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"TUTANKHAMUN: THE GOLDEN KING AND THE GREAT PHAROAHS"

## **King Tut exhibit impresses, educates**

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When the tomb of King Tutankhamun was discovered in 1922, Tutmania gripped the public like a fever. The temperature spiked again in the 1970s with the tour of "Treasures of Tutankhamun," which bypassed a disappointed Atlanta.

Get the cold compress ready: It's our turn now. "Tutankhamun: The Golden King and the Great Pharaohs," a new exhibition, begins its U.S. tour at the Civic Center on Sunday, and it's terrific.

Too often big exhibits intended for a broad audience are more Hollywood than art. Not this one. Yes, it's dramatic. Arts and Exhibitions International, the organizer, has deployed a full artillery of effects, from pinpoint lighting in darkened spaces to video fly-throughs, to create a memorable experience.

But never at the expense of the artifacts. The 130 objects from The Egyptian Museum in Cairo are the stars of the show, and they are top-notch. The museum and curator David Silverman worked together to select an array that represents the artistry and range of ancient Egyptian arts and crafts. Majestic pharaohs carved from obdurate stone. Vessels carved out of milky Egyptian alabaster. Birds fluttering in the marsh painted on a palace floor.

The objects tell a story, too. The exhibit is a TUTorial (to steal the Carlos Museum's term) on the pharaohs who ruled ancient Egypt. The roll call of mighty kings in the first gallery is followed by chapters on their courtiers, families, religious beliefs and, of course, their elaborate funerary rituals. Some examples:

- We mostly know the royals in their formal public personae, which — especially the two colossal statues in the show — project their dignity and power. Artifacts like the sarcophagus for a pet cat and the intimate relief of a princess eating a duck help humanize them. The award for the most up close and personal, however, goes to the limestone toilet seat. Yes, pharaohs are people, too, and they had indoor plumbing!

- Both sexes were big on bling. Conspicuous consumption and fashion were not the only motives. Gold, you see, was thought to be the flesh and bones of the

gods. Wearing it brought one closer to divine. And divine it is: Artisans were as creative as they were skillful, incorporating imported stones and newly invented glass in elaborate designs.

- A pharaoh's tomb contained elaborate provisions for the afterlife, from actual food to model boats that magically became life-size in the beyond. It wasn't all paradise, though. Hard labor was required of everyone. Pharaohs did an end run around that assignment by stocking the tomb with statuettes called shabtis. Tut, you'll see, had plenty of them, in various sizes.

"Tut" is both accessible and substantive. If you just want to experience the thrill of discovering the tomb, you can. If you go to ogle (and covet) the jewelry, you can. If you want to learn something — a lot, really — you will.