

Introduction: What Art Does: Power and Performativity

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Art creates power¹—for the commissioner, the depicted, as well as for the creator. But no commissioner or creator can make art solely about power. Any art too literal, too on-the-nose will fail in its objective of power creation. Effective art hits obliquely. And clever commissioners destabilize their society when they order innovative art. Impactful art creates an insecure footing for the community who view it as a reset. If we view art as social action, then art's creation demands destruction as much as creation.

Egyptological (art) historians seem to agree that all ancient Egyptian art was functional,² and they usually concentrate on the ritual-religious aspects of that functionality. But function also means art does something to society. An ancient Egyptian statue or building might have had names and iconography that broadcast ideological purpose, even a mention of power creation, but that description was usually embedded in religious ideology, veiling overt political intentions.

Such temple and statue examples are more obvious to us as “art,” but the Egyptians created all sorts of “art” with all sorts of functionality. Let us take the example of the modified corpse and the embalming skills it took to turn a dead body into an Osirian effigy. The desiccation, anointing, and wrapping of a human body aided preservation and inhibited putrefaction. To make a mummy, mineral and organic materials—natron salts, tree resins, bitumen, pigments, woven linen bandages—were applied to human flesh and bone. Such a modified corpse could then be manipulated within funerary rituals intact and without a putrid smell. These are the obvious and direct functions of the corpse modification, but we know that there were other, ideological functions, namely turning that person into an Osirian entity, applying cleansing and elevating materials to divinize, enabling the transformation of the dead into an *akh* spirit. What was not, and could not be, directly stated was that such a modified corpse also functioned to socially differentiate a particular dead human being from the mass of other dead human beings, thereby granting their family social power, vast resources, and access to restricted, embalming, knowledge.

Not every ancient Egyptian person was given the privilege of embalming. This was a rarity demanded by the rich and powerful in society. Note that the ancient Egyptians did not say outright that only rich people obtained this privilege because of their hoarded wealth, while others could rot in the ground. Instead, the honor of such differential treatment was cloaked in ideology, morality, ritual need, and religious intent that was first elaborated for the royal sanctity and then percolated through other social, mostly elite, strata.³ Egyptologists do not regularly think of mummified humans as “art,” let alone make the distinction that a mummy can even be termed “fine art,” and more on that problematic term below, but that is exactly what art can do. Art escapes categorization, and its direct social purpose is obscured with ideology, in this case, the constructed discourse developed by the king and his elites to support their social power.



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Art historians of the ancient world gravitate towards particularism, all the details of a particular culture, object or structure, the *comparanda*, typology, and dating. These are important facts, to be sure, but discussions of the larger social use of art or how art, once constructed or conceived, has a power of its own on its makers are avoided. In this Special Issue, we would like to connect the manufacture of social power to fine art production in the ancient world. Egyptological art history is quite understandably object-oriented, tracking an overwhelming amount of material culture preserved from ancient Egypt, rather than being commission/function/power-oriented. Dating, material, find spot, style, atelier, and object categorization demand such a particularist approach, but the field also risks becoming burdened by typologies and *etic* perspectives. Materiality is important, to be sure, but art must also be understood by what it *does* to society, not just what it is.

The ancient Egyptians perfected the differentiation between “fine” art and practical arts or crafts.⁴ What we think of as “fine” art displays skill and/or fine material, but with no or little practical application, thus the use of the word “fine,” meaning non-utilitarian. The distinctions people, including Egyptologists, make between “fine” art, “minor” art, or “practical” art is all about social power. Even the pluralization of the word “art,” in English as “arts,” implies a lesser collective, rather than the unique singular art. By the same token, art historians bring value judgements to the distinctions between “art” and “craft,” or between “artist,” on the one hand, and “artisan” and “craftsman,” on the other. Our application of these heavy terms determines the perceived power of the crafted thing.

