

**Y Ganolfan Eifftaidd**  
Amgueddfa henebau'r Aifft  
Prifysgol Abertawe Parc Singleton,  
Abertawe, SA2 8PP



**The Egypt Centre**  
Museum of Egyptian Antiquities  
Swansea University, Singleton Park,  
Swansea, SA2 8PP

01792 295960

Dear

Thank you for booking your school party at the Egypt Centre. Please find below the **'Art' Teachers activity pack**. The Teachers pack contains information sheets regarding art theory and information relating to the distinct style of Egyptian art. Student will be given a talk based on objects in the museum connected with art and after the talk students will be encouraged to observe and draw the real objects around the museum. If you want to concentrate on any specific topic please discuss this with us before your visit.

Most of our staff who will be working with your children are unpaid volunteers and not trained teachers. Please could you therefore ensure that the children are supervised at all times.

When you arrive at the museum your group will be welcomed and taken to the area for their 'Art' talk. After the talk students will be given clipboards, sheets and pencils and divided into two groups. One group will go into the *House of Death* and one group will go into the *House of Life*. The students go for lunch in a pre-booked area and after lunch swap over so they all have an opportunity to see both galleries.

We charge £2 a head for each student and provide the relevant equipment for use. Teachers and students may bring cameras but we do not allow flash photography in the museum galleries, due to conservation issues regarding safe light levels. We also have a shop area with 'Egyptian' items for sale starting from 30p. Please make cheques payable to **Swansea University**.

We look forward to seeing you and hope you enjoy your time at the Egypt Centre. Any comments on how we can improve our services to you will be gratefully received.

Yours sincerely,  
Wendy Goodridge  
*Assistant Curator*

# Important Notice for Teachers

We want to ensure that your visit to the Egypt Centre is happy, safe and rewarding. In order to achieve this we want to explain our roles; what you can expect from us and what we expect from you.

## *The Role of the Egypt Centre*

- All activities are museum led. We will provide trained activity leaders to work with small groups of children. Activity leaders are **not** expected to discipline children. All staff working with your children are fully-enhanced CRB checked.
- We will endeavour to provide as many of the activities chosen by the school in the time available.
- We will provide all materials and equipment needed for each activity, which are safe to use.
- We will provide each child with a clipboard, pencil and work-pack for their use during the visit.
- If required we can provide a safe area for lunch near toilet facilities.
- We provide a gift-shop that caters for school children and is relevant to areas of study.
- We welcome feedback from schools and each school is given a questionnaire to return.

## *The Role of the School*

- The school should try to arrive at the agreed time
- The school will pay a £2 for each child and 50p for any work packs not used due to absence of children.  
(Please make cheques payable to *Swansea University*)
- A member of school staff should supervise each group of children at all times and ensure good behaviour.
- Ensure the equipment and materials that are to be used for subsequent school groups and the public are not being misused.
- Respect other visitors to the museum
- If the school has any concern please report it to a member of staff.

The Egypt Centre wants to ensure that children are protected from harm while in the Museum. In addition to the Museum's responsibilities, we ask that teachers/leaders of groups exercise their own responsibilities.

In particular, all leaders/teachers shall:

- Make sure they have adequate staff supervision using the ratios laid down by their institution. This is a suggestion:
  - 0-2 years = 1 adult to 3 children
  - 2-3 years = 1 adult to 4 children
  - 3-7 years = 1 adult to 8 children
  - 7 years + = 2 adults (preferably one of each gender) for up to 20 children/young people, and one additional staff member for every additional 10 children/young people.
- Ensure they supervise the children/young people at all times
- In case of an accident, contact a member of Museum staff who will follow Museum procedures
- In the case of a lost child, contact a member of Museum staff who will follow the Museum procedures
- Refrain from having possession of or consuming alcoholic beverages on the Museum premises
- Refrain from either verbally or physically abusing a child/young person
- Ensure adequate insurance cover for the group and leaders
- Ensure that the appropriate group leaders carry any necessary medicine for the children with them at all times, with the permission of the parents/guardian
- Inform their group of behavioural expectations while in the Egypt Centre

The Museum hopes each visitor has an enjoyable and exciting visit. We therefore expect all visitors to display courtesy and respect for others, and for the Museum property, at all times while visiting the Museum.

Group leaders should therefore not allow members of their group to:

- make any sectarian, racist, sexist or other offensive remarks toward any person or other group
- vandalise Museum property
- leave litter in the Museum/University grounds.

# The Egypt Centre *Hierogift* Shop

## ‘GOODIE’ BAGS FACILITY

The museum shop is available to use for all visiting parties during their time at the centre. There are many items geared towards school children, and at a very affordable price (items start from 25p!) There should be (time permitting) a chance for your group to visit the shop at some time during the day.

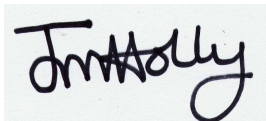
However, the shop is quite small, so we are unable to serve a whole group at the same time. It is recommended that groups use the shop 6 or 7 at a time in order to make it easier for the shop assistants and for the children themselves.

We also offer to make up ‘goodie bags’ which can be prepared in advance, up to a certain amount of money, ie. £1.50, £2.00, £3.00 etc. This can make the visit easier for schools especially if they are pressed for time.

If you wish to use this facility, please contact me in advance and I can have a selection of items for you to see during the morning session. I can suggest items to put in the bags, both educational and fun. Some examples include; blank papyrus, painted papyrus, bookmarks, pencils, pens, scarab beetles and small statues, necklaces and rings. The bags will be ready before you leave.

If there are any other questions about the shop you wish to ask, then please do not hesitate to contact me here at the Museum.

