Ancient Egypt Art and Magic
Treasuries from the Fondation Gandour pour l’Art
December 17, 2011 - April 29, 2012

The purpose of the Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg, is to increase and diffuse knowledge and appreciation of art, to collect and preserve objects of artistic interest and merit, to provide facilities for research and to offer instruction and opportunities for aesthetic enjoyment of art.

Open to the public in 1965, the Museum is dedicated to serving all people by pursuing excellence in art from antiquity to the present through collection, exhibitions and education for its diverse audiences. The Museum has an encyclopedic collection of art from around the globe and across the centuries. The approximately 18,000 objects include works by Monet, Gauguin, Rembrandt, Monet, Cézanne, Rodin, O’Keeffe and many others. Also on view are ancient Greek and Roman, Asian, African, pre-Columbian and Native American art. The Museum’s photography collection of more than 12,000 images is one of the largest and most significant in the Southeast. Two interior gardens, one devoted to sculpture, encourage reflections.

Education programs at the Museum are made possible, in part, by the Margaret Acheson Stuart Society. For more information about the Museum, visit fine-arts.org.

Ancient Egypt Art and Magic from the Fondation Gandour pour l’Art is sponsored by Progress Energy Florida (presenting sponsor), the Stuart Society of the Museum of Fine Arts (premieer sponsor) and the St. Petersburg Times (media sponsor). The official host hotel is the Renaissance St. Pete Resort and Golf Club. Additional support has been provided by Bright House Networks.

About the Exhibition
Jean Claude Gandour is one of the world’s most generous philanthropists and art collectors. He spent his childhood in Alexandria, Egypt, where he learned Arabic, became aware of other cultures and acquired his great passion for Egyptian antiquities. In 2010, he established the Fondation Gandour pour l’Art and formed a partnership with the Musée d’Art et de Histoire, Geneva, which has the largest public collection of antiquities in Switzerland.

The Fondation Gandour pour l’Art, based in Geneva, Switzerland, is a non-profit organization dedicated to furthering cultural education and understanding through the enhancement of public access to its world-renowned art collections.

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Ancient Egyptian religion

Ancient Egyptian religion was polytheistic and included complex beliefs about the afterlife. There were hundreds of gods and goddesses. Two of the most important were the sun god, Ra, and Osiris, ruler of the underworld. Egyptian gods could take many forms, including animal forms and mixed forms with an animal head on a human body. Although they were much more powerful than human beings, ancient Egyptian gods were not all good or all evil. Worshipping. The Egyptian pharaoh occupied an intermediary position between humanity and the gods.

To the ancient Egyptians, their world (the gods, the king, humanity and the dead) existed as an island of order, or Maat, surrounded by disorder or chaos. It was the job of the pharaoh to maintain Maat so that Egypt would remain peaceful and prosperous.

Ancient Egyptian social structure

Ancient Egyptian society consisted of a descending hierarchy of the gods, the king, the blessed dead and humanity. Class structure in ancient Egypt was rigid. Below the pharaoh were the nobility, professional classes, and only about 1 percent of the population belonged to the elite (noble or educated professionals, artisans and workers, servants and farmers, and slaves. Less than 10 percent of the population belonged to the elite (noble or professional) classes, and only about 1 percent of the population could read and write. Unlike the majority of the ancient world, women in ancient Egypt had the same legal status as men.

Hieroglyphic writing is a system that employs characters in the form of pictures. Each individual hieroglyph may represent an object or one or more sounds in the language. The word “Hieroglyph” comes from the ancient Greek phrase for sacred carving because many hieroglyphic inscriptions are found in temples or tombs. According to ancient Egyptian tradition, hieroglyphic writing was introduced by Thoth, the god of writing and patron of scribes. The hieroglyphic system was used by the Egyptians for thousands of years.

The oldest hieroglyphic date from the fourth millennium BC, while the last datable inscription was carved in the Gateway of the Roman Emperor Hadrian on the island of Pharos in AD 204 by a priest, probably named Emet-akhamt. With his death, the secret of the hieroglyphs was lost until the nineteenth century.

Hieroglyphic inscriptions are typically written right to left and arranged in rows or columns on a neutral background. The actual size of objects in the real world has no significance in hieroglyphic inscriptions. Instead, the larger the hieroglyphic depiction of an object, the more important it is.

Although hieroglyphs are often beautiful, they were primarily used for commemorative purposes. Hieroglyphs were not concerned with creating the essence of real-world objects and could be invoked for positive or negative purposes. What are some modern-day objects or texts that have symbolic properties? Hint: Think about national symbols such as historic documents or flags, or jewelry such as wedding rings. Research one of these symbols using the media. Write a news scavenger hunt. See if you can find these words in the sentences around them. Write down your best guess, and then circle words you don’t know. Try to figure out the words’ meanings by looking the words up in a dictionary. As a group activity, make a list of the words students identified and see which ones the class guessed correctly.

MFA will be holding a variety of events in conjunction with the exhibition.

