

Shotgun Review

Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh at DeYoung Museum

by Chris Sollars

During the Taliban rule in Afghanistan, large carved Buddhist sculptures on cliff walls were desecrated. Photos documenting the Buddhas before and after their destruction were featured in the exhibit Afghanistan: A Timeless History that I saw at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston in 2002. The exhibition was introduced with a statement and photo of first Lady Laura Bush presenting how the US Invasion and Presence in Afghanistan has allowed the saving and protection of many more of this culture's works. Leap ahead to spring 2003 when the Iraq National Museum was left unguarded by US Troops after the invasion of Iraq, holding one-of-a-kind relics from the origins of civilization completely destroyed or taken by looters. Think of continuous character desecration in the United States with McCarthyism; Democratic and Republican ad campaigns; and the destruction of an individual's or social group's public image for the purpose of control and regaining power. Those in power have the option to rewrite history as they see fit. Howard Zinn references this within The People's History of the United States and the exhibition Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh, shows some examples of this centuries before Christ.

Relevant to current events, the new De Young Museum kicks off its first exhibition with Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh, organized by the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York which will also travel to the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, TX. The show according to the De Young "highlights the art created during the glorious reign of the female pharaoh Hatshepsut, who shared Egypt's throne for nearly two decades in the early New Kingdom as senior co-ruler with her nephew, Thutmose III." Some sources suggest Hatshepsut possibly used force to take the throne from her nephew Thutmose III, but this has never been completely confirmed. Regardless, all images of Hatshepsut as king were destroyed or erased from history after her reign, as the depictions of Hatshepsut as queen remained untouched.

As pharaoh Hatshepsut initiated building projects that were grander and more numerous than those of any of her New Kingdom predecessors. The masterpiece of her building projects was her mortuary temple complex at Deir el-Bahri, from which most of the important statuary in this exhibition come from. The show focuses on Hatshepsut reign (ca. 1479-1458 BC) the art and architecture, the phenomenon of a woman ruling in a patriarchal society, and the eventual destruction of Hatshepsut's monuments by Tuthmosis III. Twenty years after Hatshepsut's death Thutmose III issued a sanctioned program to destroy her monuments through smashing or re-appropriating them for himself, his father Thutmose II, or his grandfather Thutmose I which lead to her omission from later recorded king lists. Those in power have the option to rewrite history as they see fit.

Some of the show's short comings are due to the crowds and the display. If you have been to the De Young Museum, go early and go during the week. Weekends are maddening as it is very difficult to take in the work. Think Blockbuster museum show that packs em all in, which takes away from an intimate viewing experience of getting to walk 360 around the statues and actually being able to read the detailed cards. Instead you trip over a small child and have to climb the sarcophagus to read the label on the next Urn.

The entrance of the exhibition funnels in the crowds and starts with timelines that take us through Egyptian history, which combine to lose my patience. With the exception of the

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book-ending of smaller works made during Tuthmosis III's reign at the end of the exhibition, before opening up into the Treasured Gift Shop, parts of the display are scattered within a linear time structure. This fragmentation of linear time, lead me from important information regarding Hatshepsut's erasure early in the exhibition, to being overwhelmed by beautiful objects for a majority of the show mid-way, and returning to works of erasure towards the end. This caused me to run room to room to trace Hatshepsut's erasure.

This Erasure is first documented in a small sculpture "Senenmut Kneeling with Uraeus Cryptogram," made out of Metagraywacke which was later reworked. As a courtier of Hatshepsut, Senenmut's name has been carefully erased from all inscriptions on the statue. Other erasures include a "Relief Fragment with Hatshepsut," Recarved as Thutmose II; the "False Door of Thutmose I" in which a figure of Hatshepsut has been erased, surely at the order of Thutmose III, but her hand extended above the table still shows.



Marketing Egyptian Art to viewers, the treasures and riches of the time are targeted to an audience over its' content. This allows for more viewers to be drawn to the show and addressed with the show's content afterwards. Some statements describing Hatshepsut's reign as "a period of immense artistic creativity," are too broad and over arching for me as a viewer. I cannot completely see the differences or the worth of its refined craftsmanship from this time period over other periods of Egyptian Art without direct juxtaposition of works prior and post Hatshepsut's reign. Only through the merging of male and female canons during her reign, represented in a selection of works, do I start to see their value and artistry as it

produces an Androgynous Representation of the Pharaoh in Stone.

This merging of male and female canons to create the image of Hatshepsut as pharaoh was done through a series of combinations. "Head of Hatshepsut," reconstructed, from an eleven foot statue of her as the god Osiris. Osiris the Egyptian God of the dead and the underworld was a male figure that pharaohs often appropriated in their own image. Hatshepsut's head wears Osiris crown as the rest of the statue has been destroyed. "Hatshepsut as Female King," is quite an amazing statue even within the confines of Egyptian canon the carving of Hatshepsut's face is delicate and pays close attention to feminine features which gives an air to softness making it quite striking as she appropriates the nemes headdress worn by pharaohs.



Slowly the images of Hatshepsut shift from a combination of male and female representation to that of just male representation without breasts. "Hatshepsut Wearing the White Crown," depicts her in a masculine physique, beard, and kings garb. Kneeling in a ritual performed by the king, our only reference to Hatshepsut is her inscribed name and features similar to the other statues of her. The sphinx usually depicted with head of a pharaoh and uses masculine pronouns for the king. In "Hatshepsut as a Maned Sphinx," Hatshepsut replaces the male pharaoh head with her own and this sphinx uses feminine pronouns in its inscriptions. Other Hatshepsut statuary and objects in the exhibition continue using both masculine and feminine forms.

Most importantly this show presents us with works that go through the varying propaganda Hatshepsut uses through appropriating symbols of the king to control her image in solidifying her as the first Female Pharaoh in a patriarchal society. Then those patriarchal rulers in turn erasing her from history after her death. Ultimately the truth lies in the extent of documentation whether through art or letters. If there is enough of it, something will survive and shed light on the truth for future generations.

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