Egyptian Art
Working with Sculpture
"Where are the mummies?" Haven't you asked this question when you've visited the Egyptian section of a museum? Almost everyone enjoys entering a world of stone gods, magic spells, sacred animals, priceless jewelry, and ancient kings hidden inside their mummy cases decorated with hieroglyphic [hi-row-GLIF-ik] symbols. It's a quiet world of mystery, almost like a tomb.

By 3,000 B.C. (30 centuries before the birth of Christ!), ancient Egypt had become a civilization. The first of its 30 ruling dynasties (the length of time one family was in power) was established, giving the Egyptians a central government. Hieroglyphs, a picture-based language, had been developed. Thanks to the rich soil beside the Nile River, the people farmed and prospered.

Three important periods stand out in Egyptian history — the Old Kingdom (3100-2290 B.C.), the Middle Kingdom (2100-1800 B.C.), and the New Kingdom (1580-1095 B.C.). It was during these three Kingdoms that the greatest Egyptian works of art were created. During the Old Kingdom, three great pyramids — which served as tombs for the Egyptian rulers — were built, along with a Great Sphinx to guard them. The builders used no forklifts, trucks, or bulldozers — every stone had to be hauled up, perhaps hundreds of feet, by men with ropes. Why did the Egyptians spend years creating these structures?

The answer lies in the nature of Egyptian religion. Many gods were worshiped — Ra, the sun god; Horus, the sky god; and Osiris [O-SIGH-russ], the god of the dead. The Egyptian King was the pharaoh [FAR-oh] and was regarded as the center of the world. Ancient Egyptians believed that Pharaoh would continue to live after death. It was believed that if his burial place was equipped with all the objects he had used during his life, he would be able to enjoy them in death. So, his tomb was filled with rich possessions — furniture, sculpture, painted scenes — everything he would need for his life after death.

Unfortunately, over the centuries, the pyramids were looted many times. In fact, most modern scientists had given up hoping to find an unplundered pharaoh's tomb — until 1922, that is. In that year, archeologist Howard Carter made his amazing discovery of the tomb of King Tutankhamen (Toot-an-KAHM-uhn). See pages 6-7. In this issue, you'll learn more about the ancient Egyptians. You'll also discover modern sculptors who work with ancient materials and you'll have a chance to sculpt your own piece of "Egyptian" jewelry.
The Great Sphinx is the oldest and possibly the most famous sculpture in the world. Sixty-five feet high and carved out of solid rock, the Sphinx has the body of a lion and the head of a man. His face is a portrait of the pharaoh buried in the pyramid seen in back.

Photo by Carl Purcell
What is it like to find yourself face-to-face with someone who lived thousands of years ago? If you’ve ever gazed at ancient Egyptian sculptures, you know that it’s a haunting experience. You feel almost as though you are in the presence of the spirits of long ago.

The Egyptians’ religious beliefs shaped their artistic style. They believed the soul of the dead person occupied the artistic representation, endowing it with everlasting life. That meant that all statues, paintings, sculptures, and low-reliefs (a sculpture with figures projecting outward from a flat background) had to be designed according to strict rules. For example, because social importance determined the size of the people depicted, the figure of Pharaoh had to be larger than that of anyone else. Every human figure had to be depicted as fully as possible. A frontal view alone would not be enough; neither would a profile. So the Egyptians combined the two and created a unique frontal style in which shoulders and body are seen from the front, while the legs and feet are seen from the side. The head is shown in profile, the eye is drawn as it would look seen from the front. (That way, the person would be able to “see.”) The stylized shapes in the low-relief (above right) done during the Old Kingdom are an example of frontality. This work shows the king about to strike an enemy while below, soldiers swim away. In three-dimensional Egyptian sculpture, the entire figure faces front. To create the statue on the left, the sculptor drew front and side views on a block of wood, then pieces were carved away until the front and sides met.

By the time of the Middle Kingdom, the Egyptians had developed an appreciation of art for its own beauty, rather than just for religious function or practical use. The hippopotamus sculpture on the opposite page was built up, or modeled from clay. Discovered in a tomb, it was intended to ward off real monsters. Yet the hippo’s round, playful quality makes it look more friendly than frightening. This small sculpture reveals the Egyptians’ love of the world and their hope of enjoying it after death.