A ceramic pot, no matter how symmetrically and beautifully made, is meant to contain, heat or carry something; a sandal, even one with the application of gold leaf, is meant to shield the bottom of the foot from wear. At the same time, a precious vase is not used as a soup pot: it has an alternative purpose that is “finer” than simple utilitarian purpose. Thus, the utilitarian form can become something more. Drawing hard and fast lines between categories of objects has proven to be a thorny matter. Many objects are practical crafts and thus not usually categorized as “fine arts,” indicating they did not have the same perceived value and intent as non-utilitarian crafted things—to us today and arguably also to most ancient Egyptians, although concepts like ‘value,’ ‘precious’ or ‘prestigious’ were never lexicalized.⁵ But when we are evaluating a hard stone vessel that can hardly be lifted and that has little room for contents, or crafted sandals cut from gold sheeting for a mummified individual, we implicitly understand that ancient people were commissioning these objects to manufacture power, seen by both their earthly audience and *post-mortem* encounters. Those ancient Egyptians with the ability to fund the technical, skill set, and material acquisition for such practically useless things could build social power inaccessible to those without that access.

In the Egyptian Proto and Early Dynastic periods, artisans figured out how to make vessels out of the hardest stone.⁶ These were arguably commissioned by rulers to display the reach of their economic arm, but also to showcase what they were able to create with these hard-to-access resources.⁷ The tombs of Abydos kings were each filled with hundreds such vessels, while the subterranean chambers of the tomb of Djoser contained tens of thousands of stone vessels. These stone jars were meant to inspire awe in those who viewed them, as miracles of consumption and hoarding, but also of creation, because it seemed a hard stone was somehow being molded with the ease of soft clay, at least to those without the technological know-how.⁸ Some of the vessels were even shaped into complex three-dimensional images of iconography, like the greywacke *ankh-ra* bowl now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.⁹ Such “fine art” was invented for and remained the purview of the ruling elites once social inequality had embedded itself into Egyptian society.¹⁰

Indeed, such “fine art” production is arguably the source of the word *hmnw.t*, what we might translate into “art” or “craft” in English.¹¹ Gardiner’s sign list U24 denotes a

“stone-worker’s drill weighted at the top with stones,” while U25 is an Old Kingdom form of the same drill.¹² The production of objects using such a stone drill were not practical in application but rather the creation of something beyond utilitarian use, a purely aesthetic endeavor that created stone objects too heavy to use as drinking or cooking vessels, a kind of proof of concept of technological advancement and social power.

It is the tension between this kind of impractical, “fine art” and the practical, utilitarian craft that haunts our Egyptological discipline. The ancient Egyptians treated such crafted funerary objects (and their makers) quite differently from the practical things of daily life, like regular sandals or wagon wheels.¹³ They treated their makers differently too, if the *Satire of the Trades* reflects the value ladder in use by the Ramesside elites, at least. We Egyptologists talk of the “artist”, his “style”, and his “atelier,” of his “reputation.” For the Egyptological art historian, “fine art” can provide the best means of tracking innovations and stylistic change, building seriated timelines, discerning regionality or workshop, because art production in ancient Egypt both reified—kept art the same—and destabilized—innovated and changed—social norms. If the creation of fine art in ancient Egypt was an act of manufacturing social power, then that art—buildings, statuary, funerary arts, minor arts—can be understood as social tools of creation, maintenance, and resistance within society.

We argue that ancient Egyptian art is:

1. **Action**, ideally seen as a verb, not an object, but rather a process that can start something, continue something, or disrupt something. Art can thus be understood as both material and immaterial simultaneously. Art has a commissioner, a creator, an audience, and an agenda.
2. **Differentiated between practical and impractical.** The impractical grants social prestige, while the practical is of this earth, base, and largely without prestige.¹⁴ Creators of commissioned, impractical “fine” art were generally elevated in Egyptian society.¹⁵ Impractical art is generally made of higher-cost materials and by well-trained specialists with restricted, generationally gained knowledge. Makers of practical arts, by contrast, were not elevated members of Egyptian society.¹⁶ The tension between the practical and impractical is one of conspicuous consumption, of superfluous spending, of patriarchal, authoritarian power, and thus where art falls on the gradient between practical and impractical is a marker of its social impact.
3. **Built from constant resistance.** Resistance comes from the tension between the expected/same/typical and the unexpected/different/aberrant. Resistance can work among players at the same approximate social level in a given social system or at different social levels or spaces; resistance can relate to the past, differentiating or connecting the now from what the ancestors created; resistance can even act against an imagined future, either idealized or dystopian.

