AURA Newsletter

Adding a design perspective

Jesse Townsley

Abstract. The term 'art' is problematic due to its lack of precision as well as vestiges it carries from earlier times. This article suggests replacing some of art's various meanings and sub-categories with a group of new terms. The related field of design is shown to contain vocabulary which could be useful in this regard. A system of coarse-grain classification of artefacts using the terms 'art', 'design', 'craft' and 'industry' is also suggested, using the terms in a four-way continuum rather than as completely separate categories.

Introduction

Various problems have been cited with the ways the term 'art' has been used in Palaeolithic art theory and rock art research. As Moro Abadia has written, 'since the 1980s, some English-speaking scholars have attacked the concept of "art" in "Palaeolithic art". They have argued that "art" is a Western concept that does not have universal validity, a label that has contributed to condense all the diversity of Pleistocene media into a single category and, additionally, a modern category associated with the Western idea of "aesthetic" ' (Moro Abadia 2013). Chippindale has stated, 'What we call "ancient art" may not have been art in its own cultural making. And a given ancient society's concept most closely approximating our idea of art may not have encompassed the range of things that seem to us to be the "art" of that culture' (Chippindale 2001).

A number of alternatives have been suggested, including 'images' (Renfrew and Morley 2007), 'imagery' (Conkey 2010), 'representations' (White 2003), 'pictures' (Clegg 1986) and 'markings' (Bahn and Vertut 1988). The term 'visual culture' has been used to try to remove the status historically given to 'the fine arts' of painting, drawing, engraving and sculpture and to include other forms of visual expression (Alpers 1983). The phrase 'spatial arts' has similarly been used to broaden the category of 'art' beyond the products of visual perception (Summers 2003). Along these lines, authors such as Dissanayake have made the case that art also encompasses dance, song, poetry etc., 'that is, all the arts' (Dissanayake 2013). Dobrez has suggested the term 're-presentation' to try to convey this sort of awareness (Dobrez 2013). Meanwhile, Chippindale has pointed out that, during the 20th century, the term art came to include 'anything and everything that an artist defines as art' (Chippindale 2001). Thus, ultimately, it seems that art can be just about anything at all, and what is and is not art can depend on personal preference. Even things unconnected to artists can be associated with the term; for example, a search for the phrase 'the art of' in the book section of amazon.com produces, as of the writing of this article, a list of over two million titles. Included are *The art of war*, *The art of the deal* and *Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance*.

As we can see, 'art' as a category does not make a sturdy box. It is more like a very large cloud — it does not contain things very well and it itself cannot be contained. All in all, there appears to be a rather large amount of chaos surrounding the term. One solution for this problem may be to replace, over time, some of art's various meanings and sub-categories with a group of new words. Researchers would then have more options when looking at, thinking about, classifying and describing artefacts.

Art and design

One source to search for suitable terms for reducing the confusion surrounding the term 'art' is the field of design. Art and design are linked — artists often do preliminary designs before starting a final version of a piece and designers often use art, and art principles, in their work. Art history is part of the academic training in both art and design. The differences between art and design, however, are what may be of most value to rock art researchers.

Design Council, a UK non-profit organisation that works with government, universities and private businesses, has stated that design can be viewed as 'an activity that

translates an idea into a blueprint for something useful, whether it is a car, a building, a graphic, a service or a process' (Design Council 2009). This suggests one of the ways a design perspective could be beneficial to Lithic Age art research in general. Because the design world is largely involved in creating things that are useful, the field does not have the sort of ethnocentric prejudice that the term 'art' has carried since the late nineteenth century against 'function' and against cultures having different approaches to visual/spatial arts than Western Europe (Palacio-Pérez 2013). It is very possible that many of the artefacts from Palaeolithic cultures were actually created to be functional in some way. Additionally, design is generally involved in aspects of day-to-day life, with social life often being a factor. A design project is not generally started because a certain person had something on their mind or they simply felt like doing it. Rather, a specific set of goals for how a project will affect people's lives has usually precedes work on a design project. As many Lithic Age artefacts may have served specific functions, some of them social functions, a design perspective may be more appropriate for the study of these artefacts than that of art.

