



Head of Wesir-Iwer



Man in Persian costume

EGYPTIAN S

By FELIX BONILLA NORAT
Special to the STAR

The exhibit of ancient Egyptian sculpture at the "Museo de la Fundación Arqueológica" is on loan from the permanent collection of the Brooklyn Museum, one of the best collections in the world of Egyptian art.

The foundation is to be commended for this as well as the many exhibits on mankind's roots they have presented over the last six years with a natural emphasis on our own roots.

Foundation president Wilfred Geigel believes we can have no future if we don't know our past, including our African past, a great deal of which stems from Egypt. The foundation has done itself proud with this exhibit, as shown by the green, if artificial turf they have put over the sidewalk outside the museum as if to dramatize their happiness with the present event. The government, local business concerns and the National Foundation for the Endowment for the Arts have also to be thanked for the exhibit's presence here.

A feature of the event is the foundation's system of bright young guides who help visitors appreciate the handsomely displayed art. The foundation recruited some 64 junior and senior high school students from private schools who each work one day every two weeks without pay. These younger students work Tuesdays to Fridays during the museum's 10 to 5 opening hours and then UPR and other art students do the guiding Saturdays from 10 to 5 and Sundays from noon to 7. (The museum is closed Mondays.) The exhibit will remain open until July 31 so that it may be seen by the large number of visitors expected for the Pan American Games and the Latin American Graphics Biennial.

It is heartwarming to see and hear these young volunteers. And it is something to think about. Have you done a job for Puerto Rico lately? Or

have you simply been a consumer, as you may consume this exhibit now if you wish, without really studying it. The exhibit merits several visits.

Study, for example, "Head of a Shawabti of Akhenaten" in the show. "Shawabtis" were supplied in the tombs of the greats to substitute for the person when he was called to do public works. In life some Egyptian free citizens were freer than others if they could pay somebody else to work in their stead.

Pharaoh Akhenaten was a poet and philosopher and Egypt's first monotheist, closing down many temples to many gods.

Egypt's art in general was quite tame. It followed rules set down by priests and pharaohs. However, artists have always been free spirits and individuality and liveliness are present in many Egyptian works, some in this show.

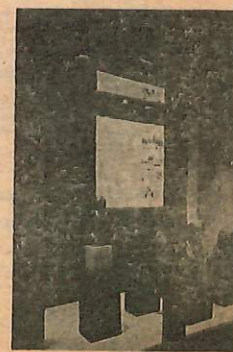
Notice the lively "Female Figure with Birdlike Head," in terracotta, about 5,600 years old, which is elegant and sensual in pose. Note "Statue of Senenmut," who was an architect, minister and lover of Queen Hatshepsut. Also notice the portrait statues of members of the bureaucracy and priesthood.

Much more freedom was allowed during Akhenaten's reign. When he found Tell el Amarna as the new Egyptian capital, he gave artists permission to portray his family and himself in natural and spontaneous poses, including on all fours. His pot belly and big hips show in the delightful "Statuette of King Akhenaten," of some 3,370 years ago.

"Figure of Lady Mi," was one of the countless concubines of Akhenaten's father. His father had lived very opulently and no pharaoh had ever had such a large and inter-



People on line outside the museum. Just like the Met?



Inside, dramatic lighting makes

SCULPTURE

at the Museo de la Fundación

national harem. Notice Lady Mi's nice, almost imperial, bust and transparent deppss which allows us to see her nice belly and sensuous buttocks. The Greeks must have studied such sculptures for their own works, a thousand years later. Akhenaten was rebellious but in love with his father. And so perhaps he became an iconoclastic with only one god. Moses was preaching about that time about a one and only god.

The foundation museum has three rooms little more than the size of postage stamps but it manages to hold 37 representative pieces for this show with dignity. Several are veritable masterpiece and most are enhanced by the dramatic spot lighting against black backgrounds. Such a lighting pinpoints the fine details of each piece. (Notice the beautiful five-inch high "Head of Wesir-Wer.") The pinpointing through light may be good for the public's initiation into quality details. But I prefer to see the gestalt of the piece first under generalized lighting, then discover the fine details myself.