Art is thus competitive or at the very least comparative to the art that has been created before and will be created after. Hatshepsut’s official, Senenmut, a so-called New Man and erstwhile lower elite, used his art commissions to socially resist, creating innovative statuary never seen before—including hard stone, three-dimensional images of himself holding Hatshepsut’s daughter Neferure in his embrace or holding objects that represent the rebus name of his mistress.¹⁷ Elite often reverted back the past, the last time period perceived as sacred and canonic, namely the Middle Kingdom, when Hatshepsut could find an inspiring predecessor in Queen Neferusobek.¹⁸ Or, we have the example of Master Sculptor Ser-Djehuty who likely compiled archives from the Pharaonic past to accommodate his Ptolemaic rulers and commissioners’ legitimization through art. His own statues were certainly perceived as products of high-quality, bearing witness of his literacy and knowledge, since they might have inspired other private Ptolemaic statues.¹⁹

Art is the preserved material product of creating personal and/or institutional value on the social landscape. Individuals use art to integrate themselves into a whole, mark themselves as insiders with restricted knowledge, and by extension, mark others as outsiders.²⁰ Art reifies identity and place.

The ancient Egyptians in power manufactured resistance against time by building art from lasting materials—limestone and sandstone instead of bundled palm reeds,²¹ hard stones like granite and quartzite, instead of softer stones that could be easily re-carved. Such artistic resistance could happen on an individual level too; Senenmut had his parents exhumed and reburied with finer burial goods once he reached a lofty station, for example, creating art that represented time-resistance against his own socially disconnected past.²²

Egyptians with institutional and ritual power created art that resisted emulation by keeping much of it immaterial—verbal, unwritten, and proscribed. Thus “fine” sensory art might not be preserved to us—sounds only few could hear,²³ scents only few could smell,²⁴ ritual incantations that were never committed to writing.²⁵ Art was meant to exclude outsiders, to separate those who had from those who did not, demanding resistance by commissioners outside or at the margins of the elite Egyptian social system, emphasizing the protagonists and setting aside the audience, who in turn could create its own mythology out of these images. Another example is provided by the 25th Dynasty Kushite kings who used traditional Egyptian symbols and ways of kingship but resisted membership within that kingly group with the inclusion of two cobra *uraei* and the cap crown, disruptive iconography to Egyptians but inclusive and identifying iconography to Nubian elites.²⁶ Another example of a man coming into power from the margins of “fine” society was Herihor, a general-turned-high priest-turned king who decided to downplay his kingly iconography while using appropriate artistic rules, naming himself High Priest of Amen in his royal cartouche carved at Khonsu temple, thereby focusing on ritual position rather than a kingship that was at this point in history severely distrusted.²⁷

We usually assign resistance to outsiders, and it does exist in that space of art creation (and destruction) too, such as the perceived misuse and neglect of Theban temples by Libyan-Egyptians mentioned in the Pi(ankh)y Victory Stela.²⁸ Such resistance can be seen among lower elites and/or within populism, which cuts high elites from the top of leadership. Egyptian history was punctuated by moments of elite replacement, represented, for instance, by a 21st Dynasty coffin inscribed with nonsense hieroglyphs found in a reused Saqqara tomb, demanding Egyptologists recognize the sociopolitical reasons for the lack of crafted coffins with correct inscriptions.²⁹ In short, art creation is about the push and pull of power, a constant tension between those commissioning/creating the art and those consuming/viewing it. That tension is the core of the ancient Egyptian elite representational system.³⁰

Art is the negotiation of power, and power is never a lasting thing. Its delicate and transitory nature demands that power in art be veiled—by beauty, symmetry, fine materials, extraordinary craftsmanship, ritual activity, spatial placement, all the elements associated with “fine” art. Crafted objects and architecture provide a key mediating factor between people and power; if it is performed well, fine art can take the eye off the obvious and direct objective of showing oneself as powerful, making any grotesque power grab seem oblique, or religiously motivated, or divinely ordained. Once crafted, such depictions of power can always be renegotiated; indirect vagaries are more easily rewritten than bombastic claims of power. For the Egyptologist, then, “fine” art is not just a means of identifying the powerful, but a way of learning about embedded and *emic* ancient Egyptian mechanisms of building power for some, breaking power for others, excluding, and including, in a constant, never-ending process.³¹

