



IN *DEFENSE* OF

Authenticity &
Originality

Egyptian goddess
Hathor in a relief at
the tomb of Seti I in
the Valley of the Kings.
Courtesy of Getty
Images

FACTUM ARTE *AND* FACTUM FOUNDATION
FOUNDER ADAM LOWE EXPLAINS TO KATRINA KUFER
HOW ITS NOT-FOR-PROFIT EFFORTS HAVE IT ON
THE CUTTING-EDGE OF DIGITAL CONSERVATION OF
HERITAGE AND CULTURE

This image and below: Scanning of Tutankhamun's tomb



focused on the development of techniques that record diverse types of high-resolution data, and non-contact high-resolution recording and free data access for preservation and study is its mantra.

With offices in Madrid, London and Milan, Factum holds an important position alongside museums and research institutions. "The relationship between originality and authenticity has changed fundamentally since the production of the facsimile of Veronese's *Wedding at Cana*," says Lowe of the 2006 project commissioned by the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in collaboration with the Louvre. "All the exhibition work we have done demonstrates the shift happening and the importance of museum items as complex subjects to be engaged with," he continues. "Exact facsimiles can form part of a coherent preservation policy, enhancing visitor experience and understanding."

However, the realm of digital mediation raises questions about the dynamic between original and facsimile, the authenticity of it, and what the public really wants to see when these facsimiles go on tour. "Many people still hold a prejudice about seeing the original—feeling they will be cheated if they look at a copy," says Lowe, clarifying that technology and manual skill are not a threat to or in competition with originals, rather, a means to a deeper understanding. "Craftsmen always use the technologies that are available—the saw, the lathe, the computer. Digital input and output

technologies are changing the way we think and work, ushering in a new generation of craftsmen who are not defined by the materials they work with. The emphasis is on the physical nature of materials and an intimacy with the way they behave is as important as ever."

Factum's work on Tutankhamun's tomb exemplifies the propositions it poses. "When you visit the original you are contributing to its destruction. When you visit the facsimile you are helping with its preservation," says Lowe. "Our understandings are better by visiting a facsimile that explains why the tomb looks as it does, why the walls are covered with micro-bacteria, what the presence of the visitor does, how different attempts at preservation have altered the tomb—some can be positive in the short term but also be responsible for longer term problems. Think about visiting a doctor and the way imaging technology has transformed medical practice." Originals are repositories of information, and Lowe doesn't waste energy over debates whether original trumps facsimile. "If you have a child it doesn't mean you are no longer necessary—



igital facsimile" is a term synonymous with The Factum Foundation and its sister company Factum Arte, two organisations sharing a strong synergy through different means. Factum Arte opened in 2001, a 50-plus-person workshop based in Madrid that collaborates with contemporary artists; while Factum Foundation, a team of seven active since 2009, focuses on recording, archiving, training and transferring skills to protect cultural heritage. Conversations between founder Adam Lowe and artist-engineer Manuel Franquelo led to the creation of exact facsimiles based on high-resolution 3D scanning and composite photography, forming the basis of Factum's initiatives. This fusion of craftsmanship and technology is its hallmark and Lowe recalls the first project that proved it possible was recording and producing an exact copy of one tomb wall of Pharaoh Seti I in 3D and colour. The ongoing project has since allowed fragments removed in the 19th century to be returned to their original contexts.

A number of visitors wish to visit fragile sites, experience antiquities, and see how contemporary art can be a means to preserve heritage and reproduce memory. This entails a complex balancing act in which facsimiles play a key role. Factum has



Adam Lowe explaining the techniques for colour matching to Jean Habert and Vincent Delleuvin from the Musée du Louvre, as Factum Arte's Pedro Miro and Naoko Fukumaru look on



The Cana Colour scanner designed by Factum Arte was one of the systems used to record the colour and surface of Paolo Veronese's Wedding at Cana.

“BY READING AND UNDERSTANDING WHY SOMETHING LOOKS AS IT DOES YOU DEVELOP A DEEP UNDERSTANDING ABOUT THE THING ITSELF,” SAYS LOWE. “OBJECTS ARE VERY ARTICULATE”



Naoko Fukumaru, Factum Arte's conservator, inspecting the colour and analysing the surface of Paolo Veronese's Wedding at Cana in the Musée du Louvre

quite the reverse,” he explains. “Replication is a method that helps us understand things better—we have always learned through copying. Things change over time. The high-resolution data and the copy reveals how. It never replaces the original.”

Some of Factum's most exciting and inventive developments have included the introduction of the Lucida Scanner, the Manuscript Recording System and Rotary Scanning Table—purpose built technologies to solve specific needs. “The emphasis is on the decisions that are made as ideas find their form,” says Lowe. “Understanding the mediations and transformations that materials undergo opens up a world of new possibilities.” Though curiosity and play drives forth the seemingly impossible, it also is a response to urgency. Documenting and archiving culture—especially when threatened by conflict—is a serious challenge, and Factum's Frontline Initiative, due to begin work in Mosul shortly, is one example. “We need to ensure this work is carried out for the benefit of future generations,” says Lowe. “It is essential that we transfer skills and technologies to local communities, making them responsible for looking after the object.” It is also critical that those responsible for the artefact own that data. “At present copyright law gives ownership to the person collecting the data—this must change to insure any future revenue benefits the preservation of cultural objects,” he asserts.

This resonates in the Arab world, where ongoing conflict has incited heritage destruction and a legion of contemporary artists responding to socio-political trauma. Factum provides a space for experimentation for artists and institutions from Saudi Arabia,

Lebanon, Egypt, Syria and more. Projects include a Factum-esque studio in Riyadh designed by Charlotte Skene Catling and Michele de Lucchi and commissioned by Misk, and on-going collaboration with Art Jameel tackling skill transfer. Arab artists such as Lara Baladi, Ahmed Mater, Manal Al Dowayan, Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige, and Arab Image Foundation founder, Akram Zaatari, have also worked with Factum's team of digital technicians. Hrair Sarkissian's *Final Flight* (2017) is a particularly moving commentary on displacement via a melancholy biological vehicle. Most recently seen at Factum Arte's booth at Masterpiece London 2018, seven skulls recreated from digital scans of an ibis referenced the remaining—now presumed extinct—Northern Bald Ibis specimens whose migratory routes were based in Palmyra.

Factum preserves evidence, neither reconstructing nor reformulating narratives. “By reading and understanding why something looks as it does you develop a deep understanding about the thing itself,” says Lowe. “Objects are very articulate—they communicate through the material evidence they embody and provide access to the thoughts of people who lived at different times, believed in different gods, had different social structures and philosophies. This is the importance of culture.” As Factum actively forges ahead in its vast involvement in artistic preservation via seemingly paradoxical authentic contemporary facsimiles, Lowe is realistic how the two are inextricably linked in the future of cultural production. “What is clear is that the ignorance about the work of others over time does not lead to good art,” states Lowe frankly. ■

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