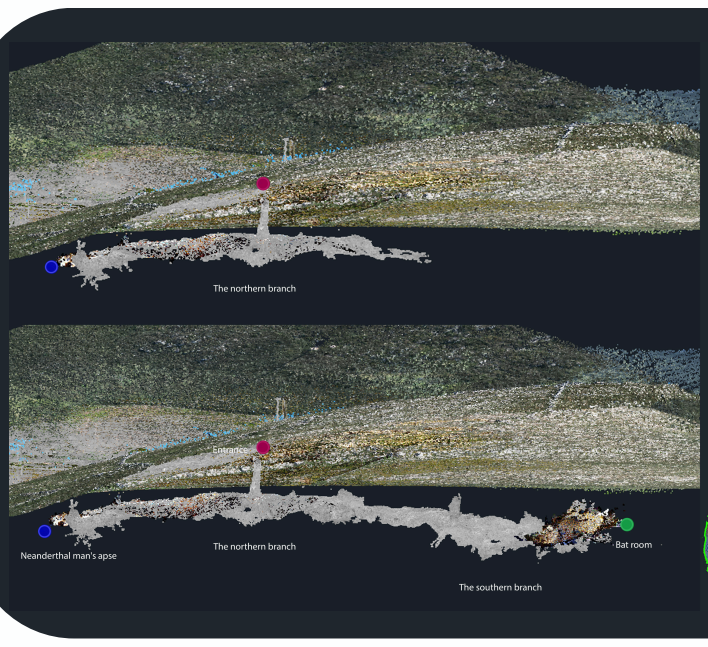
Soprintendenza
Archeologia, belle arti e
paesaggio per la città
metropolitana di Bari

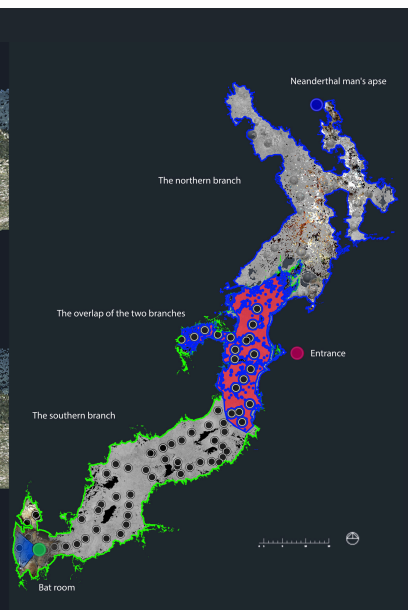


THE BREATH OF DEEP TIME

The Neanderthal of Altamura and the Memory-Building of the Invisible

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Altamura's urban context reflects the dynamics of a rapidly expanding center, where construction and production growth have often accentuated the detachment from rural areas, perceived as geographical margins rather than identity resources. This rift between the town and the karst landscape fuels social fragility and a loss of cohesion, making a territorial regeneration strategy that rebuilds the bond between inhabitants and territory a priority. From this perspective, excellent cultural attractions, such as Lamalunga Cave, are not only objects of scientific protection but also powerful drivers of integration. The site houses the most archaic and complete Homo neanderthalensis skeleton in the world, located for 150,000 years in a treasure chest of calcitic concretions that preserve his morphological and genetic integrity.

The narrative power of this site lies in a fundamental paradox: the exceptional nature of the find imposes its physical inaccessibility for rigorous conservation reasons. However, despite this material separation, the skeleton has been internalized by the local community as a true totem. For the citizens of Altamura, the Neanderthal is not a distant archaeological find, but an ancestral presence that watches from underground, a symbol of identity around which a sense of belonging is gathered. To translate this invisible presence into a perceptible experience, the ABAP Superintendency for the Metropolitan City of Bari has focused on the technological innovation of the digital twin. Through laser scanning surveys and ultra-high-resolution photogrammetry, the abyss was virtually "cloned," allowing the cave's physical barriers to be overcome.



The digital twin is not just a study tool, but the centerpiece of an augmented narrative that democratizes access to the invisible, allowing the community to explore their totem pole millimeter by millimeter without violating its delicate microclimate.
This "open science" strategy fits with the principles of the Faro Convention, transforming the Neanderthal from an object of specialized investigation to a "relational good". The "In the Abyss of Time" project, launched in 2023, embodied this mission, involving over 800 primary school children in multidisciplinary workshops.
Through the use of experiential pathways, young citizens were able to "touch" evolutionary history, recognizing the Neanderthal as a common ancestor and transforming scientific curiosity into respect for their heritage.



At the same time, the power of visual storytelling was entrusted to a photographic exhibition created under the patronage of National Geographic. The auteur images, brought to the heart of the city, acted as a further aesthetic bridge between the abyss and the light. This synergy between technological prominence, art, and teaching demonstrates that immaterial regeneration is not a static act, but a narrative flow that ennobles marginal rural areas.
By elevating multidisciplinary research to a collective narrative, Lamalunga Cave ceases to be a physical boundary to become the hub of a new civil consciousness, projecting Altamura as an international model for integrating deep identity, technology, and a sustainable future.



Michelangelo Pistoletto
Love Difference - Mar Mediterraneo
Courtesy Cittadellarte – Fondazione Pistoletto
in mostra al Museo Castromediano di Lecce