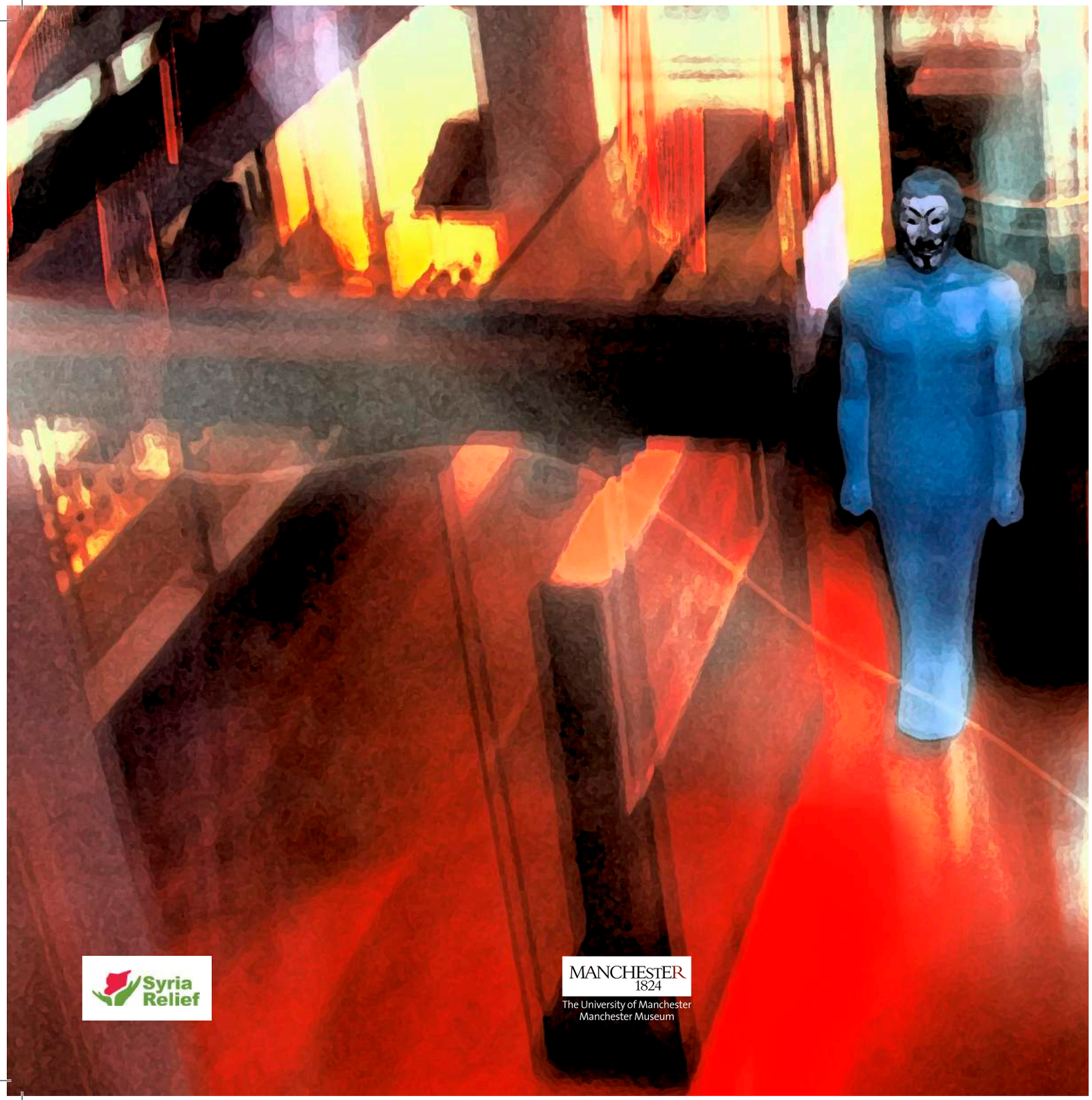