Some highlights include:

- Ancient Egypt – Art and Magic Family Day Saturday, December 17, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
  Sponsored by Franklin Templeton Investments
  Included with museum admission
  Hands-on activities and performances for children and parents. Designer Hieroglyph to discover the museum, create a cartouche-inspired ornament, make your own pyramid and more

- Ancient Egypt – Art and Magic Lecture Sunday, December 18, 3 p.m.
  Included with museum admission
  Distinguished scholar Dr. Robert Steven Bianchi introduces Ancient Egypt – Art and Magic, the pioneering exhibition he curated. Dr. Bianchi is known for bringing these objects and their culture vividly alive. Stelae: a funerary figure to assist the dead in the afterlife

- Ancient Egypt – Art and Magic Educator Workshop Tuesday, January 31, 5:30-8:30 p.m.
  Workshop for Tampa Bay area educators, held in conjunction with the St. Petersburg Times Newspaper in Education program.

Visit FineArts.org for more details and the complete listing of events.

Vocabulary

Amulet: a charm (as an ornament) often inscribed with a magic incantation or symbol to aid the wearer or protect against evil (as disease or magic)

Cartouche: an oval or oblong figure (as on ancient Egyptian monuments) enclosing a sovereign’s name

Dynasty: a succession of rulers of the same line of descent

Hieroglyphic writing: a system that employs characters in the form of pictures

Papyrus: the pith of the papyrus plant, especially when made into strips and pressed into a material to write on

Pharaoh: a ruler of ancient Egypt

Polytheism: belief in or worship of more than one god

Sarcophagus: a stone coffin

Shabbat: a funerary figure to assist the dead in the afterlife

Sphinx: an ancient Egyptian image in the form of a recumbent lion having a man’s head, a ram’s head or a hawk’s head

Stele: a usually carved or inscribed stone slab or pillar used for commemorative purposes

Learning new words

When you study new things, you often come up against some tough vocabulary words! Most vocabulary words are learned from context clues or good old-fashioned dictionary work. While you read this post, be sure to highlight or circle words you don’t know. Try to figure out the words’ meanings by looking for clues in the sentences around them. Write down your best guess, and then look the words up in a dictionary. As a group activity, make a list of the words students identified and see which ones the class guessed correctly. Next, use these words for a news scavenger hunt. See if you can find these words in the St. Petersburg Times. The group that finds the most words wins the game.
Ancient Egypt — A Brief Chronology

4000-3200 BC

- The Predynastic Period

3200-2660 BC

- Dynasty 0

2955-2635 BC

- The Early Dynastic Period

2635-2180 BC

- The Old Kingdom

2180-2000 BC

- The First Intermediate Period

2000-1650 BC

- The Second Intermediate Period

1650-1300 BC

- The Third Intermediate Period

1300-1050 BC

- Dynasty XXVI, 664–525 BC

1050-720 BC

- Dynasty XXVII–XXVIII

720-305 BC

- The New Kingdom

305-30 BC

- The Late Period

30 BC

- The Ptolemaic Period

30 BC

- The Roman Imperial Period Begins

- The First Intermediate Period, 2635–2155 BC

- The Second Intermediate Period, 2155–1650 BC

- The Old Kingdom, 2635–2155 BC

- The First Intermediate Period, 2155–2000 BC

- The Middle Kingdom, 2000–1650 BC

- The Second Intermediate Period, 1650–1300 BC

- The Third Intermediate Period, 1300–1050 BC

- Dynasty XXVI, 664–525 BC

- Dynasty XXVII–XXVIII, 1050–720 BC

- Dynasty XXVII–XXVIII, 720–306 BC

- Dynasty XXIX, reign of Psamtek

- Dynasty XXX, reign of Psamtek

- Dynasty XXXI

- Dynasty XXXII

- Dynasty XXXIII

- Dynasty XXXIV

- Dynasty XXXV

- Dynasty XXXVI

- Dynasty XXXVII

- Dynasty XXXVIII

- Dynasty XXXIX

- Dynasty XXX

- Dynasty XIX, reign of pharaoh

- Dynasty XIX, reign of Psamtek

- Dynasty XX, reign of Psamtek

- Dynasty XXI, reign of Psamtek

- Dynasty XXII

- Dynasty XXIII

- Dynasty XXIV

- Dynasty XXV

- Dynasty XXVI

- Dynasty XXVII

- Dynasty XXVIII

- Dynasty XXIX

- Dynasty XXX

- Dynasty XXXI

- Dynasty XXXII

- Dynasty XXXIII

- Dynasty XXXIV

- Dynasty XXXV

- Dynasty XXXVI

- Dynasty XXXVII

- Dynasty XXXVIII

- Dynasty XXXIX

- Dynasty XXX

- Dynasty XIX

- Dynasty X

- Dynasty IX

- Dynasty VIII

- Dynasty VII

- Dynasty VI

- Dynasty V

- Dynasty IV

- Dynasty III

- Dynasty II

- Dynasty I

- Dynasty 0

- The Predynastic Period

Research activity

Find Egypt on a map. Locate the main cities and bodies of water so you can reference them in your research. Research one of these works of art or time periods to learn more about it. Write a brief research paper about the information you find. Be sure to write your paper in proper essay form and document all of your sources. Present the information to your class in an oral presentation.