

# EGYPT IN THE ART OF SUSAN OSGOOD

Ägyptisches Museum, Georg Steindorff

University of Leipzig

Showing until 27th August, 2017

“  
THE CONCEPT OF THE SHOW IS BRINGING  
TOGETHER SCIENCE AND ART—AND  
WHERE THESE TWO DISCIPLINES CROSS.

**E**XPLORATIONS:  
Egypt in the Art of Susan  
Osgood is your excuse for  
a field trip to Germany!  
This exhibition celebrates and  
joins the two worlds of Susan  
Osgood: Art and Archaeology.  
It is showing at the Ägyptisches  
Museum - Georg Steindorff -  
in the University of Leipzig  
through until August 27, 2017.

*Explorations* features Susan  
Osgood's incredibly detailed  
drawings of temple reliefs as an  
archaeological illustrator for the  
University of Chicago's Oriental  
Institute Epigraphic Survey in  
Luxor, as well as her colourful  
travel sketchbooks and evocative  
contemporary fine art. Susan also  
documented a number of the  
coffins found in KV 63—the first  
new tomb to be discovered in the  
Valley of the Kings since  
Tutankhamun's in 1922—and  
*Explorations* showcases the  
incredible artistry of both Susan  
Osgood and the anonymous  
ancient craftsmen.

Susan Osgood grew up in rural  
New Hampshire in the U.S. Lis-  
tening to her professors at art  
school share their stories of ad-  
venture and travel, Susan came  
up with the idea of “finding a way  
to travel while making a living as



Susan Osgood in Luxor Temple, 2005  
Photo: Mark Chickering

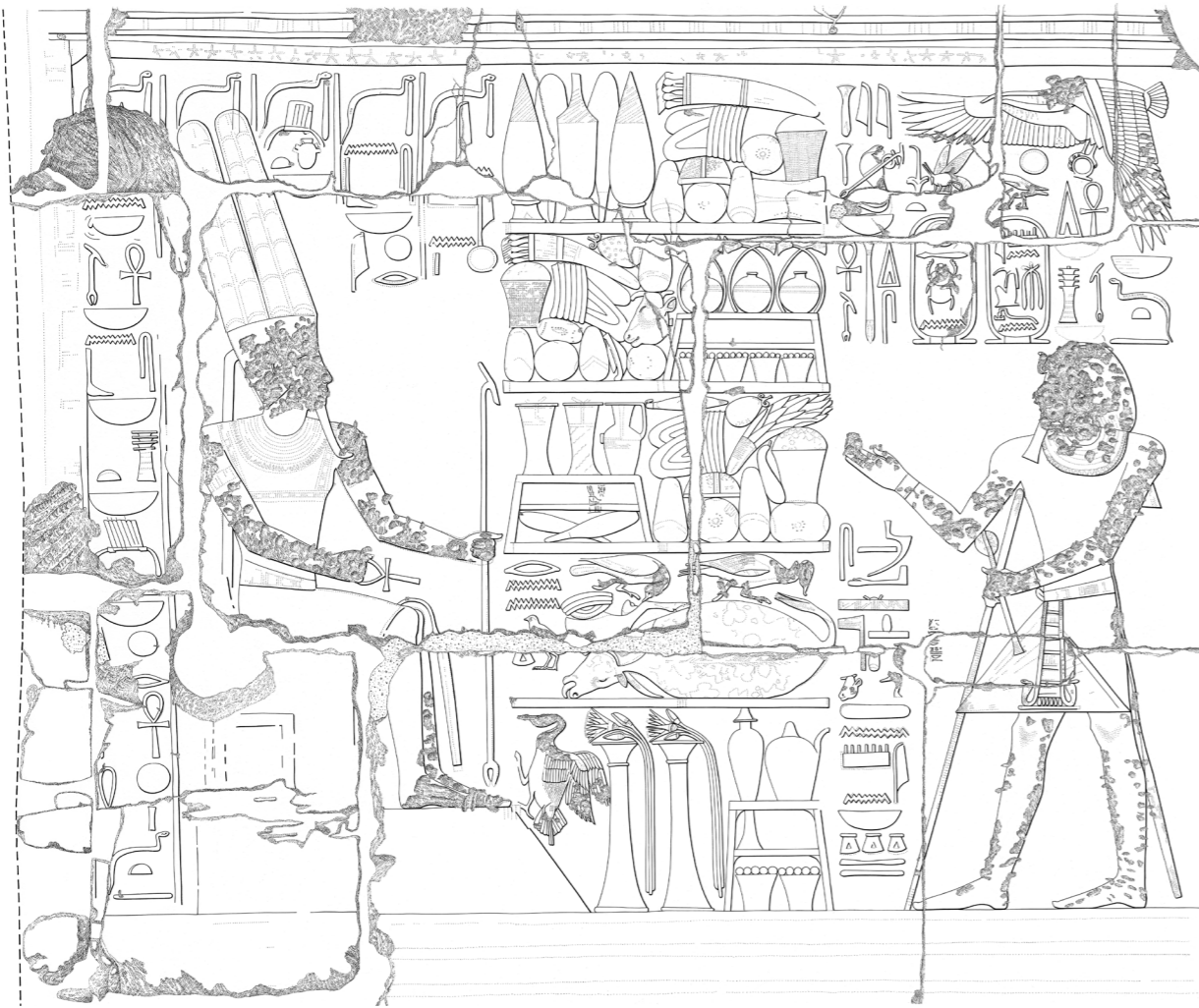
*“Copying the exact curve  
that an artist carved  
3,500 years ago...  
I imagine the temple  
as it once was,  
with brilliant sunlit  
open courts and dark,  
covered, inner sanctuaries  
lit with oil lamps.”*