Many thanks

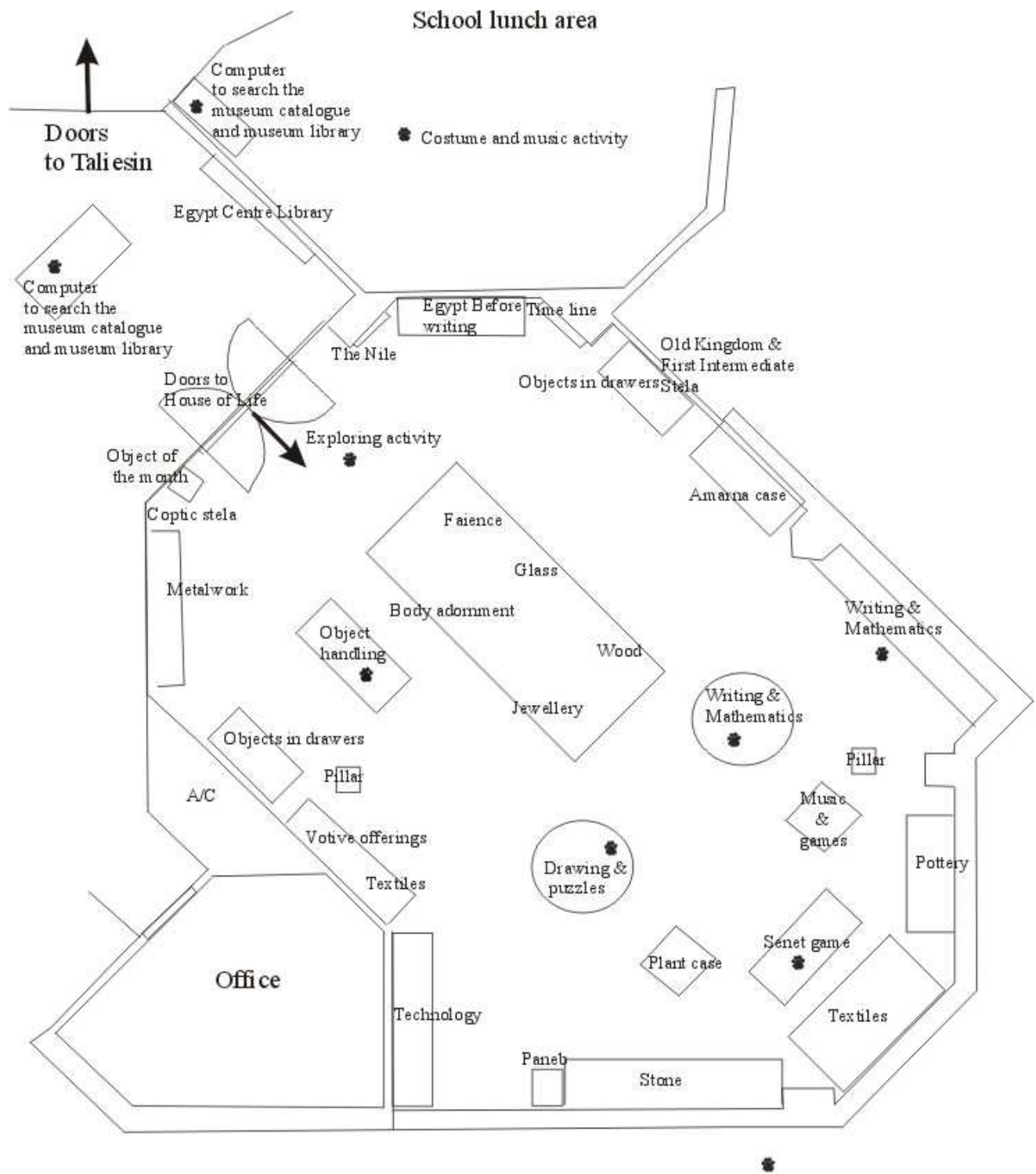


Jayne Holly


**Museum Assistant (Gift Shop manager)**

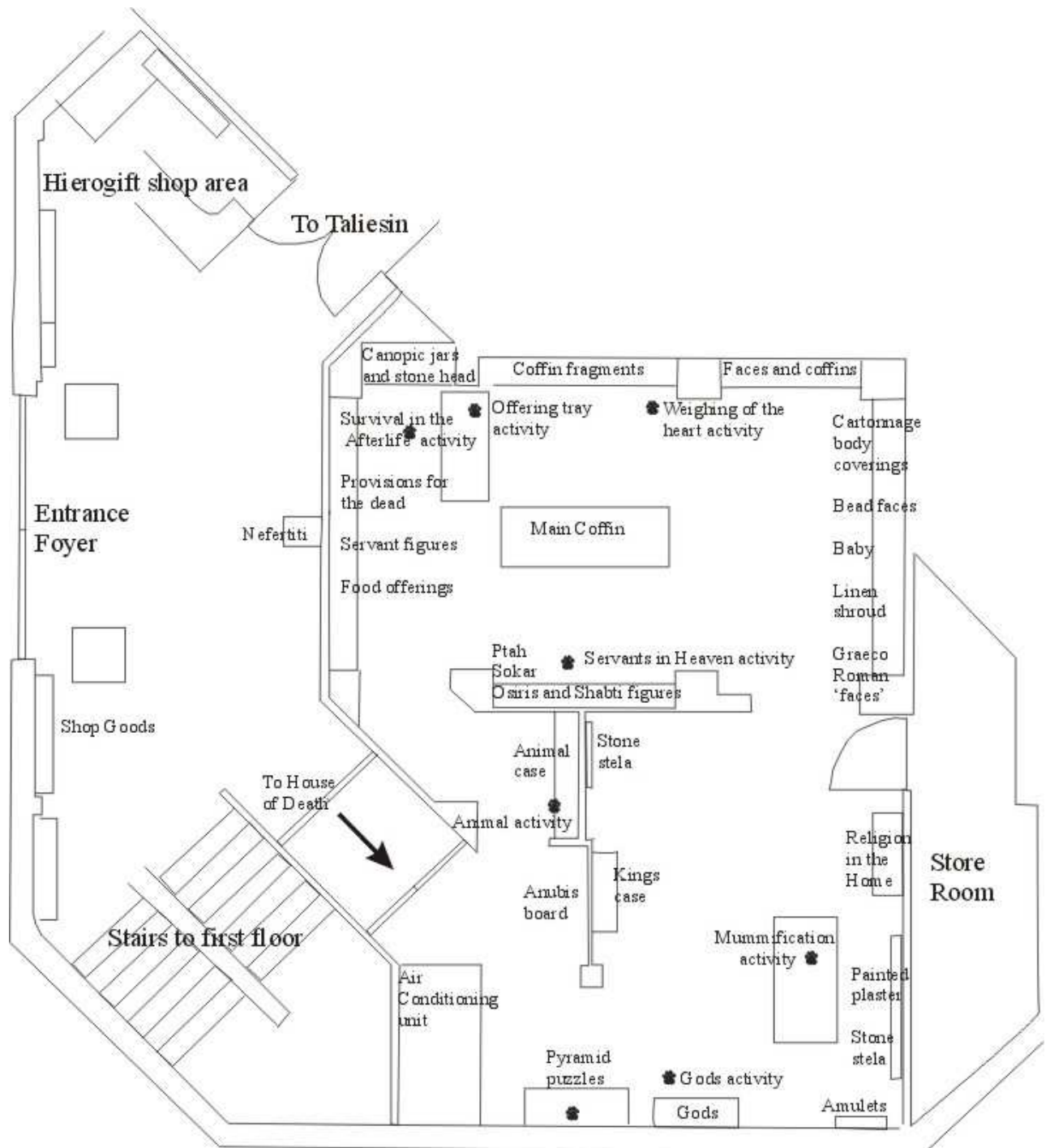
Tel: 01792 295960

E-mail [j.m.holly@swansea.ac.uk](mailto:j.m.holly@swansea.ac.uk)




## Egypt Centre First floor plan

 Hands-on activities



## Egypt Centre Ground floor plan

 Hands-on activities



# Egypt Centre School Party

Art

Name.....

School.....

## ANCIENT EGYPTIAN ART

~To understand Egyptian art you have to understand Ancient Egyptian culture. Religion was central to Egyptian life and art performed a religious function. The ancient Egyptians believed when they died they would be resurrected and have an afterlife. However in order to survive in the afterlife they needed conditions. They needed their body (through mummification), they needed food offerings and they had to receive the blessing of the Gods.

~The ancient Egyptians realised substitutes were needed in case these things ran out, were destroyed or stolen! Such substitutes include spare hearts, reserve heads, statues, models and portraits of the deceased, wall paintings of the deceased enjoying the afterlife, substitute food and drink.

*Note: Look at reserve head and clay offering trays and painted food offerings*

Such objects and wall paintings were not just pretty to look at they actually became the real thing and are performing an essential function. *Note: Look at the print of Anubis mummifying Sennedjem.* This idea also worried the Ancient Egyptians. Early on hieroglyph signs of snakes, which were seen as dangerous animals, were mutilated or had painted a dagger in their backs just in case they decided to harm the tomb owner!

~As these depictions were to become the real thing and allow the tomb owner to live forever it was essential to show the tomb owner at his/her best and in the prime of life even if they died in old age. The images are not always how they really looked but an idealised image intended to allow the tomb owner eternal life.



