CAVES & GROTTOES
**Introduction**

Since early humans first sheltered in caves at the dawn of civilization, their walls have provided not only protection from the elements, but also sites for creativity, contemplation and reflection. Long since abandoned as dwellings, caves continue to inspire awe and fear, their entrances conjuring primeval feelings of dread and fascination, their depths still seeming to speak to us profoundly, our histories inextricably linked.

Caves & Grottoes gathers together artifacts and artworks from prehistory to the present day, showing how caves have long been – and continue to be – a source of artistic inspiration. Caves represent a liminal space, one that links us intimately to our distant past. Their gaping mouths threaten to swallow us up – to return us to the dark recesses of the earth at the same time as they offer shelter.

Caves embody the paradox at the heart of man’s relationship with nature: that which seems to offer succor or protection all too often endangers; for centuries we have sought to recreate caves on our own terms in the form of grottoes. Frequently ornate and bizarre, these constructions encapsulate the human urge to dominate and control our natural environment. Grottoes speak not only to this impulse to control but also to humankind’s urge to create, in turn highlighting that art will always imitate nature but it will never replace it.

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This long-extinct creature stands – weight on its hind-legs – in a position of attack. His front legs swipe forwards as he opens his wide jaw to reveal his massive canines. At a fully erect height in excess of eight feet this is one of the largest examples in existence.

As the name suggests, Cave Bears spent much of their life in the caves of early Europe, mainly in what is now Romania. They differ markedly from our current-day Brown Bears, which only enter caves to hibernate. Cave Bears were considerably larger and heavier too, weighing up to 600 kg. While some specimens found in the eighteenth century were thought to be unicorns or dragons, they were certainly terrifying to early humans and are believed to have been worshipped by Neanderthal man. What is speculated to be the earliest known musical instrument, a ‘bone flute’, was actually made from a cave bear bone by Neanderthal man, 55,000 years ago.

Genuine Cave Bear skeletons such as this can be found in major national institutions such as the American Museum of Natural History, New York.
Cristofano Allori was born in Florence in 1577 and received his first lessons in painting from his father, Alessandro. Soon becoming dissatisfied with the hard anatomical drawing and cold colouring, however, he entered the studio of Gregorio Pagani, one of the leaders of the late Florentine school, which sought to unite the rich colouring of the Venetians with the Florentine attention to drawing. Allori's works are distinguished by their close adherence to nature and the delicacy and technical perfection of their execution.

This work was one of Allori's most successful and is known in a number of autograph versions, the most famous being in the Galleria Borghese in Rome. Depicted in the cave in the walls outside Assisi to which he retreated, it seems probable that Allori employed a friar to pose as Saint Francis. The soft intelligence of his hands and face are held in stark contrast to the harsh surrounding environment and cassock which symbolize the vow of poverty that Saint Francis took in 1205.

Works by Allori are to be found in private and museum collections worldwide, including the Art Institute of Chicago; the Louvre, Paris; the Prado, Madrid; the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; and the Dulwich Picture gallery, London.

Full cataloguing information for this work is available on request.

*Saint Francis at Prayer*, Mid-17th century
Oil on copper
40 x 31 cm
This group of drawings were made by a British military artist during the Peninsular War (part of the Napoleonic wars between France, Spain and Britain), and were likely done around the time of the Battle of Montserrat (29 July 1811). These strange, dreamlike landscapes feature the cavernous Montserrat Mountain Range outside Barcelona. Composed of vivid pink granite, the mountains have held religious significance since pre-Christian times when the Romans built a temple of Venus there. Since the 10th century they have been home to the abbey of Santa Maria de Montserrat which, according to Arthurian legend, is the home of the Holy Grail. The basilica contains a statue of the Virgin of Montserrat, one of the black Madonnas of Europe, more commonly known as la Moreneta – meaning ‘the little dark one’. Believed by some to have been carved in Jerusalem in the early days of the Church, it is more likely a wood Romanesque sculpture from the late 12th century.