Using terms from design in rock art research

To show how terms from design can be used in rock art research, let us first look at a certain aspect of Lithic Age geometric signs. First, a description by Bahn: '[Breuil] saw that some panels at Niaux covered in dots and lines were located just where the main passage divided, and felt that the marks might therefore be topographic guides. There do seem to be occasional links between "signs" and important places in a cave: at Lascaux, for example, some lines of dots are located at points of topographic transition, and similarly in other sites signs are positioned where passages turn, become narrow or branch off' (Bahn 1988). Aczel has reported similar panels in the cave of Rouffignac being referred to as 'indicative panels' (Aczel 2009). In classifying ancient petroglyphs in the US Southwest, Martineau has stated, 'After recording information upon such an out-of-the-way rock, the author would place on a conspicuous rock, symbols directing passers-by to the hidden panel. Panels giving such directions are therefore termed *locators*' (Martineau 1973).

In the world of graphic design, symbols and signs that aid navigation are often included under the heading of 'signage'. Rock art researchers have, in fact, suggested that some of the geometric signs may have functioned as caravan traffic signs or territorial delimitations (Bahn and Vertut 1988). Systems of 'signage' which give people directions in navigating are sometimes referred to in graphic design as being involved in 'wayfinding'. So, already we have a list of terms from the world of Design to suggest for use in Lithic Age art research: 'wayfinding', 'signage', 'graphic', 'design' and 'graphic design'.

'Design' and 'graphic' have had some previous use in rock art research. Leroi-Gourhan has referred to 'the meaning of the designs' (Leroi-Gourhan 1982) and Conkey has written about 'geometric or animal designs'. Conkey has also used 'design' as an adjective in such phrases as 'design

elements and principles' and 'design structural approach' (Conkey 1981). Leroi-Gourhan and Conkey appear to have been thinking in terms of the meaning for 'design' of 'the arrangement of elements or details in a product or work of art' (*Merriam-Webster* n.d.). Dowson, meanwhile, has referred to 'non-Western art, design and architectural traditions' (Dowson 2007). While Leroi-Gourhan and Conkey's usages of 'design' can also be very helpful, Dowson's example, which distinguishes design from art as an activity and a tradition, is very close to the meaning I am suggesting that more rock art researchers consider using.

The adjective 'graphic' has also already seen use in Lithic Age art research, such as in 'graphic depictions' (Dowson 2007), 'graphic vocabularies' (McDonald and Veth 2012), 'Palaeolithic graphic expression' (Palacio-Pérez 2013), 'iconic graphic depiction' (Bednarik 2013); 'graphic communication' (von Petzinger 2015); 'los materiales gráficos' (graphic materials) (Montañés 2015).

The term 'graphic' has some complications. *Oxford Dictionaries/US* definition 1 for 'graphic' includes 'Of or relating to visual art'. *Oxford* then defines 'visual art' as 'Creative art whose products are to be appreciated by sight, such as painting, sculpture, and film-making (as contrasted with literature and music)' (*Oxford* n.d.). Meanwhile *Merriam-Webster* defines 'graphic' as 'of or relating to the pictorial arts; also: pictorial'. At 'pictorial', definition 1, in *Merriam-Webster* there is 'of or relating to a painter, a painting, or the painting or drawing of pictures' (*Merriam-Webster* n.d.). So, these definitions show that the term 'graphic' means somewhat different things to different people. By itself, the term 'graphic' can apply to painting and drawing, and may or may not apply to sculpture and film-making depending upon which dictionary, and definition, one wishes to consult. Further, for the related term 'graphic arts' in *Oxford* definition 1 is 'The visual arts based on the use of line and tone rather than three-dimensional work or the use of colour' (*Oxford* n.d.). However, in *Merriam-Webster* we find definition 1 for 'graphic arts' being 'the fine and applied arts of representation, decoration, and writing or printing on flat surfaces together with the techniques and crafts associated with them' (*Merriam-Webster* n.d.). So the phrase 'graphic arts' applies to visual arts based on the use of line and tone, with the use of colour being possibly included or not, again depending upon which dictionary one consults. The printing-related meanings of the term 'graphic' for the most part would not apply to the study of Lithic Age works, except perhaps for such cases as the hand prints, some of which may have been printed multiple times from a single application of paint, thus qualifying them for the category of printing.

The concept of graphic design could be of particular benefit to rock art research in a way alluded to in the following definition: 'Graphic design, also known as communication design, is the art and practice of planning and projecting ideas and experiences with visual and textual content. It can … be for any purpose, whether commercial, educational, cultural, or political' (AIGA n.d.). As graphic design involves both visual and linguistic communication, its perspective unites what are often two separate cognitive

worlds. One of the ways this could benefit rock art research is in the study of the geometric signs, which von Petzinger and others suggest may involve, in some cases, elements of language without the signs constituting a fully-functional linguistic system (von Petzinger 2015). There are numerous examples of Lithic Age art markings with geometric signs placed near or on figurative art. Such panels could entail a combination of visual thinking with at least some aspects of linguistic thinking, and therefore a graphic design perspective could help in their study.