an artist.” She writes that “touring  
Egypt in 1979 gave me a taste for  
a foreign culture rich with layers  
of history and art. In 1985, I  
began working as an archaeo-  
logical artist for the Oriental In-  
stitute, and have spent my winters  
drawing the ancient monuments  
and artifacts there ever since—an  
experience that continues to fuel  
and inspire.”

Many thanks to Rogério Sousa  
from the University of Porto in  
Portugal for his kind permission  
to reproduce portions of the *Ex-  
plorations* catalogue. Italicised  
portions come directly from the  
catalogue (thank you to Rogério  
Sousa, W. Raymond Johnson and  
Susan Osgood), while other text  
is by the editor to include extra  
information.

German Egyptologist Eberhard  
Dziobek first met Susan Osgood  
in Egypt while working for the  
German Archaeological Institute.  
Some 25 years ago he approached  
Susan Osgood to ask whether she  
would lend him a few of her  
paintings to exhibit. Susan looked  
at him and asked, “Why?”

Susan's art has now been exhib-  
ited around the world. It seems  
her idea of combining art and  
travel has turned out rather well.



The king with a pile of offerings in the presence of Amun-Re. 20 x 24", 50.8 x 61 cm, after the Epigraphic Survey "Medinet Habu Volume IX. The Eighteenth Dynasty Temple, Part I: The Inner Sanctuaries", OIP Vol. 136, 2009, Plate 79.

## MY WORK WITH THE EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY

Susan Osgood

**6** The opportunity to live and work in Luxor deeply influences me. I am surrounded by scholars from around the world, as well as by the local people who speak colloquial Egyptian Arabic. Copying the exact curve that an artist carved 3,500 years ago depicting a specific style, I imagine the temple as it once was, with brilliant sunlit open courts and dark, covered, inner sanctuaries lit with oil lamps.

**T**he universe began at Medinet Habu. Or, to be more precise, beneath a little temple in the north-east corner of the Medinet Habu precinct.

In the beginning, the primeval mound rose from the chaotic, timeless waters of Nun and there emerged the creator god who brought the universe into being.

At Thebes, the creator god was Amun, and Medinet Habu, directly across the Nile from Luxor Temple, was

imagined to be the location of that original primeval mound of creation. It was referred to as "the genuine mound of the West". This same mound was considered the burial spot of the Ogdoad, the eight creator gods of Hermopolis in Middle Egypt.

