



## “INVOLVED WITH THE CONTENT RIGHT FROM THE START”

Architect and Scenographer **Rainer Verbizh** on his general function and the work of an exhibition designer and the conception of the Tutankhamun show

In autumn 2006, my office staff and I started to work for this exciting and unique project to reconstruct Tutankhamun's tomb, working closely on the development of the content and compiling draft models for the travelling exhibition. Together with the Egyptologists Dr Martin von Falck and Dr Wolfgang Wettengel, it was possible to put together a solid, scientific foundation for the project. Building on this I developed a preliminary programme as well as various plans for the exhibition and suggestions for media installations and film productions.

My first draft went far beyond the initial idea to present a reconstruction of the tomb in its original size. Our plan was to expand on this idea by exhibiting many of the individual objects as well. I wanted to display perfect replicas of the most important large objects from the tomb that were hidden inside each other, such as the gold shrines, coffins, statues of gods and ushabtis, furniture and other objects used for the death cult, as well as boats and barques, chariots, weapons, jewellery, the insignia of power and much more in a large exhibition space in order to provide the public with a deeper insight into the cultural context of the burial goods. Many of the replicas are fully justified in this case as the original objects have, of course, never left the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. The suggestion to reconstruct the enormous golden shrines, all the coffins and many other objects and to present them separately would therefore be a unique event worldwide. For me, that was the biggest challenge of the exhibition.

I also thought it was important to focus more on Howard Carter and his sponsor Lord Carnarvon as the discovery of the tomb is one of the most exciting adventures in the history of archaeology. On entering the exhibition space, the sections “Egypt – Today and Yesterday” and “Time Travel” would allow visitors to immerse themselves in the world of ancient Egypt, especially the era of the 18th Dynasty. We continued to develop the project over the next year and in summer 2007 began the concrete planning of the exhibition's world premiere at the industrial site of the Toni Areal in Zurich.

What is the role of an exhibition designer-architect-scenographer within the framework of such a project? I had long recognised the necessity of getting involved with the planning of the content from the very beginning in order to be able to seamlessly create an appropriate setting that provides the perfect complement to the contents – not the other way round as so often happens when architects first develop a concept and the content has to be adapted later to fit in.

I see my function as a mixture of pilot, idea maker, “midwife” and overall coordinator of the many people who work on a project like this. And that is a considerable number. As mediators, we work together with the scholars to develop a way to present the contents that suits the theme. The decisive questions are: what is the public able to understand? What chains of logic will they follow? Where is there too much explanation and where is there too little? Next, the layout and design of the space has to be planned, and invitations to tender sent out to various companies. Once the sub-contractors have been selected, this part of the project advances to the preliminary construction and assembly stage. At the same time, graphic artists have to be recruited; media producers contacted, scenarios for scripts drafted; specialist firms are required for the media, electrics and lighting installations as are ticket sales, surveillance, security and counting systems and much more besides.

The list of employees has not yet come to an end: researchers are needed to find pictures and existing film material based on information provided by the scholars and to negotiate the copyrights. Filmmakers have to be found as do suppliers of audio guides, sound equipment and translations. Simultaneously, the scholars have to compile texts, search for pictures and images, one needs editors, translators ... and all this has to be coordinated so





that it runs smoothly and seamlessly, which is a constant challenge for the whole team. At the same time, the client has to organise countless firms and individuals. In brief, hundreds of people are working together on the same project at the same time.

This exhibition was not just of great interest to us because of its content, although we also entered new territory here as with every exhibition. We were also excited by the real challenge of designing the space for the exhibition in a way that would both provide information on the contents and allow visitors to immerse themselves

in the great civilisation of Ancient Egypt. As the exhibition consists of replicas, we could display most of the objects directly to the public without having to enclose them in huge glass cases or other heavy constructions.

All of this was only possible thanks to the many months of hard work invested by the creative team and above all because of the support and backing of a courageous employer and the unending determination of project leader Christoph Scholz.



**Rainer Verbizh** graduated from Graz University of Technology (TU) with a distinction in art. His paintings, graphic art and etchings have appeared in both solo and group exhibitions since 1964; in 1973 he started working with video art in Paris, was guest professor at the TU Graz and Innsbruck, in the Bauhaus Dessau and the National College of Design in Paris (ENSCI). The Atelier R. Verbizh in Paris has realised over forty exhibitions and installations in museums, carried out numerous feasibility studies and programme assessments for exhibitions, museums and cultural theme parks over the last twenty years. From 1972–75, Verbizh was part of the Paris-based architect team Piano & Rogers during the construction of the Centre Georges Pompidou; from 1977–81 he was a partner in the architect team together with Renzo Piano and Peter Rice. He founded his office and workshop Atelier R. Verbizh in 1981; worked for the large project Parc de la Villette; 1984–87: project management for the Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie, responsible for two sections of the permanent exhibition. Design of exhibitions and museum spaces for the aviation museum Aeroscopie in Toulouse; the aquarium Caribéen De La Mer in Martinique; Viva Mozart, 2006 in the Salzburg Museum Carolino Augusteum; the volcano park Vulcania near Clermont-Ferrand; the Ladin museum in the Garda valley, South Tirol; the tidal power station La Rance in St. Malo; Océanopolis (Le Parc des Sciences de la Mer), Brest; the astronomical observatory at Pic du Midi in the Pyrenees; virtual reality multimedia networks for the Ars Electronica Center in Linz; design of the exhibition of the Austrian pavilion for the Expo in Seville (1992) and Taejon/Korea (1994). Exhibition design for Peugeot-Citroën, Airbus, Elf Aquitaine on computers, energy, Eureka projects, money and its mechanisms, airplane engines and much more.



Work in progress: development of CAD plans by the Atelier Verbizh for the entrance area and the "Time Travel" section.