This scene shows Sennedjem and his wife Iynfert ploughing wheat and flax of an impossible height! Notice the ground lines. These are to create order and keep their feet firmly on the ground!



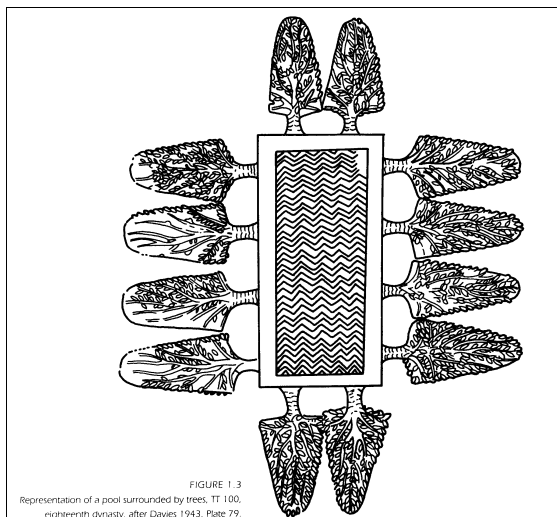


This scene shows Nebamun and his family hunting in the marshes. Notice his size compared to the other figures. His cat has performed an impossible balancing act while catching many birds.

They are always seen dressed in their best clothes even if they are hunting in the marshes and their best clothes are not suitable! You can get an idea of social structure and a person's importance in Egyptian paintings. The largest figure in a family group is nearly always the man, his wife is shown in a much smaller scale and the children are miniature adults.

Also each individual item was seen from the best angle: human torso and eyes from the front, arms and legs from the side, causing the figure to look distorted. (*Note: Look at the coffin fragments and find such depictions of Gods. The King Case has a profile of a king's head.* Perspective was hardly used. However, the God Bes and Goddess Hathor are shown face on as a symbol of power. *Note: Look on the Religion in the Home Case and you will see depictions of Bes and Hathor on vases.*

A pond or lake was seen from above while the trees around it are seen from the side.



*Note: Look at the 'Lake of Fire' in the coffin fragments case.*

~Artists and sculptures at court were instructed to show the king as an idealised figure, powerful and perfect. Some Egyptologists say that for a brief time during the Amarna period (C.1350 BC) artists were instructed to portray what they saw, warts and all! Akhenaten, the heretic king, was shown with protruding belly, elongated head and long face. However, others say that the way he was shown was propaganda to show him as the 'father and mother' of his people. He didn't actually look like that!