These are two examples from a set of five drawings. Please contact the gallery for further information.
This ancient Chinese limestone sculpture depicts the head of a laughing lohan. (In Buddhist teachings a lohan, or arhat, is one who has escaped from the endless cycle of death and rebirth but has chosen to remain in this world to spread the Buddha’s message.) Dating from China’s Song Dynasty (c. 960–1279 AD), the lohan is shown smiling with his teeth showing, the prominent creases in the corners of the mouth and eyes suggestive of laughter. The back of the head is roughly worked, indicating that this sculpture was placed in a niche in ancient times.

China’s adoption of Buddhism has resulted in some of the most spectacular sculpture in the world. This exquisite sculpture would have adorned one of the great Buddhist cave temples, hewn from the mountains of northern and central China.

*Anonymous*

*Head of a Laughing Lohan*
Carved Limestone
38 cm (including mount)
This rare glazed terracotta panel – intended for the purposes of private devotion – depicts Saint Jerome during his period of penance as a hermit in the Syrian desert. He is shown having relinquished his cardinal’s hat, which lies on the ground by his side, next to a skull, an allusion to the vanity of secular power. He is accompanied by the faithful lion he famously tamed and appears gazing at the crucifix in front of him. The narrative is set at the feet of a rocky ravine and distinctively outlined trees frame the scene to the sides, whilst a turreted fortification (possibly Bethlehem) extends the picture plane in the background.

This work echoes the prototype of a marble relief attributed to Antonio Rossellino, purchased in 2001 by the Metropolitan Museum in New York. Akin to the work of Andrea della Robbia – the foremost terracotta master of the renaissance – Buglioni strived for greater clarity and formal simplicity, and was appreciated in his lifetime by great collectors such as Cardinal Giovanni de Medici, son of Lorenzo the Magnificent and the future Pope Leo X who, around 1495, commissioned from the artist numerous decorations for the sanctuary of Santa Cristina in Bolsena.

Full cataloguing information for this work, as well as an essay by Professor Giancarlo Gentilini, is available on request.
This grotto-cum-fountain – half open-air, half underground – was based on the designs of the architect Louis Combez and built on the site of a former stone quarry, now the site of the Palais de Chaillot, Paris. Built for the Exposition Universelle of 1878, the fountain has a grandiose feel to it and, much like Bernini’s *Fontana dei Quattro Fuimi* in Rome, it conveys a sense of man mastering the mighty riverine forces of nature.

The *Exposition Universelle*, which aimed to boost national morale after France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870–71, as well as a newly forged French allegiance with the United States, was a world’s fair on an unprecedented scale, with the grounds covering sixty-six acres and hosting over thirteen million people throughout its duration. Amongst the many notable exhibits were Alexander Graham Bell’s newly invented telephone and the completed head and shoulders of the Statue of Liberty, prior to its transportation to New York.
Gregorio and his older brother, Francesco, descended from a family of artists and began their training in Rome with a specialty in landscapes and views. While Francesco mainly devoted himself to ports and seascapes, Gregorio’s repertoire was much more varied and displayed a less stereotyped and more sensitive interpretation of his environment.

His great skills as a painter could have been seen in the decoration of the two ground floor rooms in the Palazzo Borghese, which he executed for Prince Ippolito along with Francesco De Capo in 1783. Aside from working with the Borghese, Gregorio was, at one time, Court Painter to King Stanislaw August Poniatowski of Poland (although he never visited the country).

Virgil, the great poet of ancient Rome and author of the _Aeneid_ was still widely read in the late 18th century, and his tomb can still be seen in Naples today. Fidanza’s great skill can be seen in the loose but confident rendering of the two shepherds in the foreground of _Virgil’s Tomb_ as well as in his dynamic compositional approach, such as his use of a diagonally recessive perspective in the idealized landscape. These two works demonstrate clear pictorial and stylistic similarities with the series of paintings in the Great Room of the Palazzo Borghese, including a sensitive luminosity that is perfectly balanced chiaroscuro.
Henry Flitcroft’s design for a grotto, known as the ‘Rocky Arch,’ was built for Henry Hoare II (1705–1785), who inherited the estate of Stourhead from his father. Positioned at the head of the lake in front of the Temple of Flora at Stourhead, it provided a setting for a statue of a river god as depicted in the drawing, and functioned as a conduit through which the spring, known as Paradise Well, could flow into the lake. (The river god statue is based on the two ancient Roman figures of ‘Tiber’ and ‘Nile’ in the Vatican.)

