

Introduction

In the ancient Egyptian language, “gates of heaven” referred to the doors on a sacred shrine holding the statue of a god. Opening these doors brought the divine world into contact with the human one, an act that enabled the Universe to perpetuate itself by renewing the process of creation. It also allowed humans to glimpse an image of an ineffable reality. Closing the doors was merely the prelude to another, future rebirth; in the meantime, the god returned to the shadowy Beyond, withdrawing his image from human sight.

Egyptians felt that certain places acted, in a way, as replicas of these shrines containing divine statues. These places were therefore endowed with doors—actual or false—which represented the transition between physical and mental realities. This exhibition focuses on four of these realities: the ordered Universe, the Beyond, the tomb chapel, and the temple forecourt. Objects designed to depict these worlds or to be placed within them reflect a complex logic that reveals the intricacy of Egyptian philosophy, far removed from our own rational, Cartesian way of thinking.

Egyptian imagery thus developed a rich visual rhetoric: evocations of the whole through depiction of a part; visual transpositions; overlapping effects; virtual reality; interplay between sound, text, and image; accumulation or synthesis of elements; ellipses; complementarity between two- and three-dimensional figures; and internal dynamics that evoke the equivalent of perpetual motion. This exhibition, featuring masterpieces and other works in French and European collections, offers a new analysis of ancient Egyptians’ visual and mental representations through an exploration of their rhetoric and a few aspects of the civilization that generated it.

