The arts

Images from the opening of Tut’s tomb

By Catherine Fox

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Friday, November 14, 2008

Archaeologist Howard Carter inserted a candle through a hole in the wall that had blocked the entrance to Tutankhamun’s tomb for 3,000 years. The jumble of furniture, golden animal heads and alabaster vessels he glimpsed in the flickering light so enthralled him that, when his anxious patron asked him to describe what he saw, Carter could only reply, “wonderful things.”

So began the excavation of the greatest archaeological find in Egyptian history, and the fascination with Tut and the treasures of his tomb that continues to this day.

Harry Burton, the official photographer for the project, was with Carter every step of the way. He captured the awed expression on Carter’s face and documented the ensuing discoveries in three more rooms, including the gilded wooden shrine that held Tut’s remains in a series of nested coffins, including one of solid gold.

You can relive the experience by visiting “Wonderful Things,” the exhibit of his photos at the Carlos Museum. The photos are presented in sequence, beginning with majestic views of the Valley of the Kings, where the tomb was found. They show archaeology at its most exciting and most humdrum, from the revelation of the mummy to the dusting and wrapping of artifacts. All told, emptying the tomb took 10 years.

During the decade archaeologists spent removing more than 5,000 objects from the tomb, Burton also took individual photos of each object. The wonderfully crisp photographs yield a wealth of fascinating details, be it the desiccated wreathes on Tut’s mummified body or the elaborate reliefs on the base of a chariot. The images are all the more remarkable considering that he used a simple box camera and fragile glass plate negatives and worked in a studio set up in a nearby tomb.

Invaluable as documents for scholars and historians, the photos also played a key role in disseminating and burnishing the Tut mystique.

They appeared in newspaper accounts and the books that followed, and they were turned into stereopticon cards for popular consumption.
Whether or not you are under Tut’s spell, you’ll likely find that Burton’s photographs are, like the treasures they picture, wonderful things.

REVIEW

“Wonderful Things: The Harry Burton Photographs and the Discovery of the Tomb of Tutankhamun.”

Saturday through May 25, 2009. $7; $5 with Tut stub. 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Tuesdays-Saturdays; noon-5 p.m. Sundays.


www.carlos.emory.edu/wonderful-things

Bottom line: Fascinating.

More on ajc.com

- Egyptian artifacts familiar to readers of the Bible
- Archeologist creates guide relating King Tut exhibit to bible
- Fetuses in Tut's tomb get DNA tests
- Androgynous pharaoh? Akhenaten had feminine physique
- Q&A / ARCHEOLOGIST PETER LACOVARA: Tut's main man
- CELEBRITY MUMMY: TUT'S A TOP PRIZE
- New Tut exhibit to stop in Atlanta
- US museum head says Mexico should get Mayan jade
- Atlanta, how do you cope with stress? Vote
- Archeologists say they found witch doctor skeleton

Expand this list

Related Subjects

- Anthropology
- Archaeology
- Social and Behavioral Sciences
- Science and Technology
- King Tutankhamen
- Harry Burton
- Michael C. Carlos Museum

Expand this list

Find this article at:
http://www.ajc.com/services/content/printedition/2008/11/14/burton.html

Click to Print