

The Makapansgat pebble

A case of pareidolia

Almost three million years ago, in some ravine of the Makapansgat Valley, an *Australopithecus Africanus* descends to the banks of a stream of little current. In a calm bend, squatting in front of the shore, this creature poses its gaze on that water mirror looking at its own reflection as it consistently forms and deforms between the superficial waves. Dismissive to the visual phenomenon, he understands unhesitant that the visage gazing at him from the water is an image of his own face. He looks at himself in the mirror, without further ado, with a certain automatism. At times the stream goes still and his image, then also still, stares at him unperturbed. It is in that lapse that his pupils dilate and his gaze manages to cross the superficial reflection to examine the bottom of the stream in search of some nourishment. In between the uniformly massed scree, his eyes stop mechanically to meet a reddish brown stone of peculiar characteristics. It is a roughly oval shaped pebble the size of the palm of his hand. Without any delay, he grabs the rock and extracts it from the creek bed. The pebble he now examines in his hand presents two similarly sized round holes in the center of its front side, adjacent to one another. Below these gaps, as if underlining them, an elongated groove completes an austere but irrefutable visual ensemble; two eyes and a mouth. A kind of synthesis of the face moments earlier our subject observed in the reflection of his own face. Once again he has no doubts as to what's in front of him. It is simply a stone with a set of holes that resemble two eyes and a mouth. However, precarious as it is, this perception is not indifferent to him. Moreover, it is urgent and captivating to him. That object devoid of any practical utility for his existence is now responsible for an internal dissociation that obscures him. The fact is that while observing that eroded piece of Jasper not only is he perceiving an image, but foremost he is being challenged by some incomplete and implausible information, and yet so real as to set in motion a metaphysical experience: the perception of an object in another object. In that fortuitous event, our unsuspected hero opened a cleft through which he came to perceive his own existence for the first time, from the outside to the inside. Conscious of his own consciousness. In an act of aesthetic and symbolic valuation he would discover a primitive mirror in which the reflection no longer returned the tangible reality but rather a possible reality.



*Makapansgat pebble. (2.5 – 2.9 million years).
Makapansgat. Southafrica.*