One should not rule out the audience's agency, though, especially since parts of the audience could re-use, re-interpret, re-purpose artistic codes received from the elite repertoire set in motion on formal, ideological, media (temple walls, public space under royal control, etc.).³² This audience, in turn, became performers (in Goffman's terminology).³³ This transmission from one set of performers to another suggests transformation of the transmitted material, and it is in these transformations, adaptations, variations, that one might find emic perceptions of value and an (always evolving) understanding of ancient iconographic codes. In this context, Bourdieu's symbolic and social capitals provide the researcher with concepts to adapt and use.³⁴

Egyptology is abandoning its isolated position forged when particularism and contextualism were pushed to their maximum, othering and fetishizing ancient Egyptian art and culture and thus separating it not only from our own modern existence, but from the rest of ancient world societies.³⁵ Egyptological art historians increasingly recognize that comparisons with other chrono-cultural contexts can increase our understanding of ancient Egypt cultural features, both in its specificity and inter-connectivity.³⁶ In this volume, we encouraged Egyptologists to expand on cross-cultural *comparanda*. We also invited colleagues from other fields, i.e., Assyriology and Renaissance art history to engage such cross-cultural connections.

Egyptology has long continued its participation in ancient elite art production millennia after the fact by evaluating it as more important and prioritizing its study over lesser production. Connoisseurship has haunted the discipline. We, the scholars, have often become apologists for this social system with its deep social inequalities, ideologizing our way past the inequity. At the same time that we have created typologies of change, we have somehow viewed art as static, as unchanging things preserved in museums, thereby discounting the tension of art's functionality in manufacturing real power in real time.

We specifically want to reflect on how art manufactures social power, and thus in this volume we question the 'verbness' of ancient (Egyptian) art because activity and motion define the purpose of art's creation. If art acts upon people, then art is created to influence thoughts and minds. To that end, we compiled case studies that reflect upon the functionality and agentivity of art. The contributions to this volume offer some avenues to further explore the performativity and action of art, as well as some preliminary answers and hypotheses on the 'verbness' of art. The case studies in this volume assert that:

Art, first and foremost, can **define**—both visually and socially—the parameters of identity and authority. In the First Intermediate Period, artistic innovation became a vehicle for expressing local competition and formulating new visual identities amid political fragmentation (Juan Carlos Moreno García, *Shaping New Identities in the First Intermediate Period (2160–2050 BC): Archers and Warriors in the Iconography of Upper Egypt*). The very capacity for making art could itself be identitarian, as in the case of the community of Deir el-Medina, which might be tentatively compared with other artisans' communities working for divine kingship (Jennifer Miyuki Babcock, *Exploring Artistic Hierarchies among Painters in Ramesside Deir el-Medina*).

Art can **display social distinction**. Cedar wood was monopolized by the Egyptian upper elite for their funerary objects, while those in the lower social strata mimicked the material in their own production, pretending to belong to a circle of which they were not a part. (Caroline Arbuckle MacLeod, *Lebanese Cedar, Skeuomorphs, Coffins, and Status in Ancient Egypt*). Similarly, 21st Dynasty yellow coffins merged ancient repertoire and innovation in their creative process via the involvement of sought-after workshops carrying social distinction for those who managed to hire them (Stefania Mainieri, *The 'Invisible' Side of Yellow Coffins—The Set of the Chantress of Amun Tanethereret in the Musée du Louvre and Some Considerations on the Production of Yellow Coffins in the First Half of the 21st Dynasty*).

Art can **compete and legitimize, reformulating the past to serve present agendas**. Early 19th Dynasty kings formulated art for legitimizing the new royal lineage as well as coping with post-Amarna reconstruction, both on a political and religious level (if such a distinction was even relevant for the period) (Gema Menéndez, *Leaving the “Discomfort” Zone*). Elsewhere, Akkadian iconography of violence, war, and prisoners stemming from an ancient repertoire of images was transformed into potent vehicles of ‘trustworthy’ narratives on Akkadian hegemony and aggressive conquest (Barbara Couturaud, *Soldiers and Prisoners in Motion*). In another example, the *Interpretatio Thebarum* reshaped the historical reality of Second Intermediate Period Egypt, negatively depicting defeated Hyksos and framing the propaganda of the reigning Theban dynasty (Uroš Matić, *The Forces of the Hyksos and Their Representations: Glimpse of Reality or interpretatio Thebarum*).