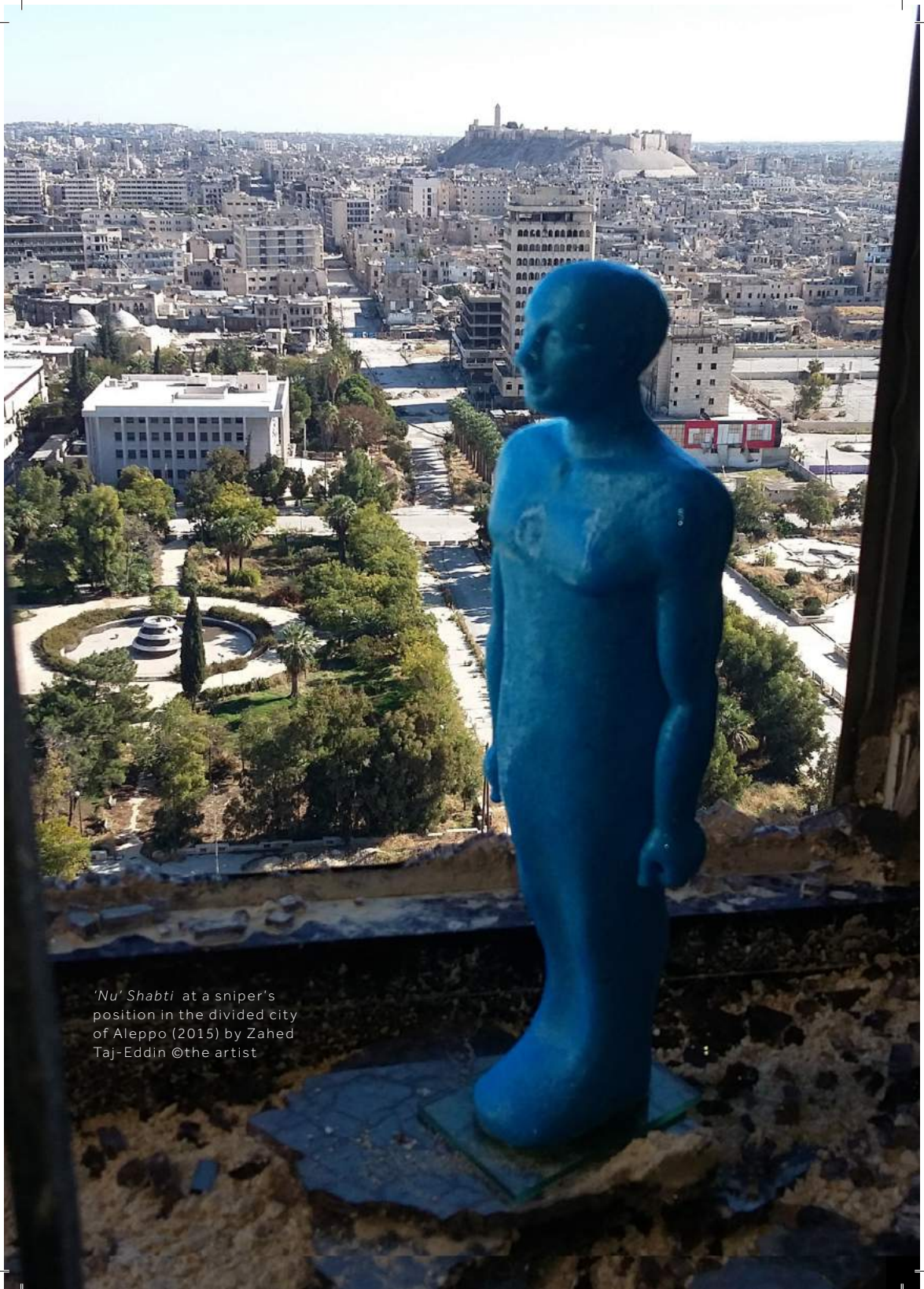