Akhenaten with his wife and three daughters. The figures are depicted with unusual bodily features of protruding bellies and long heads. They are shown enjoying a tender family moment.

This era shows tender scenes between the members of the royal family, not the normal severe portrayals of royalty seen previously and after this date.

This period is argued by some to be the best naturalist art showing vegetation, flowers, nature. However the Old Kingdom also had naturalistic scenes, and of course ideas of what looks 'natural' changes. *Note: See floral patterns and necklaces in the Amarna case.*

~Animal images are important as the ancient Egyptian's believed their gods could take animal form. Animals were mummified and their images worshipped and so the god would give their blessing and protection. Also because they feared dangerous animals such as crocodile and hippopotamus they associated these animals with gods hoping to make them less of a threat.

~Groups of animals were also seen in horizontal rows one above the other, depicting order and harmony. Many Egyptian paintings are symmetrical giving the sense of balance and harmony. Egyptians feared chaos and disorder would descend upon them if they showed life as chaotic.

~The Egyptian artist was not recognised, there was no concept or word for art. The nearest word was craft and artists were considered craftsmen. There was no distinction between art and craft. The artist's subject's name was much more important to enable the subject to live forever.

~Paintings were mostly flat colour although there is some experimentation with shading. Large areas were painted using a coarse brush of palm fibres or pieces of wood chewed or beaten. Separate brushes were used for different colours. Depth was shown by over-lapping figures which were of the same size, we show objects smaller if they are further away from us.



Mummy portrait of a woman from the Roman Period (2AD) *Note: Look at the mummy portrait in the Cartonnage Case. Can you see where it has been restored? Do you think the person looked like this? and Why was the face so important?*

~Egyptian art is seen on plastered walls, floors, stone, pottery, wood, linen, papyrus, glass, faience and metal. It served as a religious function, was a sign of importance and lastly used for decoration: It is unlikely that the Egyptians used decoration for the sake of it, but we will never know. *Note: Look at the glass inlays of daisies and many beads in the jewellery case. The daisies are associated with rebirth and the daily cycle of the sun. The beads in the jewellery case have symbolic meanings.*

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## Art of Ancient Egypt. What is Art?

*We can take nothing for granted and that conceptions which are familiar—or even axiomatic—to us, may be irrelevant to ancient culture, it becomes clear that the paradoxes are founded on a discrepancy between our own outlook and the views and intentions of the ancients. Frankfort 1948: 124-125*

Which objects would you see as art? Textile, tomb painting, pottery, stone cosmetic containers, tomb figuring, etc?

What is art?

The concept of art is a modern one, not shared by the Egyptians. Yet, we often unthinkingly use modern terms to ancient culture which leads to misunderstanding. The Egyptians had no concept of art. People who manufactured tomb paintings, etc. would be classed as 'craftsmen'. Tomb paintings were just as functional as tools such as axes, there intention was to ensure the continued life of the deceased.

There have been many attempts to identify art, none of which seem entirely successful. Carroll (1999) provides a background a definition of art. Art is sometimes said to be aesthetically pleasing, for example. But different groups may find different things pleasing. A number of things are deliberately made to be visually pleasing, for example a mown lawn, but are not works of art. Some artists, for example the German Expressionists produced paintings with the intention of inspiring disgust. In the 1950s, a significant group of philosophers noted that every attempt to define art failed (particularly philosophers influenced by Ludwig Wittgenstein). The Historical Definition School maintains that objects can be considered art if they perform an acknowledged function of art. There may be a number of functions and the present function may differ from the intent of the maker.

### **Art and fine art**

Many people visiting the Egypt Centre are interested in Egyptian art but when shown pottery they are not interested. This reaction perhaps stems from the 18<sup>th</sup> century notion of 'Fine Art.'

The doctrine that art should be valued for itself alone and not for purpose or function is sometimes called 'aestheticism'. The idea of the 'fine arts' where paintings, music, etc. in which aesthetic properties are considered more important than utilitarian ones is very much an 18<sup>th</sup> century one. There are some problems with this view: to view art simply from the point of view of its beauty is to take it from its original context; who decides on what criteria art should be judged; why should the aesthetic be considered 'good'? Because aesthetics are linked to moral value in the west, aesthetics and utility are often seen as separate. But is this separation justified? For the Egyptians the tomb painting was just as functional as a copper alloy adze.

### **Art, aesthetics and morality**

As Alfred Gell has pointed out (1992), ethics and aesthetics belong in the same group. Aesthetics depends on accepting 'initial articles of faith'. Because works of art are considered special, they are often bound up with moral qualities. They may be related to ideas of social harmony and the idea of 'high culture'. Such ideas are not only spurious since they may not be the same as moral values regarded by the Egyptians but also may

lead to charges of elitism. Gell (1992) proposes that art is studied as a component of technology, stripped of aesthetic value. He calls the technology of painting, sculpture, poetry etc. 'the technology of enchantment'.

### **Art and Writing**

In the West, art and writing are often differentiated. As Assman (1997:114-115) and others have pointed out, the distinction was not so clear with the ancient Egyptians. The Egyptians used the same word to refer to both their hieroglyphic writing and drawing of their art works. Cyril Aldred wrote "...once a scribe had learnt to draw the full range of...[hieroglyphic signs with requisite skill he had become *ipso facto* an artist, since the composition of his pictures is the assemblage of a number of ideographs with some interaction between them." (Aldred, C., *Egyptian Art* 1980 p 17)

Renaissance scholars such as William Warburton, believed that Egyptian hieroglyphs were natural signs referring directly to objects. This proved not to be correct insofar as we now know that the symbols refer to concepts and sounds of a language. However the Renaissance scholars had come close to one aspect of Egyptian writing, that is hieroglyphs are iconic (they are meant to represent actual objects). Hence, letters in the shape of harmful animals such as snakes could be dangerous and in Old Kingdom tomb paintings therefore such representations are shown cut in half. Similarly, art was very much like writing. It was a signing system and had to follow a set pattern to be read.

