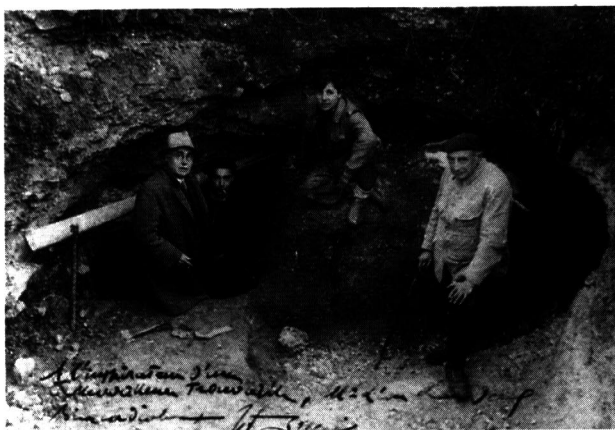


The entrance to Lascaux in 1940, with (left to right) the schoolmaster Léon Laval, Marcel Ravidat, Jacques Marsal (center), and the Abbé Breuil. Ravidat and Marsal were the principle discoverers of the cave.



## LIKE VIOLETS, HE SAID

Jacques Marsal [1925–1988] in dapper suede slippers would lead us into the darkness of Lascaux. It takes his absence today, our fourth visit, to say how much his presence determined what Lascaux is. As one of the discoverers, Marsal remained coated with the awesome freshness of that tumbling in, toppled juniper, under which four boys squirmed to arrive. That Marsal stayed on, nearly 50 years, was a bloom added to the stem of the cave, and I'm overwhelmed by the difference one person can make in the personality of a place, not via declaration or sheer information, but by being folded in, obliquely, wearing Lascaux, allowing its grace to loom, allowing us, hardly aware of his movements, our own reading through his light.

Men spring up like violets  
when needed, Olson said,<sup>1</sup>

and Blackburn, near his end,  
lamented the disappearance of a Barcelona  
waiter, an old man  
who moved so accurately and gently  
among the clientele. Paul wrote:  
“We do not need to know  
anybody’s name to love them.”<sup>2</sup>

Because of Marsal, I know Lascaux in my heart  
like a nearly weightless child  
framed by thunder and a bruised, milling sky,  
a child standing on the sensation of eternity,  
sayable eternity, right under the dust.

[Hotel Cro-Magnon, September 1990]