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Spine dining: 'Inostrancevia devouring a Pareiasaurus' (1933) by Alexei Petrovich Bystrow, featured in new book *Paleoart*



Barney! 'The Primitive World' (1857) by Adolphe-François Pannemaker appears in *Paleoart*



Fossils in the frame

A grisly book depicts dinosaurs as red in tooth and claw



Given most of us are pretty confident that we could pick a *Tyrannosaurus rex* out of a line-up — or even by the tremors in a cup of water on a dashboard — it's quite extraordinary just how little was known about what dinosaurs really looked like only a couple of hundred years ago. In fact, according to a new art book, as recently as the 19th-century some were still arguing that fossils were decorative ornaments buried by God (this belief is no doubt still upheld by members of the Trump administration).

It was only around 1830 that scientists and archaeologists started to imagine what the bones they were digging up

might have looked like if covered with skin and scales, and the genre that would come to be known as paleoart (as opposed to paleolithic art, ie cave paintings) was born.

Paleoart: Visions of the Prehistoric Past, a sumptuous book from writer Zoë Lescaze introduced by artist Walton Ford, draws together 160 years of paintings, drawings, prints and mosaics of dinosaurs, mammoths and cavemen as they might have lived in their time, be it hanging out in paradisaical harmony, or waging major inter-species dino-wars. In fact, maybe because it gave the artists an excuse to crack open the vermilion

gouache, it's mostly the latter.

There are pictures of *Tyrannosaurus rex* versus *Triceratops*, mammoth versus sabre-toothed cat, ground sloth versus glyptodon, and any manner of beast-on-beast pile-up you can imagine. And yes, maybe these depictions say more about us than they do about them — certainly, scientific progress has proved a lot of the images anatomically and behaviourally fanciful — but as gory-yet-glossy coffee table fun-fests go, it's a rip-roaring treat.

— *Paleoart: Visions of the Prehistoric Past* (Taschen) is out 10 July