Art can also **resist death and oblivion**. The particular case of Renaissance perception of the ancient Egyptian pictorial method of writing, thought to be a tentative universal language, was an act of resistance against death and oblivion. Anxious that Humanistic ideas might be lost, Renaissance scholars invented ‘neo-hieroglyphs’ in the hope their memory would remain intact (Rebecca M. Howard, *Reviving Ancient Egypt in the Renaissance Hieroglyph: Humanist Aspirations to Immortality*). The whole mechanism of tomb creation explored for the New Kingdom Memphite necropolis ensures one’s memory would be efficiently conveyed, transmitted, sustained and worshiped via the involvement of several agents, including the tomb owner, his family and relatives, dependents, and their hired artistic crew (Nico Staring, *Artistic Production in a Necropolis in Motion*).

Art can **repurpose ancient material via reuse**, as in Mesopotamia, where statues could undergo several repurposings of their functionalities via reuses. Their perceived agentivity was such that violent acts could be perpetrated to neutralize their power (Imane Achouche, *How Many Lives for a Mesopotamian Statue?*). It can also **sustain and preserve elite decorum**, as in New Kingdom colonial Nubia, which saw its local elite using Egyptian artistic repertoire to draw boundaries of their social space, reinforcing cultural and religious affiliations to Egypt as well as power hierarchization on a local scale (Rennan Lemos, *Egyptian Art in Colonized Nubia: Representing Power and Social Structure in the New Kingdom Tombs of Djehutyhotepm Hekanefer and Pennu*). Likewise, the recommodification of New Kingdom royal coffins by 20th and 21st Dynasty High Priests of Amen recommodified New Kingdom royal coffins, stripping them of their valuable materials and reusing them to support the High Priests’ power claim (Kathlyn M. Cooney, *Surviving New Kingdom Kings’ Coffins: Restoring the Art that Was*).

Art can **challenge and question**. Contemporary and modern art is prompting Egyptologists to challenge their discourse on ancient objects, causing them to question the “power and agency of collections, representation, and knowledge production.” (Alice Stevenson—*Dialogues between Past and Present? Modern Art, Contemporary Art Practice, and Ancient Egypt in the Museum*). Yet art can just as well **copy and expand on previous material, reverting to the past while creating additional layers of meaning**, as Persian rulers at the head of Achaemenid Egypt subtly reinvested Pharaonic traditional iconographic repertoire and designed ancient motifs for specific audiences, showing art’s dynamicity in function and interpretation (Marissa Stevens, *Through the Eyes of the Beholder: Motifs (Re)Interpreted in the 27th Dynasty*). On the contrary, art can **pre-figure what comes next**, with the royal ideology and its integration within elite tombs under Thutmosis IV and Amenhotep III’s rules, challenging the supposed novelty of Amarna artistic standards (Melinda Hartwig—*Royal Ideology and Elite Integration in Theban Tombs as Precursors to the Amarna Period*).

Art can **impact target audiences by the choice of specific iconographic motifs**. “Visual hooks” found in New Kingdom Theban private tombs helped tomb owners curate an aptly designed and well-suited pictorial self-representation (Inmaculada Vivas Sainz, *The Creative*

Impulse: Innovation and Emulation in the Role of the Egyptian Artist during the New Kingdom—Unusual Details from Theban Funerary Art). Art can also **pacify and reconcile**—as Kushite king Tanwetamani designed his so-called ‘Dream stela’ to visually convey the duality of 25th Dynasty rule over both Kush and Egypt, reconciling ‘the present imperial expansion of Kush with the history of Egyptian activity in Nubia’ (Christopher Cox—*Imperial Art: Duality on Tanwetamani’s Dream Stela*).

