

MASTERPIECE INTERVIEW

Factum Arte is bringing a facsimile of the Teschen Table to Masterpiece London that is almost indistinguishable from the original in the Louvre. Digital technologies are transforming the field of conservation, says founder and director **Adam Lowe**



How did Factum Arte and the Factum Foundation emerge?

Factum Arte was formed in 2001 as a workshop - which it still is - devoted to building bridges between new technologies and traditional craft skills. We were really trying to show that if technology was handled properly it could become a supporting tool, and a meaningful tool in the creation of great works of art.

We were invited that year to design and build a 3D laser scanner to record a section of the Tomb of Seti I at a resolution that would allow us to create an almost exact copy. Eight years later, in 2009, we were given permission to go back and record the whole tomb, but when we reached Egypt, there were excavations going on that created so much dust we couldn't work. So we were moved on by the minister for antiquities to record the Tomb of Tutankhamun. That was when I formed the Foundation, because growing interest from the heritage community meant that people were getting confused by the fact that this work was being done by a commercial company.

The Factum Foundation basically works to apply technology, some of which is developed by Factum Arte, to the preservation of cultural heritage. Factum Arte continues to work with different artists to realise great works of art.

What are the key principles behind the Factum Foundation's work?

The Foundation uses non-contact, digital recording for the preservation of cultural heritage. We never touch the objects - we're not restorers. For me the future of how you preserve the past lies in a deeper understanding of it, and that's why all of our energies have been focused on digital recording. That means scrutinising the high resolution files that we've recorded, and working with specialists in each field so they can make an interpretative restoration, rather than turning an object into a reproduction of itself by physically imposing things on to it.

And what can we discover by looking at these digital records?

The most obvious example is with the Tomb of Tutankhamun, where we shared accurate data that was useful for forensic study. The archaeologist Nicholas Reeves was able to study that data and find two doorways in the tomb, that may well

lead to the discovery of another tomb beyond the north wall and a storeroom behind the west wall. It feels like a gift from the pharaonic gods.

What can private collectors learn from the types of technology you employ?

There are many things. Collectors should be having all their objects recorded at the highest resolution in the event that a fire, or a theft, or some other kind of accident causes damage. When I began this work, I'd go to dinner parties in London and talk to people about scanning and digital facsimiles. The normal response would be one of horror, of how this amounted to cheating or falsification. But I think what's happened over a period of 10 years is that people have come to realise that if you can capture many of the qualities of an object, you can have it recreated in a way that has an emotional impact as well as an intellectual one. And the way that digital scans help us to read an object, and engage with its complexity and its past, actually makes for a type of connoisseurship.

You're now working on projects all over the world. What are you most excited about?

Right now, I'm incredibly excited that we've managed to create an exact facsimile of the Teschen Table. The original is in the Louvre while the re-materialisation will be at Masterpiece London. I think it's something that's going to shock a lot of people. Side by side, the two things look almost identical, and to make one of the most complex 18th-century tables in the 21st century, using a mixture of new technologies and traditional



craft skills, has been a real joy. This spring, we carried out photogrammetric recording of the sarcophagus of Seti I in Sir John Soane's Museum, as a prelude to our current project in Egypt, which is our most important to date: we're restoring Hassan Fathy's great building, Stoppelaere House, which will become a training centre for 3D scanning; we're going to equip and train local teams to record the tombs in the Valley of the Kings. And then we have an amazing project in Dagestan: building the technology to record the manuscripts in the state archives and in private collections in the country, but also recording Kala-Koreysh, a remote site where one of the buildings is reputed to be the first mosque outside the Saudi peninsula. Some of the Factum Foundation's projects already have financial support but we are always looking for the new generation of philanthropists who understand the importance of cultural objects.

For more information on the Factum Foundation, go to www.factumfoundation.org.

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