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IN CONSERVATION

The Valley of the Kings - next steps

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Being on the West Bank for the installation and attending the opening of the facsimile of Tutankhamun's burial chamber and its exhibition area has been a thrilling, tough, interesting, exciting but ultimately an incredibly successful process. And we stayed in the shadow of the hills where the nobles are buried and a quiet evening's walk from Madinet Habu - so we felt very lucky.

On the night of the opening the team were entertained in the company of 27 Ambassadors from Europe, South America and the East as well as a press corps of ninety and archaeologists and interested parties making up an audience of three hundred. The hosts were the Ministers of Antiquities and Tourism and the location was the Luxor Temple - with its powerful pylons and a new lighting display that makes the cream stone bright but not livid. The music was provided by the Cairo Symphony Orchestra - it was a lovely, balmy evening and we were delighted by the reception and response to the facsimile.

The speeches hailed the facsimile as important and extraordinary - but this is just the beginning, the first born of the family. It is our intention to work with the Ministers and other institutions to record in high resolution and to recreate the two greatest sites of all - those of Seti I and Queen Nefertari. And we want to do this while developing the Stopplaëre House (the one you notice in images of the facsimile on a hill rising behind it) into a research, technology and archive centre - to employ local Egyptians and to pass on to them what we have learned and what we have developed so that they can do it themselves. We also want to be a workshop where the skills and technologies developed by Factum Arte in creating the facsimile can be used to create the new ones (watched by visitors so that they too can learn) but also to pass on the skills and the machinery to Egypt so that they can preserve their own heritage and monitor its life. The Minister announced this and we now have to make it happen.

We need everyone to help. The project is enormous, Seti is over 50 times bigger than Tutankhamun's Tomb and Nefertari over ten times. It will be three years scanning Seti - though we will process data and start routing and printing as the scanning continues - we think it will be seven years work.

But it will be worth it - Seti I is closed - it has to be. So is Nefertari. Tutankhamun's closure has been announced. When we - and the new Egyptian artisans - have finished visitors will be able to see these incredible sites while protecting their originals. The originals will be being analysed and inspected and perhaps restored - the facsimile will be made up of data that is a permanent record of what we have now - to monitor change and to allow the public to enjoy this truly magnificent structure - safely. This is what the Foundation does.