With this background in mind, for the purposes of Lithic Age art research, I intend to use the term 'graphic', either by itself or in the phrase 'graphic arts', to include painting, drawing and engraving of both figurative and non-figurative works, but not sculpture. A final detail in this regard is that the word 'graphic' can also be used as a noun meaning 'a picture, map, or graph used for illustration' (*Merriam-Webster* n.d.). I will also at times use 'graphic' as a noun when referring to both figurative and non-figurative two-dimensional, or 'mostly' two-dimensional, Lithic Age artefacts of a visual nature. (The qualification 'mostly two-dimensional' is included to account for the grey area caused by the pre-Historic use of bumps, crevices etc. on surfaces in drawings, paintings and engravings.)

As for 'wayfinding', in the discipline of design the term refers to 'the branding and signage applied throughout and on buildings. While each sign or symbol in a public or private building is a work of design, they're all part of a larger system within the building' (AIGA n.d.). Considering that caves served some of the functions of buildings during periods of the Palaeolithic age, it seems reasonable that rock art research could include markings in caves as possible examples of wayfinding. Additionally, considering the similarities between indoor and outdoor navigation signage, rock art researchers may also wish to expand the meaning of 'wayfinding' to include outdoor markings other than those just on buildings, such as the signs discussed previously by Martineau. I intend to use this expanded meaning for the term.

In the world of design, wayfinding is a sub-category of the categories 'environmental graphic design' and 'environmental graphics'. The Society for Experiential Graphic Design defines 'environmental graphic design' as activities that are 'concerned with the visual aspects of wayfinding, communicating identity and information, and shaping the idea of creating experiences that connect people to place' (SEGD 2018). Thus for the purposes of rock art research, the categories of 'environmental graphics' and 'environmental graphic design' could include such markings as clan signs, territorial delimitations, and maps as well as markings involved with wayfinding.

Finally, rock art researchers may find the design world's term 'communication design' of use in describing the cognitive processes involved in the creation as well as the understanding of rock art.

Ideal types and continua

An advantage of the system of replacing certain uses of the word 'art', along with some of the terms now in-

cluded in 'art' as a category, with a set of new terms is that this system could be of use both to researchers wishing to continue using the word 'art' as well as those choosing to avoid it. Speaking from the pro-use side, Chippindale has written: 'For all its difficulties and false associations, our word 'art' does convey some essentials applicable to prehistoric rock art. Included among these essentials are the idea of pictures of subjects, often of physical objects; the notion of skill and accomplishment in their making; the concept of images, things that stand for other things; and the hint that these images may to an extent be separate from the mundane objects of everyday physical existence' (Chippindale 2001).

A way of revising the term 'art' without discarding it entirely would be to place it at one end of a continuum, with 'design' at the other end. We do not have a way of knowing for sure what meanings the markings and some of the objects had for the Lithic Age people who created them, so placing hard lines between categories in this case is often not possible. 'Art' could be thought of in terms of things that produce a mostly psychological experience and 'design' could be considered as producing things that tend to fulfil a more physical, and possibly socially-related, function. This continuum would *not* carry the assumption that art is of higher value than the creation of things that are physically functional; art and design are both valuable, but in different ways. Artefacts could then be placed somewhere on the continuum, not necessarily having to be deemed strictly either art or design.

A system of coarse-grain classification of artefacts might involve a framework of the following four terms: 'art', 'design', 'craft' and 'industry'. Again, these terms would not carry the prejudice they have had at certain times in the past. Design, craft and industry are not lesser activities than art, they just serve somewhat different purposes. Those people who value physically functional over non-utilitarian psychological activities might actually argue that design, craft and industry are *more* valuable than art. The edges of these four categories would still involve a certain amount of indistinctness, but the lack of specificity from the overuse of the term 'art' could be clarified, along with aiding in the question of how to categorise non-art visual artefacts. Some of depictions of animals and humans, for example, could remain in the category of 'art'. Some of the non-figurative marks, such as the possible 'wayfinding' signs, could be placed in the category of 'design' (perhaps specifically 'graphic design'). Much of the pottery, clothing etc. could be referred to as craft — and in fact some of these have been classified as such at various times in the past. Some of the toolmaking, especially lithic points for example, have already been referred to as being part of an 'industry'.