Through its materiality, art can **embellish and create value henceforth, maintaining social inequalities and power differentials**, as seen in the New Kingdom textile industry, where the material gained value the more it was worked (unlike other materials like metal) and supported power balance while marginalizing female weavers (Jordan Galczynski—*Marginalized Textile Producers in New Kingdom Egypt*). Additionally, art can **reframe social arenas and push elites to reshape their cultural space while transforming other social categories’ visual status**. New Kingdom goldsmiths offer perspective on how art could transform one’s social standing by pushing elites’ boundaries, forcing intermediate social strata to the margins (Alisée Devillers—*Towards a ‘Social Art History’: Ancient Egyptian Metalworkers in Context(s) and the Creation of Value*).

Art can **provide a carefully curated self-depiction for high officials pulling from the traditional repertoire while personalizing a global scene within royal contexts**, blending tradition and individuality—like the self-portrait *in assistenza* of the Overseer of the Treasury Djehuty serving under Hatshepsut, which created a whole new layer of meaning in the queen’s chapel of her Deir el-Bahari temple (Anastasiia Stupko-Lubczynska—*The Author Takes a Bow: A Self-Portrait in Assistenza in the Temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahari*). Art can also **experiment**, testing the limits of representation, as in the 21st Dynasty vignettes of funerary papyri displaying attempts to depict an invisible being called Medjed (Mykola Tarasenko—*Visuality of the Invisible: The Image of Medjed in Sources of the 21st Dynasty*).

Finally, art can **move and create feeling**, as with Ramses II’s so-called ‘Twin stelae’, which were meant to stimulate specific emotions to subordinate audiences, reinforcing and reifying the institution of kingship and royal power (Tara Prakash—*Emotions and the Manifestation of Ancient Egyptian Royal Power: A Consideration of the Twin Stelae at Abu Simbel*). The art piece Egyptian-born artist Sara Sallam offered us for closing this volume bears witness of another set of emotions created through art, using the discoveries or plunders, depending from the vantage point chosen by the viewer, happening in Egypt not so long ago. The author explores “an alternative mode of listening to displaced heritage: one that honours the agency of the silenced, embraces rupture over restoration, and invites the possibility of care over control.” (Sara Sallam—*An Artist’s Reflections on Archives and Re-sistance*).

This volume hopes to follow new research avenues³⁷ that decentralize our focus on elite art production by discussing the agentivity and ‘verbness’ of art. Otherwise, we the scholars become willing participants in the artistic manufacturing of power from millennia past.

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Notes

¹ We are using here the IEMP rubric developed by Michael Mann ([1986] 2012) and, following Cooney (2025), we add a–B for “body” to his model.

² E.g., Robins (1997); Baines (1994).

³ Centuries before the peak of the embalming practice, ancient Egyptians were already experimenting on maintaining the physical aspect of dead bodies (Jones et al. 2018). Accessing mummification during Pharaonic times meant thus standing as the legit

repository of such ancient knowledge. On a side note, now that we know that mummification experimentation was on its way in Prehistoric Egypt, it might be interesting to re-evaluate Predynastic material culture (notably via the vague typological category of feminine statuettes) and its connection to knowledge gained by the intimate contact with dissected bodies. We thank Mariam Ragheb and Rennan Lemos for the inspiring discussions on the topic.

Obviously, ‘fine’ versus ‘practical’ art are etic, modern categories. How ancient Egyptian apprehended the different uses artistic production might have had—if they only verbalized such distinction other than with the *hmw.t*-concept—is still unclear and would require further inquiry. What is clear, though, is how porous these categories could be, notably via material evidence mostly lost. The precise eye make-up created out of kohl, that statues bear, were both daily-life related (practical, especially given the antibiotic quality of kohl vis-à-vis certain infections) and identarian sign for social status (utilitarian). The same can be said about fine draperies carefully woven out of processed linen, fundamentally a piece of clothing and yet symbols of one’s social standing. Additionally, although ‘fine’ arts was an unlexicalized concept in ancient Egypt, the differentiated importance and status given to specific categories of object producers hint towards internal hierarchization, quite elusive from a modern vantage point (see the difference between metalworkers’ means of self-representation (Devillers, this volume) and those used by woodworkers (Devillers Forthcoming a)).

Or were gathered under the generic *nfr*, ‘beautiful’, ‘perfect’ (e.g., Nyord 2020, pp. 16, 20–21).

Aston (1994); Raffaele (2005, p. 78).

Mazé (2018).

