-age family, created by world-renowned sculptor [Elisabeth Daynès](#). The family ó an old man, an adolescent, a woman, and a child ó are dressed in clothing and ornaments made of materials available 200 centuries ago. These people were far from the òcave menö of popular imagery. They were sophisticated hunters and gatherers who lived in a structured society with a culture much more refined than most of us imagine.

Scenes from the Stone Age also offers an unforgettable virtual tour of the entire Lascaux cave, thanks to cutting-edge laser mapping and the most advanced 3D modeling technology. Multimedia presentations and interactive stations reveal the paintings' complexities and provide insight into the talent required to create them. For instance, visitors can examine the *Great Black Cow* panel as a projection on the wall constructs and deconstructs the painting, uncovering engravings, hidden animals, and symbols. Guests discover how the Lascaux artists took advantage of the cave's natural relief to create perspective and movement.

Despite 70 years of research and analysis, the exact meaning and purpose of the Lascaux cave paintings remain a mystery. Some who have studied the paintings believe they reflect visions seen by the artists when they were in a trance-like state. Others theorize the artwork is an account of past hunting successes or part of a ritual to improve future hunting. (Interestingly however, the cave walls contain no images of reindeer ó a primary source of meat for Paleolithic man. There are also no paintings of plants or landscapes.)

The artwork is not haphazard but is complex, with a confidence of line, an emotive use of color, and a manipulation of form to express movement. Whatever the purpose of the paintings, they possess an undeniable beauty and power.

Scenes from the Stone Age invites us to contemplate these early masterpieces in their full splendor, and reflect on the creativity and humanity of our early ancestors. For tickets, or more information, visit www.hmns.org or call (713) 639-4629.

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Scenes from the Stone Age: The Cave Paintings of Lascaux was created by The General Council of Dordogne, with support provided by the Regional Council of Aquitaine, the French Ministry of Culture and Communication, and the European Union. The worldwide tour is organized by the SPL Lascaux, international exhibition. Official sponsors are Delpeyrat and Maïsadour.

The Houston Museum of Natural Science—one of the nation's most heavily attended museums—is a centerpiece of the Houston Museum District. With four floors of permanent exhibit halls, and the Wortham Giant Screen Theatre, Cockrell Butterfly Center, Burke Baker Planetarium and George Observatory and as host to world-class and ever-changing touring exhibitions, the Museum has something to delight every age group. With such diverse and extraordinary offerings, a trip to the Houston Museum of Natural Science, located at 5555 Hermann Park Drive in the heart of the Museum District, is always an adventure.

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