

AVOIDING OBLIVION

The Preservation of Pharaonic Knowledge

For Masterpiece [Re]discovery

30 June – 6 July 2022

'*Avoiding Oblivion – The Preservation of Pharaonic Knowledge*' is an exhibition created by Factum Foundation for Masterpiece London Art Fair. On the 100th anniversary of the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun, it reveals how our fascination with Ancient Egypt began centuries earlier. Masterpiece [Re]discovery invites visitors to engage with a prescient and powerful display that charts changing attitudes to preservation, the impact of time and the dynamic nature of originality.

The exhibition, curated by Adam Lowe and Charlotte Skene Catling and designed by Skene Catling de la Peña, embeds the plan of Tutankhamun's tomb within a larger labyrinth that traces how Ancient Egypt has captured the public imagination for over five hundred years, from the Renaissance to the Romantics, through colonial discovery and scientific excavation to the future and virtual or augmented experience. The façade is Giovanni Piranesi's *Caffè degli Inglesi*, an 18th century Egyptian architectural fantasy, originally created in Rome where travellers on the Grand Tour would meet. Cut-out windows reveal an animated journey through his *Carceri*, or 'prisons of the mind'. Original objects and books such as Horapollo's *Hieroglyphica*, originally printed in 1505, sit alongside Factum Foundation's 21st century technologies (specifically designed to record in the Theban Necropolis), Howard Carter's carefully observed watercolours and Harry Burton's vintage photographs that capture the greatest archaeological discovery of our time.

Our knowledge of Ancient Egypt and the Theban Necropolis is founded on tombs that were built to last for eternity and survived for over 3,000 years. These profound monuments, *The Book of the Dead* and the Pharaonic approach to magical transformation and the cycle of life, remain enigmatic and captivating. Looking back at Egyptomania through the ages we see very different behaviours and attitudes. Displays include 'Cannibalism in Europe in the 19th century' illustrating the way Egyptian mummies were bought, sold and eaten, to 'Squeezed to Death', 'Tomb Raiders' and 'Hacked Out and Sawn Off' that detail the destruction of the tombs by antiquarians and tourists alike. A facsimile of *The Celestial Cow*, otherwise known as *The Myth of the Destruction of the Human Race*, marks a turning point in the exhibition and signals the start of a different approach to looking, recording and preserving at this critical time in our collective history. It also leads us to question what we - individually and collectively - are doing during our lives, and how we ourselves will be perceived and remembered after we are gone.

A stark white space with the dimensions of Tutankhamun's sarcophagus chamber contains an experiment in virtual display that allows visitors to look through the eyes of others. Through the Theban Necropolis Preservation Initiative (TNPI), Factum Foundation has been working alongside the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities in the Valley of the Kings for over twenty years, rethinking preservation, stewardship, access and training, and demonstrating how digital data can enable positive change. While technology is usually seen as a force shaping the future, Factum uses it to look deep into the past. This innovative installation for Masterpiece [Re]discovery encourages visitors to understand the complexity of history in new ways and to challenge our own point of view and the limits of understanding.

This exhibition was initiated by Philip Hewat-Jaboor and has since become a tribute to him.



Notes to the editors

The **Factum Foundation for Digital Technology in Preservation** is a not-for-profit organisation founded in 2009 in Madrid by Adam Lowe. It works alongside its sister company, Factum Arte, a multi-disciplinary workshop in Madrid dedicated to digital mediation and physical transformation in contemporary art and the production of facsimiles. The Foundation was established to demonstrate the importance of documenting, monitoring, studying, recreating and disseminating the world's cultural heritage through the rigorous development of high-resolution recording and re-materialisation techniques. The Foundation's activities include building digital archives for preservation and further study, creating and organising touring exhibitions, setting up training centres for locals to master the different technologies developed by the Foundation in order to record their own cultural heritage, and producing exact facsimiles as part of a new approach to conservation and restoration. Their work spans all continents, with many projects throughout Europe, Africa and the Americas. They are now beginning a many-faceted project on the impact of environmental change on cultural heritage in and around the arctic circle.

The **Theban Necropolis Preservation Initiative (TNPI)** is a collaboration between the Madrid-based Factum Foundation for Digital Technology in Preservation, the University of Basel and the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. The main goals of the initiative are the preservation and sustainability of the Egyptian cultural heritage, using non-contact digital technology and employing Egyptian staff in charge of all operations on the ground, and external involvement focused on capacity development, training, support and technology transfer. In 2019, the TNPI received patronage from the Egyptian National Commission for UNESCO. In 2022, the TNPI completed the high-resolution recording of the Tomb of Seti I, which began in 2001 under the patronage of the Ministry of Antiquities.

Skene Catling de la Peña is an architecture practice based in London and Madrid, founded in 2003 by Charlotte Skene Catling. She has developed a unique approach she calls 'Geoarcheology', which seeks to excavate meaning from context as a means of developing architecture, by transforming observations about the composition of the earth, historical artefacts and the cultural landscapes of their commissions. Skene Catling de la Peña are experienced in the design and integration of contemporary projects into listed buildings and sensitive historic contexts. Recent work includes the AALTOSILO, a pioneering project focused on re-use and renewal through Alvar Aalto's first industrial building at the edge of the arctic circle in Finland. Their Flint House for Jacob Rothschild was extruded from the Buckinghamshire landscape in strata of flint and chalk (RIBA 'House of the Year' 2015). Their work on *Fidelio*, a site-specific Opera at the Perm World Heritage Site, Russia, was awarded the Perm Prize for Arts and Culture. They regularly collaborate with Factum Foundation and together have recently completed the permanent installation, *In Ictu Oculi – In the Blink of an Eye*, at The Spanish Gallery, Bishop Auckland. Skene Catling has written about architecture in *The Burlington Magazine*, *The Architectural Review* and *ARCH+*, and *DOMUS* magazine. She launched the architectural film festival, *ArchFilmFest*, in London in 2017, ran a post-graduate architecture unit at the RCA for five years and taught architecture at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT). Skene Catling de la Peña has won many awards for its approach and has been extensively published internationally.

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