### **Definitions of beauty - Western ideas of the aesthetics of Egyptian art**

Some western writers such as Hegel did not really think of Egyptian 'art' as 'art'. Others were impressed by its strangeness or monumental qualities. The latter group is here considered.

Egyptian art has often been considered sublime rather than beautiful. In the eighteenth century, the beautiful was divided into the 'sublime', the 'picturesque', the 'pathetic' and so on. The 18<sup>th</sup> century idea of the Sublime embraced notions of terror, power, vastness etc. Raging seas, towering mountains etc. might be considered Sublime. The aesthetic ideals of 19<sup>th</sup> century Neoclassicism wanted simplicity, grandeur and massiveness and looked to Egypt (as well as Greece and Rome). Egyptian art has also been valued not necessarily because it was considered beautiful in its own right but because of its associations with the mysterious, exotic East. Egyptian art may be considered beautiful because of its strangeness, its antiquity, its associations with some powerful civilization

Now it is generally agreed that it is pointless to argue whether or not Egyptian art is beautiful. However, connoisseurship is still very much in evidence in choosing what is displayed in museums, what is collected, etc.

### **Egyptian Art and the Notion of Progress**

It is sometimes stated that the Egyptians were unable to use perspective and that western peoples are somehow more 'developed' in that they can use perspective. It is much more likely that in the eyes of the Egyptians there was no need to use perspective. Similarly Egyptian representation tends toward a 'square', formal depiction of figures which again does not appear natural to us.

In the west, as in other cultures, ideas of what appears natural are culturally conceived. The camera for example has altered our perceptions of what appears realistic. We tend to think that camera image is reality but it is not how we see. For example a camera

represents images with depth of field so that some objects are shown out of focus. This is not how our eyes see.

In Hegel's idea of history, the symbol is called a kind of 'pre-art' *Vorkunst*, which mainly belongs to the Orient. The earliest art is a kind of 'unconscious symbolism' such as Indian and Egyptian art. In this the artists themselves were unclear as to their aim 'The very appearance of Egyptian works of art makes us see that they contain riddles to which not only we ourselves lack the key but even those who pose them to themselves' (Hegel, G.W.F., 1927 *Sämtliche Werke*, ed H. Glockner (Stuttgart) Vol XII (*Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik*, part II section 1 p407 translated by Gombrecht 1972 p188). Hegel sees Egyptian art as inadequate in contrast to that of the Greeks.

### **Evolutionary Assumptions within the Study of Egyptian Art**

Today studies of Egyptian artefacts tend to be descriptive. This method of studying Egyptian objects is now orthodox. Egyptologists turn out one after another corpus of objects or individual object showing its slight difference from others. While the recognition of difference does show workshops and chronology, Davis (1983) questions this type of specialist study and points out that it could be argued that scholars should concentrate more on issues of general consequence.

The description of the 'evolution' of Egyptian art often leads to certain periods being regarded as the pinnacle of achievement. Old Kingdom and Amarna art is often cited as particularly developed (Redford 1979: 8 for the value placed by earlier scholars on Old Kingdom art). W.S. Smith *A History of Egyptian sculpture and painting in the Old Kingdom* Oxford University Press 1946 p xv: writes 'Nowhere in the ancient world until the time of the new spirit of Greek civilization is there anything comparable to the technological accomplishment, the naturalism, and the productivity of Egyptian art as exemplified in the first of its great periods of achievement, the Old Kingdom.' Cyril Aldred seemed to have a particular affiliation with Amarna art. The idea that Old Kingdom art and also Amarna art was particularly accomplished may be linked with its apparent naturalism (See section on naturalism).

### **Orientalism and the 'primitive' nature of Egyptian art.**

Edward Said (1978) describes orientalism 'as a system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western Consciousness...the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all non-European peoples and cultures'. Hence Egyptian art, along with other aspects of Egyptian culture may be viewed as lesser than western art.

### **Art-historical Egyptology**

O'Connor (1997: 17), reviews the plusses and minuses of the Egyptological study of Egypt. Of art he states that the culture-historical approach has led to a high standard with regard to issues of dating, authenticity and relationship to the broader culture. A detailed data base has been built up. But 'the approach has tended to be fragmented, particularistic and heavily weighted to (admittedly important) issues of dating and style. That art offers an especially valuable insight into Egypt's mental world has been realised, but mostly along relatively narrow lines, with regard to the religious system.' O'Connor gives examples of how Egyptology might become more innovative. In terms of art, he suggests more work could be done on showing how art is structured by the world view, particularly cosmogony. Etc. The way in which art is transformational is not simply

limited to tomb walls but spreads to more 'mundane' items such as cosmetic containers and decoration of chairs.

Cyril Aldred, perhaps from early training at the Courthauld Institute of Art uses western art-historical vocabulary 'naturalism', 'mannerism', 'realism' etc. when talking about Amarna art in (1988). Amarna art is often considered naturalistic but it is not ideologically neutral. Montserrat (2000: 44-45) compares the pictures of family life from Amarna to the mass-produced images of the 1897 jubilee of Queen Victoria showing her surrounded by her family to convey imperial solidarity. Also the naturalism tends to obscure the fact that many of the pieces of the royal family were intended for religious devotion. They were set up by the elite in their homes to invoke the royal family as intermediaries in the worship of the Aten.