One way of looking at this four-category system of coarse-grain classification might be as a continuum with four ends rather than two (Fig. 1). There are cases where some of the four categories could be combined when studying certain artefacts. For example, the first person who carved a spearthrower with the shape of a deer with two birds sitting on its excrement could be considered

Art   Design

Craft   Industry
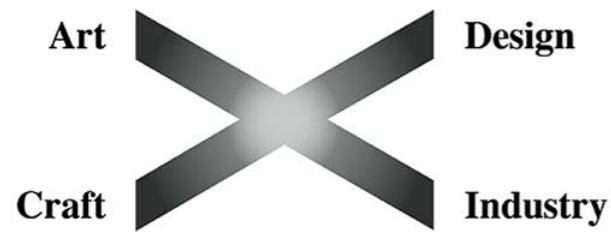
Figure 1. *Proposed four-way continuum of coarse-grain classification.*

as having created art or design, depending partially upon one's sense of aesthetics, while the spearthrower itself could be included in the category of an 'industrial' tool. Those Palaeolithic craftsmen/toolmakers who then copied that particular design could be considered as having done craft and industry. Decorations on tools etc. could be viewed as a combination of design and craft, and, if sufficiently innovative or well-done, could also be considered as art. The actual fabrication of the lithic points could be referred to as an industry, while certain aspects of their design could be thought of in terms of 'industrial design'.

Note that some markings which appear to us to be decoration or abstract signs may have actually been stylised figurative representations in the cultures in which the artefacts were created. Markings appearing to be merely decorative could have actually added significance and perhaps been integral to an artefact's function. White has posted the warning 'It cannot be overemphasized that the twentieth-century European and American conception of art has no meaning in any non-Western hunting-and-gathering society known to anthropology. In order to understand the objects and images that we shall be looking at, we need to put aside our own culture's preconceptions about image-making' (White 2003). Wariness of observer bias and presentism, along with mindfulness of what is simply not known, are indeed crucial in the study of Lithic Age artefacts.

The categories and terms I have suggested adding to the rock art research lexicon are therefore not intended to be used as definitive readings of artefacts. Instead, they are meant to aid in the process of describing *possible* interpretations of artefacts. Hopefully some of these suggested interpretations, along with their subsequent discussion, will lead to a better understanding of Lithic Age artefacts, as well as the people of the cultures who created them. I plan to elaborate on many of these points in future articles.

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XXVIII Valcamonica Symposium 2021
ROCK ART, A HUMAN HERITAGE
28–31 October 2021 – Valcamonica (Italy)

The Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici is once again organising the Valcamonica Symposium. More than a year after the start of the pandemic, which delayed numerous initiatives and prevented new research and interactions between institutions and researchers, this conference aims to facilitate communication and exchanges and to establish new contacts and collaborations, redefine objectives and facilitate planning.

The Valcamonica Symposium will be an opportunity to present new research and news on rock art sites from around the world; it will allow us to deepen the debate on specific issues, geographical locations and specific periods, but above all it aims to become a stimulus to share reflections and research methods, to review the tools of museumisation in light of new potential for sites, in museums and on social platforms.

The official languages of the Valcamonica Symposium are English, Italian, French and Spanish.

Headquarters
The Auditorium Cittadella Cultura, Capo di Ponte, Valcamonica, Italy. We hope that the VCS can take place in person, or via a mixed approach with part of the audience and speakers connected through an IT platform (e.g. zoom).

Calls
The Scientific Committee has proposed a number of session titles.

Applicants are invited to send in their abstracts, indicating a preferred session; contributions on other topics will also be considered.

The posters will be published on the webpage dedicated to VCS2021, will be present within the proceedings and it is hoped that they will also be exhibited in the hall.

Sessions currently proposed
- New research and news in world rock art
- The aesthetic and semiotic research of rock art
- Rock art didactics and museology
- Rock art and contemporary social network platforms
- Rock art and statue stele in Valcamonica and in the Alps (Chair A. Fossati; by invitation only)
- History of research and research methodology
- Rock art and landscape (Chair H. Steberglokken, J. M. Gjerde)
- Cognitive, intellectual and cultural interface of rock art (Chair G. Kumar)

During the VCS2021, there will be two panels dedicated to the CAR-ICOMOS and PRAT-CARP committee.

