

Ramses at Montreal

The great pharaoh Ramses II and his time. An exhibition held at the Palais de la Civilisation. Île Notre-Dame. Montreal. 1 June – 29 September 1985

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The great pharaoh Ramses II and his time. An exhibition held at the Palais de la Civilisation, Île Notre-Dame, Montreal, 1 June – 29 September 1985.

Catalogue: Christiane Desroches-Noblecourt. *Le grand pharaon Ramsès II et son temps.* Montreal, Pierre Des Marais, Inc., 1985, 197 pp., 91 illus. \$20.00.

The arrival in Montreal in the summer of 1985 of the exhibition of Egyptian antiquities *Le grand pharaon Ramsès II et son temps* was heralded with great fanfare. Not since 1979 when "Tutmania" swept the country has so much attention been given in Canada to objects from ancient Egypt. Yet, if a few years ago the attractions

were a tragic boy king and his golden treasures, magnificent though they were, this time the organizers claimed that we were going to see a *real* king, one who had genuinely accomplished something. Oh, and what accomplishments: epic battles shown on major temples in Egypt and told and re-told by court poets; large buildings erected throughout the country; father of well over a hundred children in a sixty-seven-year reign. He was even the pharaoh of the Exodus, albeit as the villain in that tale, and thus one of the protagonists in one of the best known episodes from the ancient world. Truly the stuff legends are made of!

The exhibition itself, when it finally arrived, certainly lived up to its promises. The objects were divided into a

FIGURE 1. Installation view, Palais de la Civilisation, Montreal. Photographic reproduction of the tomb of Nofretari (Photo: Ville de Montréal, Graetz Inc.).



number of themes: the builder king; the king as solar divinity; the royal family; religion, sciences and the arts; palace life; a photographic reproduction of the tomb of Nofretari, Ramses' favourite wife (Fig. 1); the daily life and funerary equipment of the necropolis workers of Deir el Medina; the king as cultic participant; and a large line-drawing reproduction of the Abu Simbel version of the Battle of Qadesh. These themes served to group the objects into well-defined frameworks, helping the viewers to understand the choice of objects and their placement within the exhibition. Particularly successful groups were the exquisite funerary material belonging to the necropolis workmen, and the 'palace' section.

However, some of the divisions were puzzling. With only the bust of Ramses' mother, the 'family' section hardly seemed necessary. The statue of the king's oldest daughter (cat. 28), for example, found a suitable location in the better represented 'palace' section (see Fig. 2). Again, why not form a new theme of 'famous men of the reign' rather than slot a statue of the vizier in the 'building' section, or statues of an architect and a scribe in the 'sciences' group? More puzzling to the present reviewer was the need felt by the organizers to include objects from periods as remote to that of Ramses II (1290-1224 B.C.) as the silver ewer (cat. 25) from the early Eighteenth Dynasty (ca. 1550 B.C.) and the various artefacts from the reign of King Psusennes (1054-1004

B.C.). Another seemingly misleading feature was the location of the mural showing the Battle of Qadesh. Labelled a 'Lesson in History' and coming as it did after the sarcophagus of Ramses, the mural could give the impression to a viewer unfamiliar with the chronology of Ramses' reign that he had died in the battle.

The objects themselves were presented in ample space, with enough room to move around and view them properly (Fig. 2). The chiaroscuro lighting lent an appropriately awe-inspiring atmosphere to the exhibition, but if I may be permitted a slight complaint here, it would be that this effect was too dramatic at times, in that details of some of the objects were obscured, in particular the installation of the wooden sarcophagus in which the king was re-interred (cat. 66, Fig. 3). Another minor irritation with the display was the lack of proper labelling. The labels gave the exhibition number, the name of the object, and the material only, so that anyone truly interested was forced into buying a catalogue or renting a recorded guided tour, excellent though that turned out to be. A small slip in the labelling (and in the catalogue) was also noticed: object n° 43, a small wooden chest, was said to belong to a man named Sennedjem. Although the chest undoubtedly came from the tomb of Sennedjem, the hieroglyphic caption on the lid tells us it actually belonged to one of Sennedjem's sons (cf. the list of sons given on cat. 45) named Kha-bekht, who is also the owner of the shawabti container, cat. 50.

FIGURE 2. Installation view, Palais de la Civilisation, Montreal. To the left, statue of Ramses' oldest daughter, cat. 28 (Photo: Ville de Montréal, Graetz Inc.).





FIGURE 3. Cover of the sarcophagus in which Ramses was re-interred, cat. 66 (Photo: Ville de Montréal, Graetz Inc.).

If the present review has spent a certain amount of time discussing the actual installation, this is largely because both the exhibition and the catalogue under review are basically repeats of an earlier exhibition in Paris (*Ramsès le Grand*, May 15 – Oct. 15, 1976, Grand Palais, Paris; catalogue: C. Desroches-Noblecourt, *Ramsès le Grand*, Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, 1976), so that the only truly original part of the Montreal showing was its installation. The catalogue itself, an essential companion to the exhibition, is divided into the themes enumerated above. After giving a brief history of the negotiations involved with bringing the artefacts to Montreal, a biographical sketch of Ramses II is given. As with most exhibition catalogues, this exposition on the king's life does not contain any controversial statements, as, for example, the author's refusal to be drawn into a debate on chronology (footnote 1) demonstrates. From the humble beginnings of the Nineteenth Dynasty, Ramses II's family, we follow the king's reign from the famous battle at Qadesh in his fifth year and other military adventures in the Near East to the celebrated peace treaty in the twenty-first year between the Egyptians and the Hittites, their arch enemies of the time. From war to peace-time activities, his Jubilee Festivals' celebrations, his building activities, his careful dealings



FIGURE 4. Double-necked make-up pot, cat. 63 (Photo: Ville de Montréal, Graetz Inc.).

with the powerful priests of Amun, Ramses' catalogue of achievements never ceases to amaze. Here, the author shows her vast knowledge of the period and even adds additional up-to-date information on certain subjects, for example, the newly discovered tomb of Ramses' sister Thia at Sakkara.