In addition, as Montserrat (2000: 45) points out, in other periods Egyptologists have no trouble interpreting the art to show it as an expression of human domination, but not so with the Amarna art. The scenes from the 'House of Rejoicing to the Aten' for example are usually shown for their naturalistic beauty. Yet this scene of fish, birds and animals are combined with pictures of the bound enemies of Egypt. Nature, like Egypt's enemies are bound and tamed.

The desire to see realism extends to the desire to see images of the royal family themselves as naturalistic. In other periods Egyptologists seem happy to recognise that scenes of the youthful pharaoh with his ever beautiful wife are not portrayals of reality. Yet for the Amarna period it is often stated that the 'feminised' image of the king shows he was suffering from some disease (e.g. Aldred 1988).

### **Collecting and displaying the aesthetically pleasing**

In the past archaeologists have tended to collect items which they have found aesthetically pleasing. This was in part because museums and collectors funded excavations. Petrie was one of the first excavators to stress the importance of all objects (Petrie, W.M.F., 1904. *Methods and Aims In Archaeology* New York: MacMillan Company). Most of the objects in the Egypt Centre and most Egyptian artefacts in other British museums were looted from Egypt by the agents of collectors looking for saleable items. The collecting of the aesthetically pleasing and ignoring of the other has led to a warped representation of ancient Egypt.

### **Selling the aesthetically pleasing**

Antiquities have frequently been 'enhanced' to improve their sale value. For example pottery may be painted and refired. This has led, through thermoluminescence dating for the object to be judged a fake.

### **Conservation**

Conservation is often done to enhance the beauty of the object. But what is considered appropriate varies from age to age. A number of Egyptian coffins of the Third Intermediate Period have a yellowish varnish. In some cases, conservators may have tried to remove this varnish believing it to be modern or perhaps seeing it as 'dulling' the true beauty of the object. There has been a debate on whether the heavy yellowing was intentional or a by-product of the varnish ageing. However, there are a number of unvarnished coffins with yellow painted backgrounds. Therefore it is generally accepted that the varnish was put on these objects by the Egyptians for symbolic purposes. The

varnish had the same name as incense (*senetjer*) which could mean 'to varnish' or 'to make divine'. The shining appearance to could be associated with god like qualities.

### **A brief history of the art museum**

Today it is considered normal to place beautiful objects in museums for the entertainment and education of the people. This European practise is however relatively new. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century the power of art to morally and spiritually improve began to be encouraged and art museums were set up. However, from the start, some observers were concerned that removing objects from their settings could obscure their former intent. Goethe for example, was concerned that Napoleon's gathering of art treasures from various parts of the world for display in the Louvre destroyed something else.<sup>1</sup>

Today the first aim of an art museum is to present objects for aesthetic contemplation rather than for historical or other information. For this reason, art museums tend to keep their galleries uncluttered of information so that the display is aesthetically pleasing (perhaps this is the way the Egypt Centre was designed. Note that the upstairs cases are very small).

### **Naturalism**

The desire to judge art in western terms is also reflected in the consideration of naturalism as a virtue. Petrie in *Revolutions Of Civilisation* (1911) uses art as one expression of civilisation and describes realistic art as being 'its best' and non-realistic as degenerate (p16). In this book Petrie states that he did not use 'elements of moral ideas and religion' to measure civilization 'because they are so largely subjective'. He did not then think of judgement of art as being subjective. Petrie himself was very conservative in his artistic tastes. In addition he disliked the Petrie medal "The first aim of the artist seems to have been his own virtuosity according to modern standards" (Drower : 359). Petrie preferred pre-Raphaelites and Art Nouveau and had friends from this group (Drower: 339).

Part of the reason why naturalism in art is favoured in the west seems to stem from its Greek heritage. Is some evidence that the Greeks of the archaic period considered the pictograms of Egypt to be an imagined reality e.g. pharaoh as a giant. The Greeks were interested in illusionist art which aims to trick the eye. Plato in particular was against such ideas and in the *Republic* complained that such ideas as perspective art was morally bad. It did not show the true world but rather the world through the eyes of the artist.

### **Egyptian Idea of Beauty**

Beauty is a western term which is not really matched in Egyptian literature. The word 'nfr' is often translated as beauty but it might be more accurate to translate it as 'good' or 'youthful' or 'perfect'.

Baines (Baines, J., 1985. *Fecundity Figures: Egyptian Personification and The Iconology Of A Genre*. Warminster: Aris and Phillips. 277-280) uses the term 'decorum' which he borrows from Gombrich (Gombrich, E.H., 1972. *Symbolic Images: Studies in the art of the Renaissance*. London: Phaidon. 7-11). Baines uses the term to describe a set of rules which govern the placing including juxtaposition, colour, etc. of representational motifs. In some ways it

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<sup>1</sup> Goethe in Elizabeth Gilmore Holt, 1979. *The Triumph of Art for the Public*. New York: Garden City, 79. The Frenchman Quatremère de Quincy also art museums as destroyers of historical meaning. See Daniel Sherman, 'Quatremère/Benjamin/Marx: Museums, Aura, and Commodity Fetishism', in D Sherman and I Rogoff (eds), 1994. *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles*. Minneapolis and London: Media and Society, vi, 123-43.



implies what is fitting or appropriate within a social context. The motivation of the system however is not that which is considered beautiful.

The Egyptians appear to have created each item from those views which individually convey the most information and conform to a timeless archetype. Thus representations may be composed from elements seen from different angles.

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# Egypt Centre

## Colour (Iwen) and Symbolism

*“ O Elder who sees his father, keeper of the book of Thoth  
Bring me the mud of Aker (an earth god), in which is Seth  
Bring me the waterpot and pallete in that writing-kit of Thoth.  
And the secrets of their contents. See, I am the scribe!  
Bring me the rotting of Osiris with which I may write”.*

This is an extract from the book of the dead.

*The mud of Aker in which is Seth = Red.  
Bring me the rotting of Osiris = Black.*

Black and red were the two colours that were used in Egyptian writing.

