

THE IMAGERY OF UITTAMONSALMI

The Uttamonsalmi rock painting consists of four separate sites, painted on the vertical rock surfaces along the northeastern shore of the strait. During the initial investigations conducted in 1975, these painting sites were designated with Roman numerals I–IV, arranged from northwest to southeast.¹⁰⁷ This naming convention has since become standard.

THE FOUR PAINTING SITES OF UITTAMONSALMI

The first and northwesternmost painting site is located southeast of the rocky Vierivuori slope. The cliff rises directly from the water, but in front of the painting site, there is a passable terrace. The easiest access is by descending from above. On an area approximately four metres wide and over three metres high, at least eighteen figures or figure fragments have been painted. The lower figures could have been painted from the terrace, but the uppermost ones are out of reach when standing on it.



The second painting site is about 120 metres southeast of the first.¹⁰⁸ The painting is located high on a vertical rock surface. In front of it lies a rocky shore strip, but access to the site in summer requires a boat due to the surrounding cliffs, which rise steeply from the water. The painting contains eighteen figures or fragments and a few pigment patches, arranged in two denser groups. Most of the figures are in the main group, high on the right. The second group is about one and a half metres down and to the left of the lowest figure in the main group. Its central motif is a long-legged animal figure (UII-14), whose body is depicted with a single line.

The third painting site is about 60 metres further southeast, and the fourth an additional six metres ahead. They can be viewed from the rocky shoreline below. These easternmost paintings are small, containing only a few figures or fragments each.

In addition to the four painting sites revealed in 1975, Pekka Kivikäs documented a fifth site high on the cliff about ten metres to the right of painting II. This painting consists of triangles and a shape that resembles a rod or a staff.¹⁰⁹ Based on Kivikäs' photograph, the painting is convincing, though its subject matter is unusual. I photographed the site in February 2025. There was a slight reddish tint on the rock that differed from its natural colour, but even in processed images, I was unable to identify the figures presented by Kivikäs. The site thus remains a mystery.

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF UITTAMONSALMI'S PAINTINGS

There are clear similarities between the paintings at Uttamonsalmi and Astuvansalmi. Both feature the same primary subjects – primarily elk, humans, and boats – and share a common painting style. Elk are depicted with outlines, with only one exception at each site, where the body is painted with a single line. Human figures are generally simplified, although a few individuals at both sites have their heads

depicted distinctively. Boats show more variation but appear in their fundamental forms at both locations. While handprints are common at Astuvansalmi, Uttamonsalmi only has one, and even that is an uncertain case.

Despite these similarities, Uttamonsalmi's paintings have their own unique character. Any figure from Uttamonsalmi transplanted to Astuvansalmi would look distinct. The nature of this difference is hard to define precisely but may relate to the liveliness of the depictions. While Astuvansalmi's elk are somewhat rigid and monumentally dignified, Uttamonsalmi's animals exude vitality. This liveliness extends to human figures, whose limbs bend more dynamically and appear to be in motion – perhaps caught mid-dance.

At Uttamonsalmi, humans are the most common subject. Of the 32 figures across the four painting sites, 12 depict humans. Most are shown in a simple style: a frontal figure with arms pointing downward and legs bent at the knees. In the first painting, three human figures form a compact group that is clearly a unified composition, with a fourth figure painted nearby. In the second painting, human figures are arranged around boat motifs, reminiscent of how Astuvansalmi's Group F places humans around elk. Two human figures in the second painting (UII-04, -06) have an additional feature between their legs, possibly indicating male gender.

Uttamonsalmi's human figures also include some exceptional cases. In the lower part of the main group in the second painting, a worn figure (UII-05) is depicted with only an upper body, with a head and arms bent at the waist. The triangular head includes eyes and a nose, with two spikes rising from the top. Another human figure with facial features appears in the third painting (UIII-01). This symmetrically posed figure is strikingly expressive, with owl-like facial features. The mark between its bent legs is more of a dot than a line, suggesting it represents something other than gender. The figure in the fourth painting (UIV-01) has a ring-shaped head without facial