Recent archaeological experimentations show that turning the drill did not require much strength (Stocks 2003; Saraydar 2012, quoted in Baumann In press), but still it requires technical ability to create such tools and an acute observation sense while prospecting the deserts in search of a high-quality vein of stone, allowing the creation of artifacts such as the glowing statues of Khafre enthroned in anorthosite gneiss. Difficulties and experimental knowledge are also attested via Egyptian sources: in the Middle Kingdom tomb of Senbi (B1) in Meir necropolis, one stone-vessel producer is complaining about the lack of grip of the drill, which prompted a second craftworker to add gum to a mixture (Quirke 2018, p. 185).

MMA 19.2.16; <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/543866>

Helms (1993); For a Maya comparison, see Inomata (2001).

Laboury (2017, pp. 374–75); Baumann (In press).

On the concept of *hmw.t*, the stone-drill hieroglyphic sign and the evolution of its meaning, see (Baumann In press).

Although we can find *hmw.w* in charge of the production of sandals and wheels, they seemed to not be socially acknowledged as sculptors or draftsmen were. The production of warfare and leather work could also be seen together with “fine art” manufacture, challenging our etic division between “fine” art and daily life objects.

Obviously, exceptions remain and overlapping existed. Here we are talking about how we think the elites divided the artistic production and defined the part that supported their rule.

One might be cautious, though, with top artists’ self-claim of being the personal pick of the king who “discovered” them. Indeed, most of them belonged to well-known family of artists, like the Chief Draftsman Dedia or the Chiefs Sculptors Bak and Userhat.

These might be the people listed in the famous *Satire of the Trades*. The list mentioned sculptors and people related to the artistic production, but they might be understood as producers of “practical” artworks, like architectural pieces, versus sculptors in charge of the elite statuary production

Roehrig et al. (2005).

Laboury (2014, pp. 86–87). The rule of Hatshepsut and her step-son and nephew Thutmose III fostered intense artistic and literary emulation among their elites (Ragazzoli 2016).

Klotz (2015).

In Goffman’s words (1959), this would be setting a stage with a clearly defined team of performers versus an audience, each body implicitly agreeing to social boundaries and basic rules to support the other’s performance.

Simultaneously, the copy of patterns originating from organic architecture in stone realizations bear witness to ancient knowledge and the oldest time, the *sp-tpy*.

Dorman (2003, pp. 32–34).

See the pioneering work in Egyptology of Sibylle Emerit: e.g., Elwart and Emerit (2023); Emerit (2024).

See Robyn Price’s sensory studies: e.g., Price (2023).

For distant past, orality can only be studied when preserved somewhat in a written form, though. See *inter alia* Pries (2023); Takács (2018).

See e.g., the statue of King Anlamani that was displayed in the Kerma Museum in Sudan.

Cooney (Forthcoming).

Grimal (1981).

Raven (2017).

Cannon (1989).

- ³¹ Baines (1990, 1994, 2006).
- ³² See for instance Deir el-Bersheh governor's coffin reproducing the motif shown on Senoswret III's funerary container which likely derived from Djoser's complex (Willems 2021).
- ³³ See Devillers in this volume on how the theatrical vocabulary developed by Ervin Goffman can be used on the Egyptological material.
- ³⁴ For an example of research on ancient past using such concepts, see Duploux (2006).
- ³⁵ See for instance the evolution of relationships between Egyptology and Anthropology: Howley and Nyord (2018); or prescriptive measures on the integration of other methodologies in art-historical analysis of ancient Egyptian material: Verbovsek (2011).
- ³⁶ E.g., see Stupko-Lubczynska in this volume.
- ³⁷ See for instance research such as Rennan Lemos' questioning postcolonial and decolonial theory in Sudanese and Nubian archaeology (Lemos 2022); research on the recycling of material culture, challenging our modern perception of copy and recycling as 'non-elite' practices (Cooney 2024; Lemos 2025); studies on domestic religious and votive practices (Waraksa and Baines Forthcoming; Mota 2018; Luiselli 2018; Dewsbury 2017; Müller 2015; Arnette 2014; Stevens 2009; Stevens 2006, to list but a few). Another example is the research on subalternity, see contributions in Devillers Forthcoming b).

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