Every ten days Amun, residing in his sacred statue, would be brought across the river to this sacred site to reperform the funeral rites for his ancestors, thereby giving them new life and, thus, renewing creation.

This perfect symbol of the eternal cycle of birth and death made Medinet Habu a particularly sacred site.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, the female pharaoh, Hatshepsut, and her co-ruler, Thutmose III, built a temple dedicated to Amun—possibly replacing an earlier, Middle Kingdom structure. No doubt Hatshepsut and her stepson wanted to tap into the site's powerful regenerative properties to boost their chances of a glorious resurrection after death.

Three centuries later, around 1170 B.C., Ramesses III chose the spot for his royal worship temple and enclosed the earlier Amun temple within his complex.

A detail of the previous scene, which suffered under the anti-Amun policies of Akhenaten. When Amun was recarved in the post-Amarna restoration, the plumes of his crown were made to overlap the signs, djed medu, "words spoken".

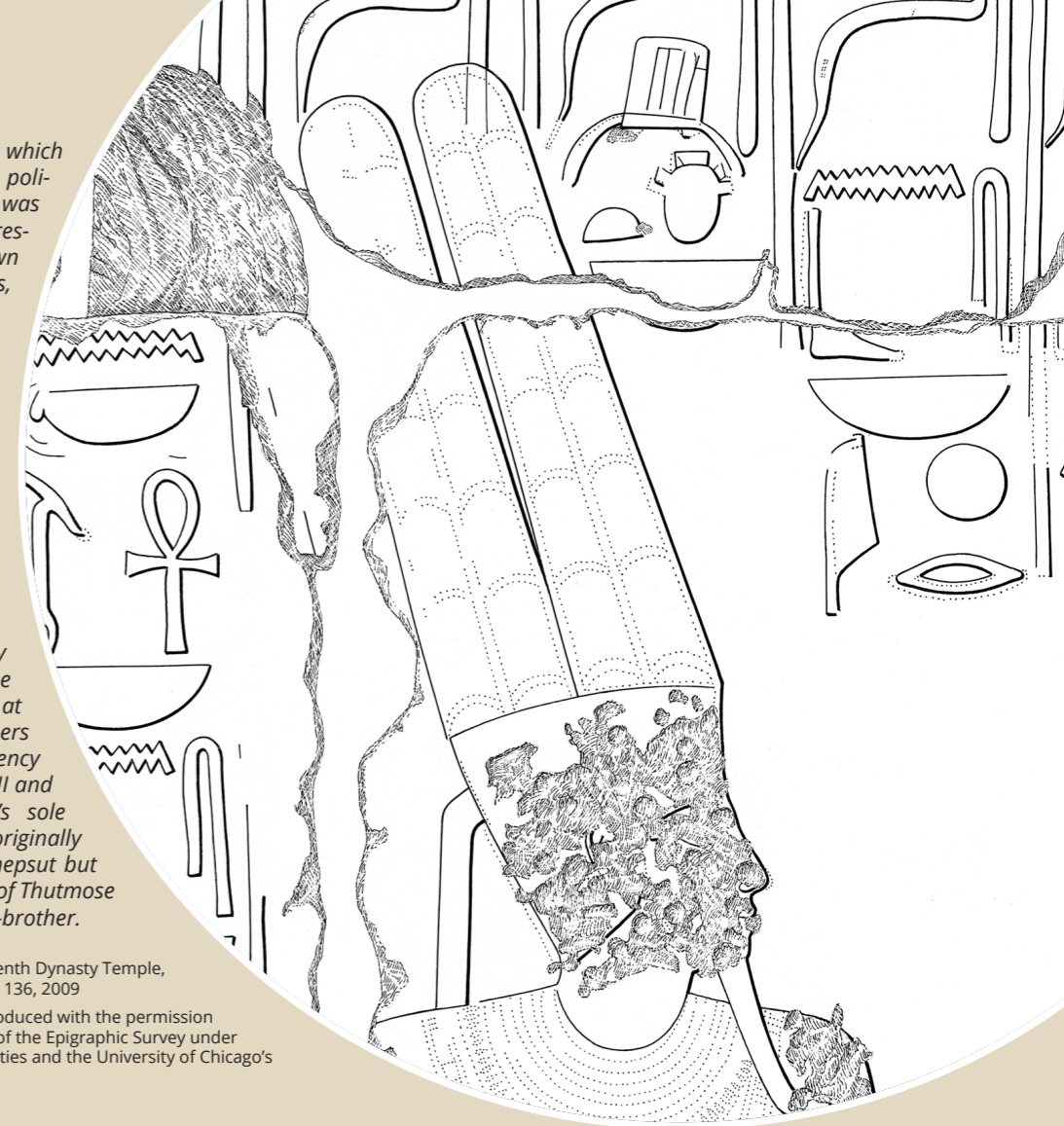
The heads, arms, and legs of both the king and god were attacked in Medieval times.

