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Sheltered Performances: Differences and similarities between painted sites on a southern Drakensberg ridge in the Maclear District, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa

By David Witelson

ABSTRACT

Southern African San (Bushman) rock art is one of the most well-researched rock arts globally. Some aspects of it, however, remain under-researched and under-theorised. While the study of San rock art is informed by ethnographic sources, they are frustratingly mute about the practice itself. This dissertation addresses that gap by investigating the processes that resulted in a pattern of simultaneous differences and similarities at painted sites on the MEL ridge. It acknowledges that rock painting and other forms of San expressive culture—which, in contrast to rock painting, were ethnographically observed and historically documented—are of a kind. It draws on performance studies literature, San rock art research, San ethnography, and the painted places along the MEL ridge to show that the production and consumption of San rock paintings were performative. By understanding the practice of San rock painting in terms of performance we can understand better the practice itself.