In tomb decoration the lines of the figures were drawn first in red and then any corrections were made in black

**BLACK (*Kem*)** – The colour black was made from carbon compounds such as soot, ground charcoal or burnt animal bones. The black residue from the inside of cooking pots was often removed and used.

Black = Osiris

- Black was the colour of death and the night but also fertility, resurrection from death and paradoxically life itself.
- Black was the colour of Khol the stuff they used to put on their eyes.
- Black Nile mud = Fertility God of the Nile often seen with a black face. See statue of Montuhotpe II with black face. Was he a black pharaoh? Or was this a symbol of fertility and resurrection. Coffins of the Late Period are often painted black as a symbol of resurrection, and many heart scarabs are also black !

Black stone seems to have been considered a particularly potent symbolic substance and was almost always the material chosen for the magical healing statues commonly inscribed with vignettes and spells during the Macedonian and Ptolemaic periods.

Black also symbolises Egypt = *Kmt* = The black Land.

## Objects at the Egypt Centre:

Black Heart Scarabs.

Black faces and decoration on Ptah Sokar Osiris figures.

Black decoration on bed legs, coffin fragments.

Sarcophagus of Amenhotep Son of Hapu.

**Red (*Desher*)** – created from naturally occurring oxidised iron and red ochre. **Red was associated with fire and blood, but could also represent regeneration as in the use of henna in a funerary context.**

Red = Hostile desert = The bad god of chaos Seth, who had red hair and red eyes

Used to represent the colour of skin.

*Desher ib*, literally means red of the heart

It is thought that the Egyptians wore red carnelian during festivals, and would paint their bodies with Henna.

**Objects at the Egypt Centre:**

Wooden Seth figure

Ptah-Sokar-Osiris figures.

Lots of patterns including the Bes bed legs and lots of coffin fragments.

Carnelian belt.

**White (*hedj*)** – created from calcium carbonate, chalk and gypsum.

White suggests purity. Due to its lack of colour white was the colour of simple and sacred things. The name of the city of Memphis meant ‘white walls’. White sandals were worn at holy ceremonies. The material most commonly used for ritual objects such as the embalming table for the Apis bulls in Memphis was white alabaster. White was also the heraldic colour of Upper Egypt.

**Objects at the Egypt Centre:**

White alabaster Offering stand.

White limestone ‘Aba’ statue.

**Yellow (*Khenet*)** – was created by the Egyptian artists using natural ochre’s or oxides. From the New Kingdom onwards, arsenic trisulphide was used.

Both the sun and gold were yellow and shared the qualities of being imperishable, eternal and indestructible. Thus anything portrayed as yellow in Egyptian art generally carried this connotation. The skin of the gods was believed to be made of gold. Thus statues of gods were very often made of gold.

**Objects at the Egypt Centre:**

21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty coffin and fragments

Bit of gold on the mummified hawk

Golden faces of the mummy masks

Coffin fragments painted yellow

**Blue (*irtiu*)** – created by combining iron and copper oxides with calcium and silica.

Blue was symbolic of the Nile and its crops. Amun was often shown with a blue face to symbolise his role in the creation of the world.

The hair of the gods was said to be made of lapis lazuli and in many of the opening of the mouth ceremonies both Anubis and the mummy have blue hair.

**Objects at the Egypt Centre:**

The goddess figurine with blue hair

Faience objects.

Lapis lazuli chunk.

**Green (*wadj*)** – created from malachite, a naturally occurring copper ore. Of course, it's a symbol of naturally growing things. Early texts refer to the afterlife as the field of Malachite. The skin of Osiris was frequently painted green. In the 26<sup>th</sup> Dynasty the bandages on the face of some mummies were painted green.

The Eye of Horus is usually covered green because of its positive connotations. Green was the colour of healing and wellbeing. Wadjet 'the green one' was the name of the serpent of Lower Egypt.

**Objects at the Egypt Centre:**

Green Wadjet Eyes

Green Scarabs

# Ancient Egyptian art at the Egypt Centre House of Life

Some Egyptian art is naturalistic showing vegetation, flowers and nature. Look around the gallery and draw some of the naturalistic patterns.

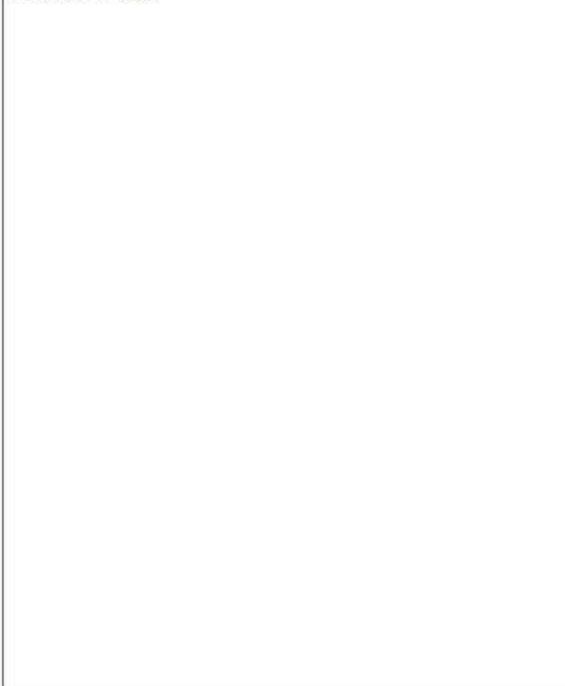
Hint: Look in the Amarna case.