Egyptians treasured the positive figure against the negative spaces in art. That's why their temples can produce claustrophobia. The stone pushes visitors, around massively and possessively. Maybe their art is a refuge from the immense negativity of the surrounding deserts. It was the desert which prompted the Arabs to invent the zero in mathematics. The empty eye-sockets of the beautiful "Head from a statue of a Female Sphinx" are startling for Egyptian art. Actually, they were once inlaid. The underlying solid form is an egg, almost a sphere, reinforced by the finely carved features that inspired restoration of an eye and chin by the once proud Roman owners of the piece.

Notice the spherical egg simplicity of all the heads in this show including that of "King Herihor" and even the Roman-influenced works.

Such marvelous economic sculptural form doesn't prevent the occasional distinction of individualized features in some portraits such as that of Wesir-Wer already mentioned or of "King Sesostriis III" of Middle Empire times. The notations of Sesostriis reign were acting up then and though they never got their Magna Carta from the Pharaoh they managed to produce on him a lined face, puckered thin lips and pinched nose.

The original chaos from which a god or cosmogony sprang is sometimes represented by the simple cube form.

Compare the five cubed or block sculptures here beginning with the squat "Senwesret-Sene-Befny and Wife" of almost 4000 years ago; the more aerodynamic "Min, the Overseer of Weavers," which is about 3,500 years old; the more anatomically defined "Yu," about 3,330 years old; the fully defined and sensuously rounded or oval figure of "Pady Mahes," about 2,700 years old and the stylized and elongated "Nes-troch," about 2,300 years old. I prefer "Yu."

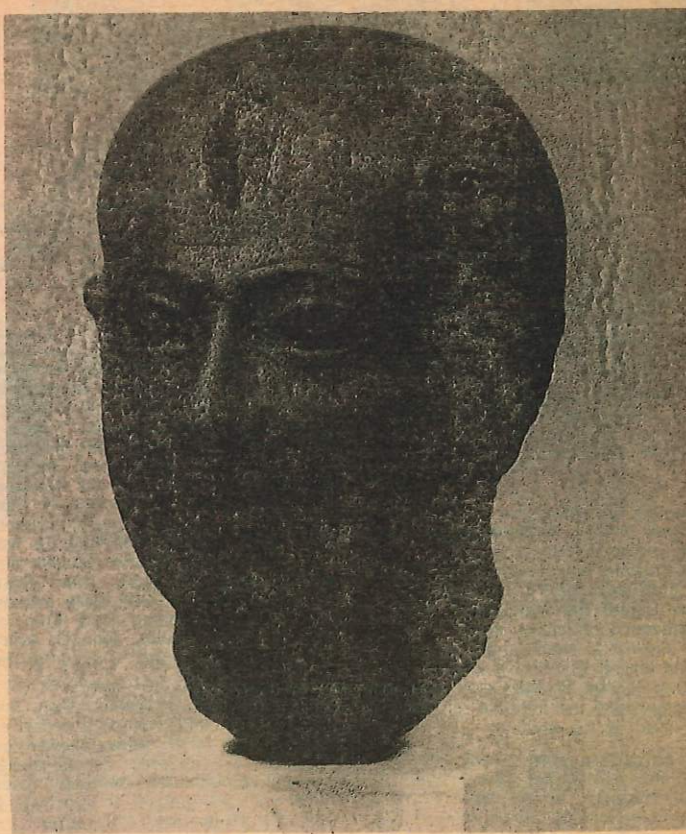
Though the Egyptians were marvellous "animaliers," "Head of a Lion," of about 5,000 years ago, is too near the initiating blob of coarsely veined stone. Some Paleolithic animals are finer and lots older. The composite animal forms in "Senenmut" are certainly more typical of Egyptian quality.

The oldest item, the "Female Figure with Birdlike Head," should be compared to the 3,300 years younger, "Torso of a Woman with a Floral Scepter," a lovely feminine figure barely four inches high.

Did the Egyptians decay after that date of 2,300 years ago or were the Greeks and Romans healthier? Or more inspired? Greek and Roman citizens had more rights than their Egyptian counterparts. Freedom is spirited.



Head of a female sphinx



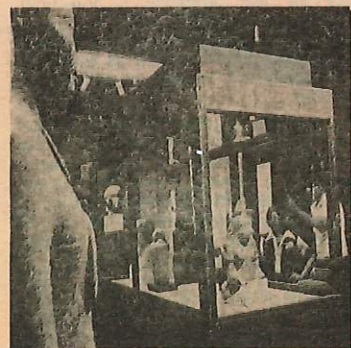
Head of King Herihor



the most of the exhibit.



Family group



Weekdays are less crowded.