Some of the most famous and remarkable pharaohs ruled during the New Kingdom. The most controversial pharaoh was Akhenaton [Ak-NOT-on], who began a new religion that worshipped only one god. Akhenaton encouraged a new, realistic style of art, as seen in the portrait of his wife at the bottom of page 5. Carved in limestone, this head seems much more “real” than previous Egyptian sculptures.

After Akhenaton, an 11-year-old boy became pharaoh. He died nine years later. He was so young, his tomb in the Valley of the Kings was comparatively small, and he and the tomb were quickly forgotten. In 1922, 3,200 years later, a team of archeologists located this tomb’s well-hidden door. As a result, this obscure pharaoh became the most famous Egyptian king of all time: Tutankhamen, or King Tut.
In this early low-relief sculpture, the Hawk god Horus (seen in the upper right) is a symbol for the large figure of the Pharaoh (center). Pharaoh rules Egypt by standing on top of its plants and people.

Palette of King Narmer, II Dynasty, Old Kingdom. Cairo Museum.

The famous and highly realistic portrait below is that of Nefertiti (neh-fur-TI-ti), Pharaoh Akhenaton’s wife. The curves of her face are as lifelike as a modern photograph.


Do the sculptures on these pages look three thousand years old?

Compare this small, playful clay hippo painted a bright green with the other Egyptian sculptures shown in this issue.

Hippopotamus. Ceramics Faience. Middle Kingdom, XII Dynasty. Metropolitan Museum of Art, N.Y.
Isn't it about time, people during the early 1900s wondered, for Howard Carter to give up? No one thought the Valley of the Kings [where the pharaohs are buried, near Cairo] still held much of value. All the major pharaohs had been located. Their tombs had been looted but many treasures had been found. More remains of ancient Egyptian civilization had come to light in the 19th century, as archeology became a strict science. What could be left?

Archeologist Howard Carter had decided in 1907 that Pharaoh Tutankhamen's tomb still existed. Most scholars disagreed. Tutankhamen's tomb had probably been totally destroyed, and looking for it would be a waste of time. Carter had to wait out World War I (1914-18) before he could begin his exploration. Then he
worked for four years and found nothing. Finally, Carter's sponsor Lord Carnarvon, who was financing the project, had had enough and called off the search. Carter begged for one more season, claiming there was a small spot still unexplored. Carnarvon reluctantly agreed to his request.

On November 5, 1922, a rock that was thought to be a step was found. Further digging revealed a staircase — with a door at the end. Carter made a small hole in the top of the door, looked in, and saw the beginning of a passageway filled with sand and stones. He ordered everything sealed up again and posted a guard. Further investigation would go on when Lord Carnarvon arrived from England.

On November 23, Carter once again stood before the door. He made another hole, lit a candle, and looked in. "As my eyes grew accustomed to the light, details of the room emerged slowly from the darkness: strange animals, statues, and everywhere the glint of gold. When Lord Carnarvon inquired anxiously, 'Can you see anything?' it was all I could do to get out the words, 'Yes, wonderful things.'"

The first of the four rooms that made up the tomb was the antechamber. It was a complete shambles. Parts of thrones, vases, chariots, and jeweled boxes lay in heaps. Carter concluded that the tomb had been robbed right after the pharaoh's burial. The robbers had to move quickly, taking only the most portable objects. Fortunately, many treasures had been left behind.

By February, the antechamber had been cleared and Carter finally was ready to open the burial chamber. No one knew what they would find. On February 17 at 2 p.m., hundreds of people crowded outside around the tomb. Its discovery had captivated the world — songs were being sung and jokes were told about "King Tut." Objects removed from the antechamber had already influenced women's fashion and jewelry.

Once inside the burial chamber, Carter found a gold shrine that nearly filled the whole room. Inside it was another, inside that, another. Inside the third shrine lay the sarcophagus (stone coffin). The team opened the three nested coffins inside the sarcophagus. Each cover featured a sculpted relief of the young pharaoh. The innermost coffin (photo above) was solid gold. On Tutankhamen's "face" lay a withered wreath of little flowers. Had it been put there by his grieving widow? They opened the last coffin and, under a gold face mask (cover), was the linen-wrapped mummy of King Tut, last seen 3,200 years ago.

