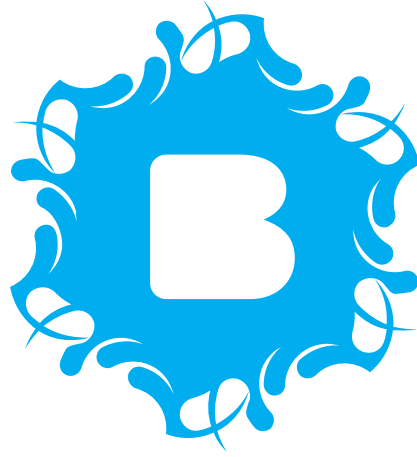


Press Release



December 2008

Brooklyn Museum Presents Exhibition of Genuine and Fake Late Antique Egyptian Sculpture

Unearthing the Truth: Egypt's Pagan and Coptic Sculpture on View February 13 through May 10, 2009

An exhibition of thirty works from the Brooklyn Museum's permanent collection of Late Antique Egyptian stone sculptures (395–642 A.D.) that includes several examples of reworked or repainted works and some that appear to be modern forgeries, will be on view beginning February 13, 2008.

These ancient sculptures were carved from a soft Egyptian limestone and feature both pagan and Christian scenes and symbols. Some were tomb portraits of the deceased, other carvings decorated the tomb and were used in pagan and Christian cemeteries and in Christian churches and monasteries. The term Coptic, which describes some of the pieces, denotes the main and original branch of Christianity in Egypt.

Late Antique Egyptian sculpture was little known when it began to appear on the market shortly after World War II and into the 1960s and 1970s. At that time a number of pieces were acquired by the Brooklyn Museum. Gradually some scholars began to realize that the examples now in museums in both Europe and the United States included many modern imposters, but a comprehensive study has yet to be undertaken. Many experts believe that some of the forgeries were created upon remnants of ancient pieces and that very few pieces remain as they were originally produced in the period.

For a review of the Brooklyn Museum's pieces, Curator of Egyptian Art Edna R. Russmann joined a number of outside authorities on Coptic art and on the sources of Egyptian stone. Much of that work is still ongoing. This exhibition focuses on the work done so far, and especially on the stylistic characteristics of the works, both ancient and modern.

The examples of the modern imitations are quite ambitious in scale and complexity and often depict unusual subjects and themes. Among the forgeries on view will be a female bust purporting to be Holy Wisdom holding an orb and staff; a limestone relief of the paralytic healed by Christ; and a sculpture depicting the Holy Family. What is striking about the fakes is that they place a greater emphasis on Christian iconography than the authentic works—a reflection of market demand for such imagery in Europe and North America.

Brooklyn Museum

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The authentic sculptures include the bust of an unnamed Christian saint with a halo and holding a cross; part of a funerary relief representing the Nile god with his consort, the Earth goddess; and a funerary stela made for a three-year-old boy, the son of a Roman soldier who was stationed in Egypt.

The exhibition's curator, Edna R. Russmann, states, "It is my hope that by displaying the fakes alongside the genuine works, visitors will gain an understanding into how museums authenticate their collections and gain a better appreciation of the real Coptic art."

Unearthing the Truth: Egypt's Pagan and Coptic Sculpture is organized by Edna R. Russmann, Curator of Egyptian, Classical, and Ancient Middle Eastern Art, Brooklyn Museum.

A variety of public programs will be presented in conjunction with the exhibition. For more information visit www.brooklynmuseum.org.

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GENERAL INFORMATION

Admission:

Contribution \$8; students with valid I.D. and older adults \$4. Free to Members and children under 12 accompanied by an adult. Group tours or visits must be arranged in advance by calling extension 234.

Directions:

Subway: Seventh Avenue express (2 or 3) to Eastern Parkway/Brooklyn Museum stop; Lexington Avenue express (4 or 5) to Nevins Street, cross platform and transfer to the 2 or 3. Bus: B71, B41, B69, B48.

On-site parking available.

Museum Hours:

Wednesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; First Saturday of each month, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.; all other Saturdays, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.