Presentation method
Fill in the form at the following link https://form.jotform.com/210281323542343 or by sending an e-mail to valcamonica.symposium@ccsp.it indicating your name, affiliation, contact details and an abstract of up to 250 words.
The deadline for submitting proposals: 6 April 2021
Notification of acceptance of proposals: 30 April 2021
Full article submission for publication within the proceedings: 1 August 2021

Registration
Speaker registration (online or in person, in the hall): €100 for registration by 31 May 2021 (the fee includes: publication of your article in the volume of proceedings, a paper copy of the documents to be collected at the CCSP headquarters, any shipping costs are not included, and a certificate of participation). From the 1st of June 2021 the fee is set at €150;
Poster registration (online or in person, in the hall) €60 (the fee includes: publication of your poster in the volume of the proceedings, PDF of the proceedings of the Valcamonica Symposium, and a certificate of participation). The aim is to print and display the posters in the hall.

The organisation of outings or events (dinners, exhibitions or evenings) will be evaluated based on the situation of the pandemic.

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# A new discovery of earliest pre-pottery Neolithic site of al-Mager, Saudi Arabia

Majeed Khan

The discovery of a Neolithic settlement site at Al-Magar in a remote area of southern Arabia, between Tatleeth and Wadi Ad-Dawasir and about 40 km from the town of Al-Gay-irah, is both surprising and tantalising as it reveals many hidden aspects of Saudi Arabian ancient culture. The site is hardly accessible and was not located by the survey teams of the Department of Antiquities during its Comprehensive Archaeological and Rock Art Surveys (1981–2001). It is through its isolation that the site is still very well preserved, although slightly damaged by local treasure hunters (Fig. 1).

Figure 1. General view of al-Mager site, southern Saudi Arabia.

On the surface, there is a scatter of stone objects of typical pre-pottery Neolithic of precisely made stone scrapers, knives and grinding stones. Among these objects only arrowheads (Fig. 2) show similarity to those located at the Neolithic sites of Mundafin, Rub al-Khali, Tatleeth, Yabrin and Wadi Fatima, but those at al-Mager are more advanced in technique and high quality of stone objects such as arrow heads, grinding hollows, dishes and knives.
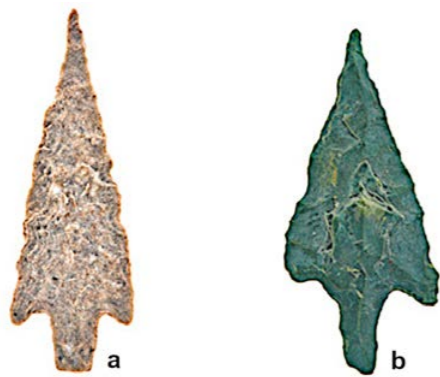
Figure 2. Arrow heads from al-Mager.

The people of al-Mager were highly skilled in shaping and modelling stone objects and figurines of some animals on which they depended in their daily life. The horse was probably domesticated as is evident from a large 'horse'

figurine with marks suggesting a bridle at its muzzle (Fig. 3). Additional evidence of possible horse domestication is provided by a nearby petroglyph of what might be a horse and rider. It is a small, deeply pecked figure made by direct percussion but easily recognisable (Fig. 4).

Figure 3. 'Horse head' with 'string sign on muzzle' suggesting a domesticated animal.

Figure 4. 'Horse rider' pounded on a horizontal rock surface.

Foot prints and a goat-like figure are engraved on a rectangular-shaped portable rock (Fig. 5). Contrary to Neolithic sites of Jubbah and Shuwaymis (registered on World Heritage List) in the Kingdom's north, at al-Magar drawings of animals are executed on individual stones especially shaped and prepared for creating images on them. This is also contrary to the Neolithic sites in the Levant and Yemen where figures are found on hills or mountain surfaces.

Figure 5. Al-Mager foot prints.

The question arises why these petroglyphs were made on individual rocks and not on the surface of nearby hills. Either the people had no tradition of using hill surfaces for creating rock art or they preferred to make animal and or human figures on portable rocks, perhaps to keep them in their dwellings.

Al-Mager 'dancers' are also quite different to Jubbah or Shuwaymis Neolithic 'dancers', suggesting a different social and cultural entity. A group 'dance' was documented on a roughly oval-shaped rock, created by deep engraving and scratching the hard sandstone rock slab (Fig. 6).

Figure 6. Al-Mager 'dancers'.

Contrary to Neolithic social, cultural and religious practices, bovids are not associated with al-Mager dancers. It is also surprising that apparent cattle are not shown on any object or palaeoart panel. For these people the horse was perhaps more important than cattle, as sculpted 'horse' figures are located in large number on the site. The total absence of bovid imagery from the site of al-Mager and its surrounding area may suggest that cattle was not present in the al-Mager area at that time. We may say that in the Neolithic, different cultural groups were living in the Arabian Peninsula at different places intact with their distinctive material cultural identities.