Newspapers soon began spreading rumors about "King Tut's Curse." They claimed that the pharaoh would destroy anyone who disturbed his tomb. This kind of talk reached a high pitch when, soon after the discovery, Lord Carnarvon died of an infected mosquito bite. However, "King Tut" was certainly not angry with Howard Carter, who lived a long life enriched by the memory of "seeing wonderful things."

Howard Carter working on the solid gold coffin that contained the mummy of King Tut.

Photo by Harry Burton. Metropolitan Museum of Art, N. Y.

A long passageway led into the antechamber. A stone wall separated the burial chamber from the rest of the tomb.
"You live again,
you live forever,
here you are young
once more forever."

FROM THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN EMBALMING CEREMONY

MASTERPIECE
OF THE
MONTH #3
Sculptors of Today: A subway station, a sled, and a seated figure. How do these three modern sculptures remind you of Egyptian art?

Urban Tombs

When contemporary American sculptor Donna Dennis was young, she liked to visit the Egyptian section of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. As she walked through the reconstructed temples and tombs, she especially liked the blocked doorways that the ancient Egyptians believed connected the world of the living with the world of the dead. Twenty years later, the artist began making sculptural environments. The most elaborate and best known of these environments is called Deep Station (below), a slightly smaller than life-size painted wood and metal version of a city subway station. When the viewer walks into this dark, mysterious, lonely underground sculpture, all kinds of feelings and fears are brought up. The negative and positive spaces created by the arches, gates, tunnels, doors, passageways, and stairs create a sense of tension: Which doors will open; which won’t? Who will be coming out of the darkness, and from which direction? How many will there be? Standing in Deep Station produces the kind of anticipation of a journey into the unknown that the ancient Egyptians might have felt while preparing Pharaoh’s tomb for his journey into the world of the dead.

How can a modern subway station be like Egyptian sculpture?

Magical Objects

What kind of a sculpture is the work on the left — a sled with a blanket and a flashlight strapped to it? The sculptures of 20th-century German artist Joseph Beuys [Bise] take the form of objects, but they are really sculptures of ideas. As you’ve seen in this issue, ancient Egyptian art was not created for the same purpose that most modern art is created — as a means of self-expression. The Egyptian art shown is this issue was done for religious or practical reasons. Their art was directly connected to the lives of the Egyptians. Joseph Beuys, whose works have included performances and political gatherings, feels that modern civilization depends too much on logical thinking. In his art he emphasizes myth, magic and ritual, inventing an elaborate system to show the connections between humans and the environment. This primitive wooden sled is based on the artist’s own experience of being in a plane crash and surviving an arctic winter. The warmth, light, and food needed for survival are symbolized by a piece of fat, a blanket, and a flashlight.

For the artist, this simple sled is a symbol of his connection to nature.

Joseph Beuys (1921-1986).

The solid dignity of this seated figure echoes sculptures of ancient Egyptian queens.

Elizabeth Catlett (b. 1919). Tired, 1940. 14" X 8" X 8". Howard University.

Timeless Figures

Compare the sculpture on the right by contemporary American artist Elizabeth Catlett with the ancient Egyptian sculptures shown on pages 4-5 of this issue. The simplified, basic, geometric forms in these works give them all a solid, monumental feeling. And, like the Egyptians, Catlett works directly with basic materials — stone, wood, and clay. The artist has said, “I enjoy the beauty of materials. I love to see the grain of the wood assert itself and become integrated in the work. I like to polish the stone to bring out its beauty.” Her wood and stone sculptures are carved, but this figure — like the hippopotamus on page 5 — has been modeled in clay, then fired, or heated to a high temperature, to harden it. However, unlike the Egyptian artists, Elizabeth Catlett has a modern message she wishes to communicate in her sculptures — the quiet strength and dignity of black women. This work, titled Tired, is a specific figure, but the woman’s masklike face and powerful, simplified form have made her a universal symbol of strength and endurance.
Jay Burke: SCULPTING IN STONE

The carefully carved monkey's head shown in the photo on the right sits serenely on a neck of steel which balances on a block of wood. Who would think that originally this monkey was meant to be a sculpture of a bird? We talked to the artist, 18-year-old Jay Burke (left) of Dartmouth, Massachusetts, about the long, slow, gradual process he went through to turn a rough lump of stone into this finished sculpture. He created his Scholastic Art Award-winning piece last spring during his senior year at Dartmouth High School.