At the upper left corner of the scene, a rounded niche was carved into the surface, presumably to hold a lamp of some sort when the chamber came to be used for domestic purposes.

The scene comes from the north wall of the "Sanctuary of the Ithyphallic Amun" in the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty Temple of Amun at Medinet Habu. These chambers were begun during the coregency of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III and completed during Thutmose's sole reign. The king's cartouches originally contained the names of Hatshepsut but were later recarved with those of Thutmose II—Hatshepsut's husband/half-brother.

"Medinet Habu Volume IX. The Eighteenth Dynasty Temple, Part I: The Inner Sanctuaries", OIP Vol. 136, 2009

All Epigraphic Survey images are reproduced with the permission of Dr. W. Raymond Johnson, Director of the Epigraphic Survey under the auspices of the Ministry of Antiquities and the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute.



## THE EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY, ORIENTAL INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO (CHICAGO HOUSE) IN LUXOR, EGYPT

W. Raymond Johnson, Director of the Epigraphic Survey

**6** In 1922 the Oriental Institute's director, James Henry Breasted, was invited by Lord Carnarvon and Howard Carter to visit the recently discovered tomb of Tutankhamun in Luxor, and to assist with the reading of the impressed seals on the outer and inner doors of the tomb.

Breasted returned the following year to revisit the tomb, and while in Luxor, he suffered a bout of malaria that laid him up for five weeks. During his convalescence he conceived the idea of a long-term epigraphic and architectural survey of all the ancient temples of the Nile Valley.

The point of epigraphic recording, and the primary task of the Epigraphic Survey even today, is to create precise, facsimile copies of the carved and painted wall surfaces of Egypt's ancient temple and tomb monuments in order to preserve for all time the information found on them as part of the scientific record. Breasted believed that this documentation should be so precise it could stand in for the original.

Even Breasted could see beautifully inscribed wall surfaces slowly fading and vanishing in front of his eyes as

wind and rain and the depredations of man scoured the fragile, ancient stone.

Although an avid photographer, Breasted quickly learned through experience that unless an ancient, inscribed wall surface is in a pristine state, photography alone often cannot capture all the details that are preserved on it.

Ancient Egyptian inscribed wall reliefs were usually intended to be plastered with whitewash and painted with bright, mineral-based pigments. Sadly, most painted details are now missing, scoured away by time and the elements. But not all monuments are lacking paint. Because many more details were painted than carved, traces of painted details often survive within carved outlines. The convention for paint boundaries in the Chicago House black-and-white line drawings is a row of small consecutive dots (see the plumes of Amun-Re's headdress above).

One of the most exciting aspects of the new digital revolution is that so much information—especially archaeological data—can now be made accessible to anyone, anywhere in the world, who wishes it. I believe that James Henry Breasted would be tremendously pleased.



Ruins within Medinet Habu Temple. Ink and watercolor, 2002.

## SKETCHBOOKS

Susan Osgood

With eyes wide open, at 26 years old I went on my first trip to Egypt. I did not bring a camera; instead, I brought pastels and a sketchbook. Wanting to travel ever since I was young—dreaming of exotic places—I took it all in slowly and intently. Sketching makes me slow down, observe, and really be in that moment, in that place.

