

NEWS

from the Worcester Art Museum

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WATERCOLORS, PHOTOGRAPHS ILLUSTRATE FASCINATION WITH ANCIENT EGYPT

(WORCESTER, Mass., Sept. 9, 2005)—A new exhibition of rare watercolors, prints and photographs at the Worcester Art Museum characterizes the romance of ancient and Islamic Egypt that consumed the public during the 19th century.

Egyptomania: Modern Fascination for an Early Civilization is on view at the Worcester Art Museum, 55 Salisbury St., from Sept. 17 through Nov. 27.

When Napoleon took his armies into Egypt in 1798, the news of his exploits drew parallels between the French Empire and that of the ancient pharaohs. The campaign sparked a fervent and lasting fascination in France with ancient and modern Egypt. These Romantic reveries deepened in 1802, when Baron Vivant Denon published an account of Napoleon's campaign, *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Egypte*, and with the appearance of Victor Hugo's prose poem *Les Orientales*. In 1822, Jean-Francois Champollion deciphered the Rosetta Stone, translating ancient hieroglyphic writing.

"As 19th-century scholars began to translate the inscription on ancient Egyptian monuments, the fascination with Egypt grew from a preoccupation into a mania," said David Acton, the exhibition curator. "Ancient Egyptian culture influenced all the arts in France and even spread to America."

Artists painted images of the desert and the Nile and their contemporary inhabitants. Ancient Egyptian and Islamic art influenced 19th-century design. With the birth of photography, Egypt and the Holy Land became topographical photographers' first destination.

This exhibition, drawn from the Worcester Art Museum's collection, reflects the evolution and spread of the Egyptian fad. Prints represent Napoleon's campaign, and early photographs by Maxime du Camp and Francis Frith depict ancient Egyptian monuments. Through the 19th-century, Egyptology evolved as a serious scholarly pursuit, as archaeologists and historians unraveled the ancient mysteries. The exhibition includes a group of watercolors by Howard Carter, the English artist and archaeologist who discovered the Tomb of Tutankhuman,

a pharaoh's burial undisturbed since ancient times. By the turn of the 20th century, Egypt had become a winter destination for western travelers. The exhibition features watercolors and pastels by Henry Bacon, an American artist living in Europe. From 1904-1912, he visited Egypt annually to paint the desert, its light and shifting sands, and the nomadic tribes who inhabited it.

About the Worcester Art Museum

The Worcester Art Museum, which opened to the public in 1898, is world-renowned for its 35,000-piece collection of paintings, sculpture, decorative arts, photography, prints, drawings and new media. The works span 5,000 years of art and culture, ranging from ancient Roman mosaics to Colonial silver, Impressionist paintings and contemporary art. Dedicated to the promotion of art and art education, the Museum offers a year-round studio art and art appreciation program that enrolls over 6,000 adult and youth students each year. Public tours are offered Saturdays at 11 a.m. and Sundays at 1 p.m., September through May. Audio tours are also available in English and Spanish.

Museum hours are Wednesday through Sunday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Thursday, 11 a.m.-8 p.m. (evening hours sponsored by Commerce Bank), and Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Admission is \$10 for adults, \$8 for seniors and full-time college students with current ID, and FREE for Members and all youth 17 and under. Admission is also FREE for everyone on Saturday mornings, 10 a.m.-noon (sponsored by The TJX Companies, Inc. and Massachusetts Electric, a National Grid Company). The Museum is located at 55 Salisbury St., Worcester, Mass., easily accessible from the Massachusetts Turnpike (I-90), Route 290 and Route 9. Free parking is available near entrances on Salisbury, Lancaster and Tuckerman streets. For more information, call (508) 799-4406 or visit the Museum web site at www.worcesterart.org.

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