Currently a freshman at the University of Notre Dame, Jay is planning to major in architecture. In his spare time, he enjoys playing sports, especially hockey and running cross-country.

Jay Burke begins a new sculpture by "rouging out" the basic shape from a piece of stone.

How long have you been involved in art?
Ever since I was a little kid, but I was never all that talented. In high school I couldn't take art until my senior year. But I had taken some art classes during the summer so I was able to get into the Art Portfolio class.

How did you happen to do this sculpture?
We started working on our own projects. I wandered around the art room for a couple of days, not doing much, waiting to get inspired. I walked in one day and another student was chipping away at a stone. I thought that looked like fun. Stone sculpting was something I'd never done before. So I talked to the teacher and she let me start one.

The stone she gave me was rounded with a bump on one side. She told me to look at the basic shape to see what I could see in it. So I took a day and just looked at it. I didn't see much at first. The natural shape it had made me want to do something animal-like. The more I looked at it, the more I seemed to see a bird.

How did you begin?
I took out my tools — a hammer, chisels, and a sculpting wedge to scrape out the stone. And I started taking off the rough parts with a hammer and chisel, until I got the right proportions. But by then, it didn't look much like a
bird. I happened to look at an old National Geographic with a
monkey on the cover and I thought, “That’s what I’ll
make.” Getting the general shape took the most time.

**How did you do the individual features?**

I started on the parts I felt most confident in doing. I looked at
monkey noses and worked that area. Then I shaved off the
jaw, leaving a little extra stone for the lips. After that, I
studied the bone structure of the eyes. There was a lot of
decision-making in this sculpture. And once I decided, there was no
turning back. I couldn’t take the powder off the ground and put it back on
his face. A lot of the work was
also by chance. I was
compromising with the stone
and the stone was
compromising with me until we
reached a final agreement.

**How was it working with soapstone?**

I had to be very careful because
soapstone is so soft. If you hit it
too hard, big pieces fall off.
The sculpture ended up much
smaller than it was to begin
with. I had to carve very, very
slowly when I was working on
the features. I found I would
avoid certain sections because I
didn’t want to make any
mistakes. The ears were two
little blocks but came off at the
end. Sometimes I’d work on
the sculpture for a few minutes
and I’d have to take a break. I
was afraid if I did anything else
I’d ruin it. Or maybe I’d take a
day and look at pictures of
monkeys or just think about
what I wanted to do. Other
times I’d work for hours
straight. I was really inspired to
do the sculpture, and that made
me want to work on it.

**There was a lot of decision-making in this sculpture. And once I decided, there was no turning back. I
couldn’t take the powder off the ground and put it back on his face.**

**How did you polish the stone?**

I used sandpaper and water. It
took three or four days. As I
was chiseling off some of the
original stone, I realized the
chipped texture looked more
like fur. All that chipping and
sanding left a lot of powder in
the fur. I could have washed it
off, but I liked the contrast, the
way it made the fur look white.
The toughest part for me was
deciding I was finished. I
had been chipping away for a
month. When do you sand the
last piece and say, “I’m done”? Just
so now I had this head and I
had no idea what to do with it.
Somebody suggested putting it
on a wooden plaque like a
trophy, but I wanted to be able
to see it from all sides. Then
my teacher brought in a block
of wood and said maybe I could
do something with that. We
went to the metal shop and
found a thin pipe. So I drilled
some holes and put it all
together. It’s almost as if the
pipe is a kind of neck, and the
wood block suggests the body.

**Were you satisfied with the head?**

Once I got over the errors, I
was happy with it. It was my
first sculpture in stone. And,
this monkey practically got me
into the school I wanted. I owe
him a lot.

**What advice can you give about sculpture?**

Don’t rush. Take it slowly — it’s not something
you can do in a week. With
sculpture, you need so much
time to work things out. To be
honest, I think if I tried
another one, I wouldn’t have
the patience. I might try to go
too fast. I was lucky to have
the teachers I did. They gave
me the time I needed.

We select our Artist
of the Month only from
among students who
have won medals in the
current Scholastic Art
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SCULPTING ‘EGYPTIAN’ JEWELRY

Create a unique piece of jewelry using ancient Egyptian techniques.