In the southwestern back corner of Medinet Habu stand four prominent white-plastered pillars. These once formed the square living room of the House of Butehamun—one of the most famous scribes who presided over the digging, decorating, and, notoriously, the dismantling of Egypt's most spectacular royal tombs.

For close to 500 years, the secluded village of Deir el-Medina, on the Theban West Bank, had been the exclusive home to the artisans (and their families) who worked on the king's tombs in the Valley.

Near the end of Ramesses XI's reign, attacks by Libyan marauders, emboldened by the absence of any strong local leadership, saw Butehamun and the other residents

of Deir el-Medina looking for a safer place to live. Medinet Habu, with its massive mud-brick walls, 35 feet (11 metres) thick and 60 feet (18 metres) high, was ideal.

The death of Ramesses XI saw the 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty splutter to an end, and his tomb (KV 4) was to be the last royal burial begun (but not finished) by Butehamun's men.

Now, instead of cutting tombs, Butehamun was involved in the rescuing of royal dead after their tombs had been violated by thieves. However, after the High Priest Piankh took control of Thebes (with the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty's King Smendes ruling the north from Tanis), Butehamun was given a new assignment: "Perform for me a task on which you have never before embarked. . . . uncover a tomb among the tombs of the ancestors and preserve its seal until I return. . . ."

Ramesses XI's empty tomb found a new use: a state-sanctioned workshop where royal mummies were relieved of their valuables before being moved to hidden caches, safe from unofficial rummaging. Butehamun was literally digging for royal gold, and the scribe earned a new title: "Opener of the gates in the necropolis."



KV63 as it was found in 2006. Coffin A, badly damaged by termites, lays in the foreground. Photos: Ted Brock (digital montage: Susan Osgood)

## UNCOVERING A NEW TOMB IN THE VALLEY OF THE KINGS (KV 63)

Rogerio Sousa

Directed by Otto Schaden, the Amenmesse Project was created in 1992 with the purpose to clear the tomb of the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty king, Amenmesse (KV 10) in the Valley of the Kings. As a result of this mission, during the season of 2005, the team accidentally discovered and underwent the clearance of a new tomb (KV63)—the first new tomb found in the Valley since the finding of the tomb of Tutankhamun (KV 62) in 1922.

Under the remains of ancient workmen's huts, down a 20-foot (six metre) shaft, was found a single rock chamber, probably hewn during the reign of Amenhotep III. Based on art styles and comparisons of a variety of artifacts, there is no doubt that the date for the final closing of KV 63 in antiquity should fall during or within a few years of the time of King Tutankhamun.

The contents of KV 63 were even more intriguing: it was found to contain six wooden anthropoid coffins, placed close together and covered in glossy black resin. Some had yellow faces, hand, necklaces and bracelets, and most were badly damaged by termites. Instead of mummies, some of the coffins were filled with ceramics, textiles, natron, and a variety of embalming materials.

Oddly enough, the texts on the KV 63 coffins were intentionally covered with resin, obscuring the identities of their original owners, and their use was dramatically changed. Although not made specifically to accompany the embalming goods, at some point [they] were converted as containers of embalming materials.

Also crammed into the room were 28 large ceramic storage jars, most of which were sealed (and contained salts, linens and deliberately-broken pottery).

This small, single-chambered structure was clearly used as an embalmer's cache that was probably never meant to be used as a tomb. The question as to whose embalming goods were housed in KV 63 remains to be answered.

In December 1907, Edward Ayrton, excavating in the Valley of the Kings for Theodore Davis, uncovered a pit (KV 54) containing what he and Davis both thought were the sorry remains of King Tutankhamun's burial: a dozen large ceramic jars containing clay seals bearing the king's name, scraps of mummy wrappings, linen bags packed with embalming material and collars of dried flowers.

This was the very same year that Howard Carter was introduced to Lord Carnarvon who was looking for "a learned man" to guide his digging efforts in Luxor. Carter suspected that KV 54 wasn't Tutankhamun's actual tomb, but an embalming cache—material left over from the king's mummification, and the remains of the funerary banquet that accompanied Tutankhamun to his tomb. To Carter, KV 54 suggested that the king's tomb was yet to be found.