Small parallel lines deeply incised in a stone were apparently not created without reason. This may represent an early Neolithic system of counting or documenting events, or it may be an early form of ancient calendar. In the culture of Neolithic al-Mager, lines played an important role. On several objects straight parallel lines are deeply incised, as

in this rock (Fig. 7a). The oval-shaped rock, incised with several sets of straight parallel lines all around the periphery of the rock. Each unit consists of three lines and in the upper and lower part, six parallel lines are drawn; all together we have 33 lines at the corners of the rock and 12 lines in the middle. The 45 lines in total were carefully engraved deeply into the rock. It must have been quite a hard task to make an oval-shaped piece of rock and incise on it straight parallel lines. Thus, it becomes a portable object used for a certain specific purpose. The next object (Fig. 7b) is another unique piece, with straight and parallel lines engraved on a roughly rectangular stone. Lines are depicted in a zigzag or snake like form, covering all space of one side of the stone. As some lines are missing and eroded it is difficult to count the total number.


Figure 7. Al-Mager graphic palaeoart.

The most prominent feature of the site is the absence of bovid figures and the high quality of stone objects not found anywhere in the Arabian Peninsula. A preliminary C-14 date initially obtained from the sounding in the area suggested an age of 8000 years before present. As compared to other Neolithic sites in Arabia, Levant and Yemen, rock art does not exist at al-Mager and there are no apparent hunting scenes, no depictions of bow and arrow, and no human figures are depicted on nearby rocks. The people of al-Mager did not practise rock art; on the contrary, they made human, animal and geometric images on small portable rocks. The most dominant factor is the use of straight parallel lines on several objects giving us an impression of early graphic or line art in the Arabian Neolithic.

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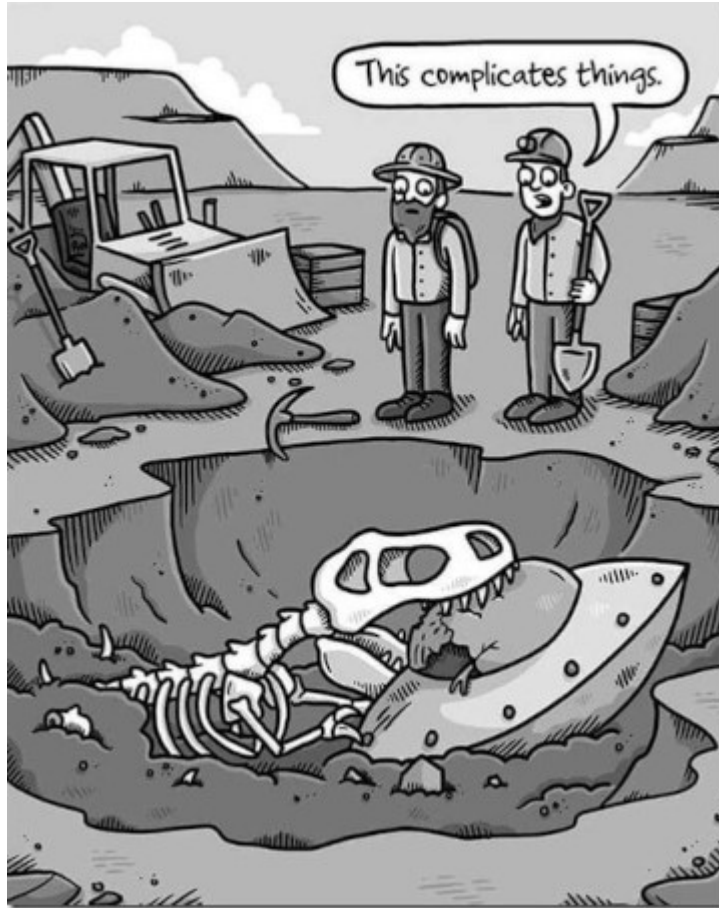
AURA Treasurer's financial statement 2018/2019

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Balance in hand on 30 June 2018: $9129.00

INCOME:	$	EXPENDITURES:	$
Sales of books	34.00	Postage	67.30
Bank interest	103.55	Business Affairs Registration	56.90
		Telephone and faxes	10.50
		Website costs	131.40
		Merchant account fees	29.00
TOTAL	137.55	TOTAL	295.10

Balance in hand on 30 June 2019: $8971.45