The pyramids, the Great Sphinx, King Tut's tomb: These are probably the images that come to most people's minds when they think of ancient Egypt. In this issue, you found out how the Egyptians built gigantic monuments out of solid rock. These constructions, dedicated to the gods and the pharaoh, were very heroic and awe-inspiring. But the Egyptians also had a less serious side, as can be seen in some of the small objects found in ancient tombs — lamps, furniture, dishes, toys, games, and all kinds of jewelry. Necklaces, rings, and bracelets were carefully designed by Egyptian artists for the pharaoh to wear in the afterlife. In this workshop, you'll work with an ancient Egyptian material — clay — and technique — low-relief sculpture — to create a pin you can wear yourself or give to someone.


Materials

- Clay (self-hardening or firing)
- Primary and secondary acrylic paint or glazes
- Assortment of small brushes
- Palette for mixing paint
- Water container
- Toweling
- Clasp pin backs
- Flexible cement (for attaching pin to clay)
- Incising needles
- Sheet fabric
- One-inch dowel rods for rolling out clay
- 12'' x ½'' x ½'' pieces of wood
- Found objects (to press into clay)
- Plastic wrap to store moist clay

When you mix and wedge the clay, you can use a dowel rod to roll out a slab of clay.
Starting Out

Step 1: Mix clay and wedge it to remove air pockets. Roll 10" x 10" slab (on fabric to prevent clay from sticking to table) with dowel rod. Slab should be no thicker than ¼". Use two pieces of wood on each side to keep clay uniformly thick.

Step 2

Measure and carefully cut clay into small squares using incising needle. Each piece should be no larger than 2" x 2" or smaller than 1" x 1".

Step 3

Using your found object, stamp its shape into the clay. You can repeat your shape, stamp lightly or heavily, incise other lines on the shape, rotate the pin while stamping, or use your shape as a pattern. Let piece dry thoroughly, then paint with acrylics.

Optional: Fire clay slowly to prevent blowouts or cracking. Glaze the piece and fire again. Attach clasp pin on back with flexible permanent adhesive.

Some Solutions

What overall format do you want your pin to be — square, rectangular, or even circular? When you stamp the low-relief designs into the pin, will you emphasize line, texture, shape, repetition, or negative/positive images? Will you balance the large and small shapes, will you use geometric (straight) or organic (rounded) shapes, or will you emphasize one main center of interest? Will you use bright colors, light tints, dark shades, or no color at all when you paint or glaze the pin?
Ancient Egypt is still alive today.

Egyptian Souvenirs

If there were a souvenir stand near the Great Sphinx (see photo on page 3), do you think they might be selling little sphinxes like the ones in the sculpture on the right? In this work, called Metropolitan Egypt, British sculptor Edward Allington takes a figure associated with ancient Egypt and repeats it so that the sphinxes appear to be rolling off an assembly line. The sphinx loses its sense of permanence and splendor when seen in this small, plaster version. Instead, it resembles a dust-collecting souvenir that may eventually break or be thrown away. Allington says his guiding principle is “rememering where your feet are,” or accepting our position in history. When he borrows art forms from past cultures, he comments on what they mean today, rather than on their original meaning. In Metropolitan Egypt, the artist may be suggesting that an object that once held great significance in an ancient civilization has become trivial through mass-production. One of the “seven wonders of the ancient world” has become no more important than an ordinary paperweight.

High-Tech Pyramid

Chinese-American architect I.M. Pei [Pay] brings the past into the present by building an ancient Egyptian pyramid in new, high-tech materials. Pei’s recently completed glass pyramid (left) is the new main entrance to the Louvre [LOOV-ruh] museum in Paris. The cables were handcrafted, using the latest in aerospace technology. Special high-strength, optical-quality glass was used to give the structure a sense of transparency and visual lightness.

The Louvre was originally a palace for the kings of France. It now houses one of the world’s largest and most important art collections, containing over a million works. Pei’s pyramid is the first modern addition to the Louvre. Many people have been annoyed and puzzled by the combination of this high-tech pyramid and the surrounding 19th-century buildings. However, Michel Laclotte [LAH-LOHT], director of the Louvre, says, “Once you are inside the pyramid, you will understand everything. The 19th-century buildings are seen through the glass, looking almost like part of the pyramid.” Pei’s structure seems to remind us that no matter how it changes, the Louvre will endure far into the future, just as the ancient Egyptian pyramids have. — S.B.