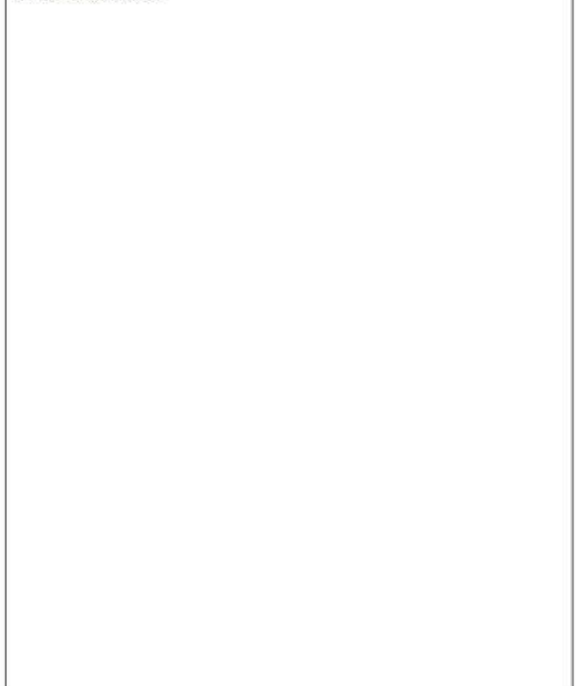
Egyptian art is seen on plastered walls, floors, stone, pottery, wood, linen, papyrus, glass, faience and metal. It served as a religious function, was a sign of importance and lastly used for decoration.

Look around the gallery for examples of art on different materials and draw two of them.

Object:  
Material:

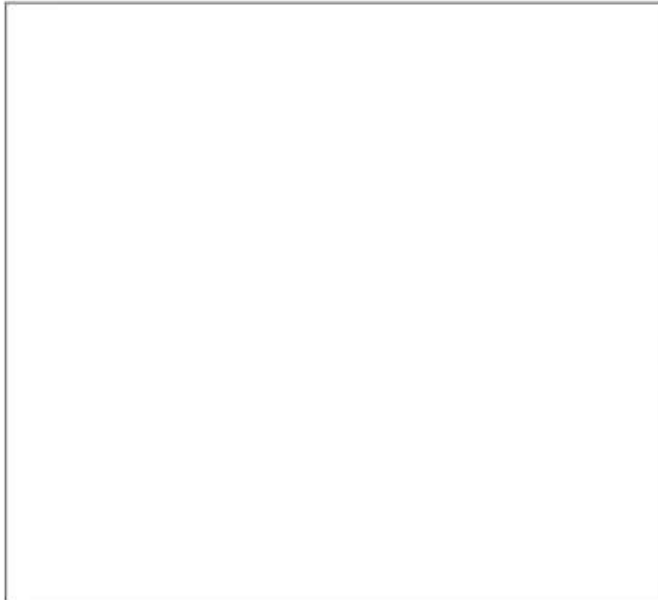


Object:  
Material:



# Ancient Egyptian art at the Egypt Centre House of Death

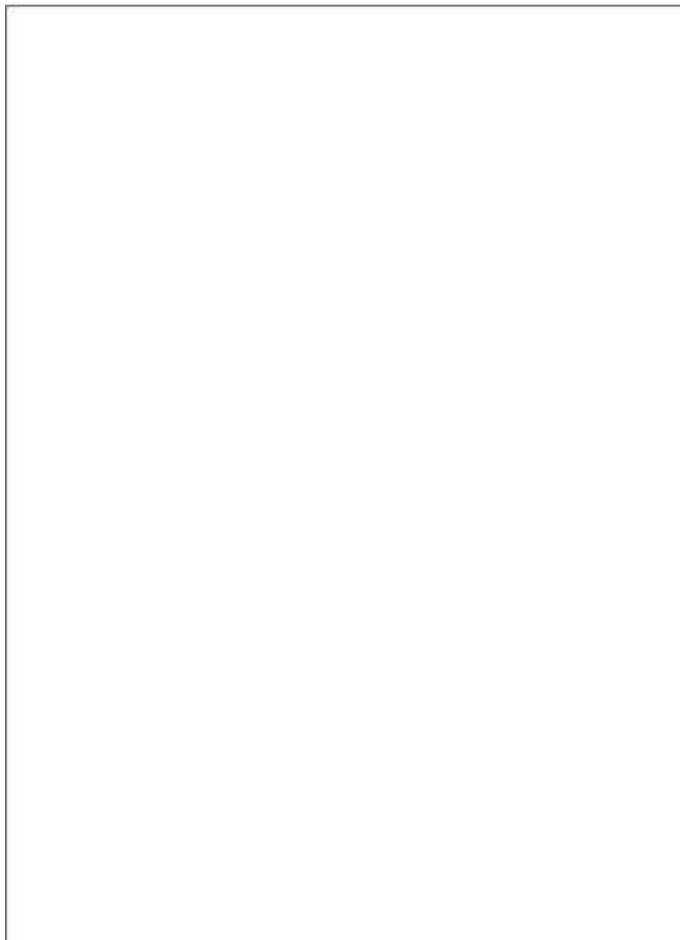
To understand Egyptian art you have to understand Egyptian life.  
Religion was very important and art performed a religious function.



Ancient Egyptians believed when they died they would have an afterlife. But they needed certain things such as their body, which was mummified, and food to be able to survive in the afterlife. They used art to create substitutes in case the real things were lost or destroyed.

Find the 'reserve head' sculpture which was placed in the tomb in case the owner lost their real head!

Draw the reserve head in the box.



The tomb owner and their families are always shown dressed their best and in the prime of life, even if they were old when they died. Every individual item is shown from its best angle. The eyes and top part of the body are shown from the front, the arms, legs and face from the side.

Look for a figure with these features.  
Hint: Look at the coffin pieces.

Draw a figure showing the face in profile and the eyes facing the front!

Look in the Kings case for an example of this. It is impossible to look like this in real life!

Now you know why there is no word for art or artist in ancient Egypt. It wasn't the artist who was important but the subject who wanted eternal life!