This drawing is one of two principal surviving records (the other being the Bampfylde view) of the Rocky Arch, which was partly dismantled after the damming of the lake in the 1750s left it largely submerged. It has since then fallen into ruin and the statue lost. This is the only known design by Flitcroft for any of the five buildings he erected at Stourhead.
Of all the artists who have emerged over the past twenty years from the now-legendary California Conceptualist movement, Mike Kelley has had the most profound impact on American art – with his scatological performance pieces, prolific writing, and large-scale installations featuring the abject souvenirs of middle-class adolescence. High and low cultures are combined to create a kind of détente between the academic and the everyday. In this world old toys and groups of drawings executed in the style of mid-1950s comic books are marshalled together to examine the most intricate metaphysical problems.

This large drawing is from a group of ten works that explore a perennial artistic conundrum: truth versus illusion. Having rendered the interior of a cave in a style that recalls comic illustration and film, Kelley asks the viewer to enter into his illusion: in their original installation, these drawings, which drip with curiously scatological stalactites and stalagmites, were often installed close to the floor, occasionally above and partially blocking entrances. Viewers were forced to crouch down and slide beneath it, strengthening the work’s comparison of art viewing to cave exploration.

Far Down Underground, to Mushroom Planet, an Erie Glow, Everyone Had Soft Hypocephalus Heart, 1981
Ink and enamel on paper in three parts
92.5 x 52 cm
John Piper’s research into architecture extended into an interest in the rocky landscapes of Snowdonia and quarries on the Isle of Portland, and the surfaces of walls throughout Britain. He became acutely sensitive to the colour of stone and to their geological past, much as Turner, Ruskin and Constable had done before him, appreciating that they were imbued with a rich history. He twice visited the Yorkshire limestone caves, in 1942 and 1943, going to places painted by Turner, and also painting Gordale Scar, showing them as if livid wounds in flesh, in savage colours.

This work, which likely depicts the Saint Columba’s Cave in Knapdale, Scotland, conveys a wildness particular to the highlands which is both beautiful and forbidding.
George Stubbs has long been established as England’s most famous painter of animals. This print was based on an oil painting belonging to Earl Fitzwilliam, one of four versions of the subject by the artist another of which Stubbs exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1776. This print was published originally by Stubbs in 1780 with this edition reprinted in 1974 (an example of which was acquired by the Tate in 1975) with the title Tygers at Play, ‘tyger’ then being a generic term to describe any big cat other than a lion. This plate was advertised as the specific companion to his A Horse Affrighted by a Lion (1763).

Tygers at Play, 1780
Original engraving in black ink
59.5 x 64.7 cm
Richard Tongue lived and worked in Bath where he advertised himself as a ‘painter and modeller of megaliths’. The present work, one of the only known oil paintings by the artist, depicts a mountain in Mauritius, must have appealed to Tongue’s love of the pre-historic. While the mountain and the unusual rock that forms its summit are natural, they certainly bear comparison with the megalithic remains (such as Stonehenge) that Tongue frequently painted.

Mauritius had been taken from the French by the British during the Napoleonic wars (1799–1815). The island’s second highest mountain was named after Pieter Both, first Governor General of the Dutch East Indies. In 1832 an ascent of the mountain took place and the British flag was planted on the summit.

*A view of the Pieter Both Mountain, Mauritius, showing the planting of the British Flag on the summit, c. 1835*  
Oil on canvas  
76.5 x 58.3 cm
An ‘historical blue plaque’ to commemorate work done by the artist during his time at the Royal College of Art. An ersatz blue English Heritage plaque reads ‘Gavin Turk Sculptor worked here 1989–1991’. Seemingly the commemoration of a life, it marks the presence of the artist with the most powerful and evocative of the tools that might be at his disposal – his absence. All that is left behind of the artist is a memorial to an implied body of work and, by extension, an implied life and worth, while the title, after Plato’s famous allegory, tells of a hidden reality we can neither see nor know.

Cave has additionally become infamous as the piece of work that ‘won’ Turk a fail for his MA which he had been studying for at the Royal College of Art. Ironically, it has gone on to become regarded as one of Turk’s most iconic pieces.