



CELEBRITY MUMMY: TUT'S A TOP PRIZE **Carlos Museum, though small, scores coup by bringing Boy King exhibit to Atlanta.**

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DATE: April 3, 2008

PUBLICATION: Atlanta Journal-Constitution, The (GA)

EDITION: Main; The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

SECTION: News

PAGE: A1

CORRECTION: 04/04/08, Page A/02: A story on Thursday's front page about this fall's King Tut exhibit in Atlanta had the incorrect phone number for group ticket sales. The number is 1-866-52GROUPS (866-524-7687).

Minutes after the champagne toast that concluded the Michael C. Carlos Museum's official announcement of the exhibit "Tutankhamun: The Golden King and the Great Pharaohs" this week, workers were already draping a 13-foot-tall banner on the Emory University museum's facade.

And why not? Tut is one of the most alluring names in the art biz. The term "blockbuster exhibit" was coined to describe the legendary 1976 show featuring the Boy King. "King Tutankhamun and the Golden Age of the Pharaoh" -- a completely different show organized by the same company, Arts and Exhibitions International -- has drawn more than a million visitors in both Los Angeles and Chicago, and it continues to tour.

Banking on such attendance numbers, Mark Vaughan, executive vice president of the Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau, estimates that Tut's six-month run here, from November through next May, could bring \$150 million to the city.

Though it will preside over the debut of this new Tut exhibit -- which includes sculptures, funerary objects, jewelry and furniture, Tut's golden sandals and the latest CT scans of his mummified remains -- the Carlos does not stand to get rich. The museum will earn a small percentage of the gate only after the millionth visitor pays for a ticket.

But it also hasn't had to put up any funding for the exhibit, and the name recognition Tut could bring it is, well, priceless.

The Carlos is, so far, the smallest museum to get a piece of the international Tut juggernaut, and the only university museum to do so. So how did this pipsqueak institution pull it off?

Friends and colleagues

It's all about whom you know. When it comes to ancient Egyptian artifacts, that would be Zahi Hawass, secretary general of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities, the gatekeeper for his country's vast legacy. When planning the tour with AEI, Hawass brought in the Carlos and suggested that the exhibition debut in Atlanta, AEI president John Norman said.

"Our ability to bring this exhibit here reflects Zahi's respect for Peter Lacovara [senior curator of ancient Egyptian, Nubian and Near Eastern Art]," Carlos director Bonnie Speed said.

Colleagues in the relatively small circles of Egyptologist/archaeologists, Hawass and Lacovara have been friends for more than 20 years.

Lacovara has strengthened those ties since joining the Carlos in 1998. He and Speed led the delegation that returned a royal mummy in the Carlos collection to Egypt in 2003. He and the staff recently helped Cairo's Egyptian Museum design and install a new display of its oldest objects.

"Returning the mummy was very important to Zahi," says David Silverman, a University of Pennsylvania professor who curated both the current "Tut" exhibit and the original 1976 blockbuster.

"It had a big impact."

When Hawass was at the Carlos to deliver a lecture soon after the new Tut show opened to great success in 2005, Lacovara asked if there was any way for his museum to be a venue.

"Zahi said, 'No, but I think I have something you might like better,' " Lacovara recalls.

Where to put it?

The curator surmises his friend was referring to the 2,000-year sweep of the new show, which puts the Tut material in a larger context. The objects are stellar, too, he says.

"They are pieces that any scholar would pick," he says. "They are beautiful, but they are also important."

The who-you-know scenario doesn't end there.

As Speed tells it, "When we got the word, we were so excited, and then we thought, 'Where are we going to show it?' "

Fortunately, developer Charles Ackerman, who is chairman of the Carlos' advisory board, has an option on the Civic Center property and knows it well. He brought the Carlos and the city together and persevered until a deal was struck to set up the show there.

"Without [him], we would never have hooked up," said Diane Harnell Cohen, commissioner of the Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs.

TICKETS

Group tickets are scheduled to go on sale soon. Individuals can register to purchase tickets now; they will be given priority. Individual tickets go on sale to the public in September. Call 214-922-1222 or 1-877-TUT-TKTS or go to KingTut.org.

Photo

SANDRO VANNINI / National Geographic

King Tut's sandals: The Boy King roamed the palace in footwear made of woven reeds. He stepped into the afterlife in this version, made of gold, which shod his mummified feet.

Photo

SANDRO VANNINI / National Geographic

This huge statue of Tutankhamun is one of the many King Tut relics coming to Atlanta. The finding of the pharaoh's treasure-laden tomb in the 1920s was one of the great moments in the history of archaeology.