The listing of the exhibition pieces which follows describes each one in detail and explains its significance, often adding useful information about a particular genre, for example, the entry on the statue of the vizier Khay, where the development of the block-statue is given. Essential information such as the Cairo Museum registration number (every object in the exhibition came from Cairo), size, material, provenance, as well as full bibliography is given, so that every entry can be said a fresh publication of the given artefact.

In short, the book is a useful companion to the study of various aspects dating to the Ramesside period, be they statuary, relief, faience, funerary practices, or daily life, and will remain so for a long time. One nagging factor, however, which makes the book more difficult to use than was necessary, is the lack of a table of contents or even consecutive page numbering, so that a quick reference to a given piece is well-nigh impossible and requires a frustrating amount of pages turning before the desired entry is located. Here, the printer may be at fault, but the work does show signs of haste here and there (as did the exhibition itself in fact: witness the peeling labels – within the first week – and the hand-

painted ceiling in the tomb reproduction, which at best can be described as sloppy). A note to object cat. 40 warns the reader that cat. 9, 12, and from 40 to 63 (Fig. 4) were included in the installation as the book was going to press and thus their bibliographical entries were kept to a minimum, although some pieces fared better than others. One can well understand the author's dilemma at suddenly being told to add a good number of entries to her ready-for-press manuscript. What is in question here is not the quality of the information contained in the book, but rather the whole organization behind the enterprise. That the author managed to draw together as much information as she

did in what would seem to be fairly short notice is clear evidence of her industry and diligence, and for this she should be congratulated.

In the end, notwithstanding the few reservations expressed above, the exhibition was certainly worthwhile. The overall impression of the installation remains a positive one and the show was a wonderful opportunity to see objects which rarely leave Cairo and which never fail to dazzle.

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Morrice at Montreal

James Wilson Morrice 1865-1924. An exhibition held at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 6 December 1985 – 2 February 1986; circulating to the Musée du Québec, 27 February – 20 April 1986, the Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, 15 May – 29 June 1986, the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, 25 July – 14 September 1986, and the Vancouver Art Gallery, 9 October – 23 November 1986.

Catalogue: Nicole Cloutier, *James Wilson Morrice 1865-1924*, Montreal, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1985. 262 pp., 145 illus., \$29.95 (paper). French/English edition.

In the past few years we have seen quite an increase in the number of publications on James Wilson Morrice and a great advancement in our knowledge of his life and work. There is Lucie Dorais' 1980 Master thesis for the Université de Montréal, 'James Wilson Morrice, peintre canadien (1865-1924). Les années de formation,' a detailed study of Morrice up to 1898, and Irene Szylinger's Master thesis for the University of Toronto, 'The Watercolours by James Wilson Morrice,' 1983. The special issue of the *Revue de l'Université de Moncton* devoted to Canadian art (Vol. 15, April-December 1982) included two articles on Morrice, 'Morrice et la critique' by Ghislain Clermont, and John O'Brian's excellent essay 'Morrice – O'Connor, Gauguin, Bonnard et Vuillard,' discussing Morrice's affinities to these artists. G. Blair Laing's book *Morrice* (Toronto, 1984), sumptuously illustrated in full colour, expanded on the author's own career as a dealer and collector of Morrice's paintings, and elaborated a number of the anecdotes

recounted by Donald Buchanan in his pioneering biography of Morrice (Toronto, 1936). Lucie Dorais' publication on Morrice, supposed to have been published by the National Gallery in 1985 in its Canadian Artist Series, has just been released. The above publications, together with John Lyman's excellent study of Morrice published by L'Arbre, Montreal, in 1945, Kathleen Pepper's 1966 biography which quoted for the first time some of the Robert Henri-Morrice correspondence, William Johnston's important catalogue for the 1965 Morrice exhibition at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, and Dennis Reid's catalogue for the 1968 Morrice exhibition shown in Bath, London, Bordeaux and Paris, formed the basis for the literature on Morrice. To the above we must now add Nicole Cloutier's catalogue for the Morrice exhibition which opened at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts 6 December 1985.

This long awaited exhibition, three years in the making, is the first large retrospective of Morrice's work, and the first serious study of his entire career and life, since the last Montreal Museum exhibition organized by William Johnston in 1965 to celebrate the centenary of the artist's birth. The exhibition consists of 109 works (69 canvases, 25 oil sketches, 12 watercolours and three sketchbooks), slightly fewer than the 142 works in the 1965 show. (There were 111 works in the 1925 memorial exhibition and 159 works in the 1937 retrospective.) The exhibition was hung in the four upper galleries of the old Montreal Museum, the first gallery presenting a 'contextual' display consisting of a chronology of the artist's life, photographs of the artist, a map with con-