Perhaps KV 63 will also prove to be a precursor to a future find, and our "Carter moment" is still to come.

KV 63  
COFFIN A  
Hypothetical post conservation reassembly of upper coffin  
February 22, 2010  
Susan Osgood  
Scale 1:2

Edge of broken surface ———  
Painted detail ———  
Restoration ———



**COFFIN A**

Digital hypothetical composite made from post-conservation drawings of fragments, 2010.

Now badly damaged, Coffin A was probably the most imposing object of the group. The face was beautifully modelled and painted yellow to suggest gold. The cosmetic lines of the eyes and eyebrows were inlaid with blue glazed glass while the eyes themselves were encrusted with white and black stones.

According to Otto Schaden, "though very fragmentary and fragile because of termite damage, some key texts could

be recovered from under the resin coating: the title 'Royal Nurse' and the name 'Iny'. The longest translatable connected text was... 'Revered, (may) I see Re in the sky and drink water from the pool.'"

Given the nature of the texts, where references to Osiris are conspicuously absent, Schaden suggested that Coffin A was likely fashioned during the reign of Akhenaten when many of the traditional deities were abandoned.

**COFFIN F**

Artists's rendering, 87 x 28", 220 cm x 70 cm, gouache and ink, 2009. Photo: Rachel Portesi.

Coffin F was exquisitely modelled, with its beautiful face clearly adhering to the style of Tutankhamun's reign. The face, hands and decoration of the collar and bracelets were yellow to imitate gold. No trace of text or iconography was found.

The dating of each coffin is open to study, but they clearly present a good sample of the diversity of the features typical to the coffins of the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. All of them consist of the full anthropomorphic depiction of the deceased, with the arms and clenched hands carved on wood. The anthropomorphic shape of the coffins is also extended to the cases, displaying the contour for the legs, bottom, and back.

**MY WORK WITH THE KV63 / AMENMESSE PROJECT**

Susan Osgood

In 2006 and 2009 Chicago House loaned me to work with Dr. Otto Schaden in KV 63. Everything had to be documented and moved up to safer storage in the adjacent tomb of Amenmesse (KV 10) by the end of the season, as the tomb was in danger of flash flooding, should a rare downpour occur.

Initially, my days began by climbing a steep ladder down the shaft and finding a place to situate myself in the small, crowded chamber.

I drew four of the coffins before they were excavated, taking many measurements from all different angles, using proportional tools, triangles, folding wooden rulers, calipers and digital photos for reference. Extensive termite damage made the coffins extremely fragile, with wood as thin as paper, they could not be touched.

Their close proximity to one another meant that they were visible from only one or two angles. Coffin F (right), with the most beautiful features, had to be drawn from an upside-down vantage point and then double-checked as the ceramic pots around it were lifted out, making it more accessible. The face of this coffin is captivatingly life-like; each eye, eyebrow, ear, nostril and corner of the mouth is different from one another.

After the contents had all been moved up to storage in KV10, I went down once again to the KV 63 chamber. As I ducked through the entrance, the space seemed very light. It was completely cleared out, absent of the black coffins and the waist-tall clay pots. All that remains, beyond the chisel marks, are a few smeared ancient hand prints of the dark resin left on the pink wall.

All KV63 images are reproduced with the permission of Dr. Salima Ikram, director of the KV10/KV63 Mission, under the auspices of the Ministry of Antiquities and the American University in Cairo.





Red Sea #7, monotype print.  
Diptych 13 x 23.25", 33 x 59 cm, 2009.

## RED SEA SERIES ▲

Susan Osgood

*"The flamingo is the hieroglyph for red. All red things: anger, blood, the desert are spelled with the flamingo. The Red Sea Hills are mostly red. The red rock is vibrant in the changing light."*

Susan Brind Morrow. *The Names of Things: A Passage in the Egyptian Desert*, Riverhead Books, 1997, p. 5.

