



The Origins of Art and Symbolism in the Southern Cape, South Africa

Lecture by Prof. [Christopher Stuart Henshilwood](#) (Director - SFF Centre for Early Sapiens Behaviour ([SapienCE](#)), UiB)

with Dr. [Karen L. van Niekerk](#) (Deputy Director, PI, SapienCE, UiB)



The lecture will take place on **Thursday, 17 October 2024, at 7:00 p.m.** (EEST) at the Norwegian Institute at Athens, Tsami Karatasou 5, 11742 (the lecture will also be streamed online via Zoom)

Registration is required for both in-person and virtual attendance.

To attend **in-person**, please register at norwinst@uib.no

To attend **via Zoom**, please register via the following link:

<https://uib.zoom.us/meeting/register/u5UtcOuqrz8sGdL4AlquMCbQb0mEl9-u62fA>



Abstract

The southern Cape of South Africa is home to significant archaeological sites that provide insight into the early development of art and symbolic behaviour among *Homo sapiens*. This talk will focus on findings from Blombos Cave and Klipdrift Shelter, which have contributed to our understanding of cognitive and cultural evolution during the Middle Stone Age.

Blombos Cave, located approximately 300 km east of Cape Town, has produced artefacts dating back to between 100,000 and 70,000 years ago. These include engraved ochre, bone tools, and marine shell beads, which are among the earliest known examples of symbolic behaviour and artistic expression¹. Klipdrift Shelter, another key site, has yielded further evidence of early symbolic activities, including engraved ostrich eggshells and complex stone tools².

In this presentation, I will discuss the methodologies used in excavating and analysing these artefacts and explore their implications for our understanding of early human cognition and social organisation. By examining the patterns and materials used in these ancient artworks, we gain valuable insights into the symbolic and cultural lives of our ancestors.

Join me as we explore the roots of human creativity and symbolism and consider how these early expressions of art have influenced the course of human history.

Biography

Christopher Stuart Henshilwood is a distinguished archaeologist and researcher whose work focuses on the development of complex technology, social systems, subsistence, environment, syntactic language, and material culture associated with early *Homo sapiens*. He has dedicated his career to exploring the people who evolved in southern Africa between 100,000-50,000 years ago and finding archaeological sites that were occupied by *H. sapiens* during the Later- and Middle Stone Age.

With more than 120 papers and chapters authored or co-authored, Henshilwood has made significant contributions to the fields of archaeology, linguistics, and evolutionary biology. His research covers a broad range of topics, including the origins of language and symbolism, the effects of climatic variation on human demographics, and the theory of human behavioural evolution. He has also published two books, further cementing his reputation as a leading scholar in his field.

As a Distinguished Professor at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, Henshilwood is highly respected by his peers and students alike. He is an A-rated scientist, and his expertise and knowledge have earned him membership in several prestigious academies, including the Academy of Science of South Africa, Academia Europaea, and the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters.

In addition to his work at the University of the Witwatersrand, Henshilwood is also the Professor and Director of a 10-year Centre of Excellence, the Centre for Early Sapiens Behaviour (SapienCE), at the University of Bergen in Norway. This centre is funded by the Research Council of Norway (2017-2027) and brings together over forty of the foremost scientists in diverse fields in Europe, Africa, the UK, and USA to explore early human behaviour. Through this centre, Henshilwood is leading groundbreaking research that is shedding new light on the evolution of early humans and their behaviour.