

Paper Mache for 10-24-25 by David Read

I was always fascinated by stories of the pharaohs of ancient Egypt and especially those of the iconic boy king, Tutankhamun. I even wrote a paper in middle school about the discovery of his tomb in 1922 by Howard Carter as if it were a current event being shown live on TV narrated by then CBS news anchor, Walter Cronkite. Am I dating myself? Recently, I was thinking back to when, while living in Los Angeles, King Tutankhamun came to town. The exhibition “Treasures of Tutankhamun” appeared at the L.A. County Museum of Art in 1978. It is widely cited as a landmark “blockbuster” in U.S. museum history, and one of the early cases where crowd-control, advance ticketing and timed-entry methods were used. I was as excited to acquire those tickets as I was a few years later when I was able to purchase tickets to the 1984 Olympics! The joys of living in the big city! There it was right before me, the solid gold burial mask of the boy king adorned with lots of lapis lazuli along with all the other royal accoutrement, funerary objects and personal possessions. The artistry and craftsmanship involved in creating those objects 3,500 years ago is hard to comprehend. It was breathtaking to see in person and well worth the long wait to get into the museum.

I just read about a new major exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York titled *Divine Egypt*. The 250 artifacts on display offer a compelling artistic exploration of other Egyptian antiquities through the lens of divinity. The show traces how the Egyptians crafted an intricate iconographic language to represent over a millennium of belief, ritual and artistic practice. One of the most significant contributions of the exhibition is its clear focus on how representation is not simply decorative but deeply embedded in meaning. Through statues, reliefs, miniature figurines and ritual objects, visitors encounter deities like Horus, Ra and Osiris, each rendered with visual cues—animal heads, crowns, gestures—that represent their divine roles. I was interested to read that the show focuses on 25 key deities among the 1,500+ known Egyptian deities and distills all those gods into a more graspable but still rich set of narratives.

Artistically, *Divine Egypt* demonstrates several things. Continuity and change over three millennia of Egyptian art are featured as the same themes (creation, kingship, afterlife) shown in different dynasties, while the visual vocabulary evolves. It places art in both ritual settings and daily life. Objects displayed are not only temple statues for pharaohs but also private devotional items, showing how ordinary people participated in the divine through art. The exhibition invites the modern viewer to recognize parallels: the makers of these works used images to grapple with big questions about life, death, power and protection.

Why does any of this matter? While ancient Egyptian art is widely celebrated for its technical mastery and iconic imagery, this show apparently shifts the emphasis toward what the art does: it acts, mediates, and communicates. The artistic significance lies not just in materials (gold, ceramics, limestone) or monumental scale, but in the way image and belief intertwine. I am sure there are parallels in the iconography of Christianity and other belief systems. Visitors are encouraged to think beyond “this is a beautiful statue” to “this is an active representation of a god, a protector, a force.” I like it. In doing so, *Divine Egypt* offers a richer, more layered appreciation of Egyptian art as a system of expression that is theological, social, political and aesthetic all at once. It reminds us that art is rarely neutral—and in this case, art is a bridge between humans and the divine. Time to plan a trip to New York, if not Egypt.