*The name for this series came to me later, as all of my titles do. The evocative redness and the flowing botanical worlds join together with remembrances of Egypt, and thus, Red Sea.*

*These monotype diptychs were printed in two parts. I began by painting and rolling inks onto a plexiglass plate and experimenting with laying cheesecloth over the ink. The fabric evolved from a simple piece of cloth into something much more organic and sensual, with frays and tendrils trailing threads.*

## SAVED MESSAGES ►

Susan Osgood

*An artist friend leaving Egypt gave me bags of powdered earth pigments, with colours ranging from bright white to yellow ochre to the darker red iron oxides and umbers from the desert.*

*At the same time, I discovered a large stack of the blueprints and black prints to be discarded from our Chicago House archives in Luxor—remnants from the ancient graffiti documentation project, which the Epigraphic Survey undertook in the 1930s.*

*The graffiti is ancient Demotic, Hieratic and Coptic, written by priests and visitors to the temples at Medinet Habu. These scribbles revealed legal messages, records of the height of the Nile, and votives asking that the writer's good name remain in the presence of the gods and goddesses of the temple.*

*I found these papers beautiful and fascinating. As I explored the movement of the ancient marks across the paper—deciding whether to incorporate or obscure them—the history of the ancient messages only added to the depth of the piece.*



Saved Messages #15, gouache on photo blueprint of ancient graffiti  
22 x 17", 55.9 x 43.2 cm, 2006

The chiselled outlines of feet occur in large numbers on the roof of Medinet Habu's second court. They accompany a great deal of Demotic graffiti (Ptolemaic–Roman Period, ca. fourth century B.C.–second century A.D.), many of which speak of libations ceremoniously poured here. The outlines of one pair of feet surround a prayer, hoping that the owner of the feet will “remain here in the presence of Min.”

In his “Preliminary Report on the Ancient Graffiti of Medinet Habu” (University of Chicago, 1934), William F. Edgerton suggests that “In these three elements—the ‘libation’, the outlined feet, and the prayer or wish to ‘remain here in the presence of Min’—we have clues to

the meaning of most of the Demotic graffiti in the temple of Ramses III at Medinet Habu. . . . It is clear that the men who left their names in Demotic in the temple of Ramses III still regarded the ancient building as the home of a deity (usually called ‘Min’); they reverently prayed and poured libations to him, and before leaving, scratched their names or feet on wall or roof in somewhat the same spirit in which wealthy and privileged Egyptians of earlier centuries had set up statues of themselves in the temples.

“Any material record, whether it be statue, name, foot, or whatever, might serve as a resting place to which the soul could come after death, to ‘remain forever’ in the divine presence.”



*Susan Osgood and pencil sketches of Thutmose III, 1986.*

*In 1986 Janet Johnson and Donald Whitcomb, from the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute, conducted the Medieval Luxor Project—an excavation at the northwestern perimeter of Luxor Temple.*

*One of the treasures they unearthed was a black schist sculpture of King Thutmose III, broken at the neck; nothing else of the statue remained. Chicago House lent me to the project to draw the Thutmose III head.*

*Each day the temple's antiquity inspectors unlocked the head fragment from storage and delivered it to me. Making precise measurements with a caliper—his eye from*

*corner to corner, the flare of the cosmetic lines at his temple, and the width of his subtle smile—over the course of several weeks, my drawing took shape.*

*I became so familiar with his features that I began recognizing the pronounced curve of a nose, an almond-shaped eye and the distinct profile on the present-day faces in the crowds at the market and riding the ferry crossing the Nile.*

Photo: Dr. Christian Loeben. Images of Thutmose III used with the permission of Drs. Donald Whitcomb and Janet Johnson, directors of the Medieval Luxor Project, under the auspices of the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute.

“

*I have been travelling to Egypt since 1979, and each spring, when I leave its dusty yellow khamseen winds blowing in from the desert, I know that it's time to return home to Vermont. I am reminded of the contrasts of my two worlds. I marvel at the power of the ice breaking up on the river that flows through the centre of my town.*

*Sometimes I dream in Arabic.*

*These divergent worlds, full of contrasts and similarities, stay with me, continuing to fuel and inspire.*

**Susan Osgood**