SHABTIS: SUSPENDED TRUTH IN CONTEXT

Zahed Taj-Eddin
Manchester Museum
Ancient Worlds
April 2017— April 2018



'Nu' Shabti at a sniper's position in the divided city of Aleppo (2015) by Zahed Taj-Eddin ©the artist

Exodus (2016) by Zahed Taj-Eddin at the Manchester Museum. The artist displayed his sculpture alongside two ancient Syrian busts from the museum collection to establish a dialogue between symbols of a prosperous past and a troubled present ©the artist

FOREWORD

Manchester Museum is, increasingly, addressing big contemporary issues in its exhibition programming. This is part of a wider, reinvigorated collecting agenda across both the natural sciences and humanities. One key theme that unites our collections is 'migration'.

In response to the contentious subject of human migration, the Museum recently acquired a refugee's life jacket from the Greek island of Lesvos. The display of this provocative object captures contemporary anxieties about the nature of humanity, freedom and movement.

We are therefore very pleased to host an installation by Zahed Taj-eddin, taking inspiration from our extensive Egyptology collections and reflecting upon his own experiences as an artist born in Syria. His *'Nu' shabti* sculptures provide a striking disruption of our Ancient Worlds galleries, confronting visitors with questions about the modern world.

DR NICK MERRIMAN

DIRECTOR
Manchester Museum

'Nu' Shabtis arrive in Manchester (2017)
by Zahed Taj-Eddin ©the artist

CONTEMPORARY SCULPTURE IN MUSEUMS *SHABTIS: SUSPENDED TRUTH* IN CONTEXT

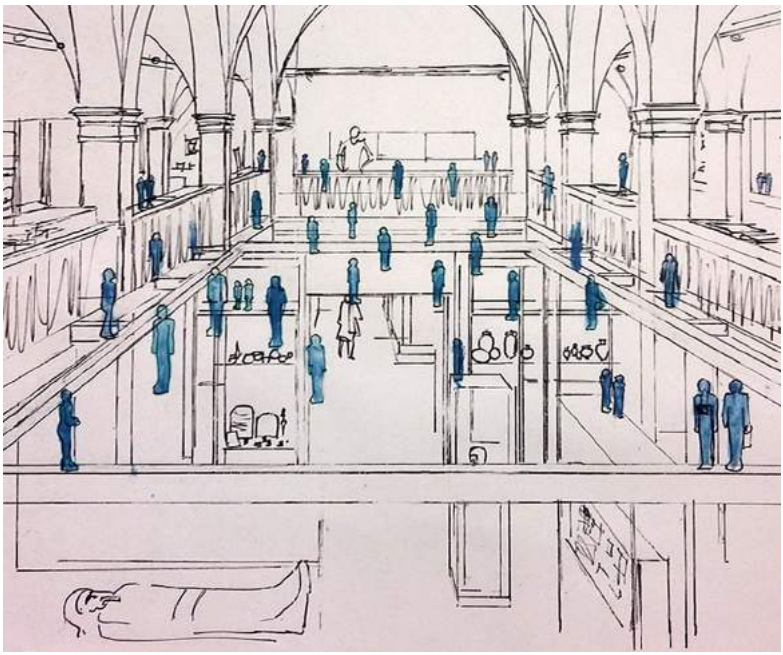
Leah Acheson Roberts
Honourary Academic Curator at Manchester Museum & Doctoral Researcher at the UCL Institute of Archaeology

'Every image of the past that is not recognised by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably'

Walter Benjamin
'Theses on the Philosophy of History'1940

In *Shabtis*: *Suspended Truth*, Zahed Taj-Eddin calls upon a 6500-year-old ceramic material to explore contemporary social issues and tell a timeless story of human movement through the ages.

The exhibition title encapsulates the many themes of this latest installation by the Syrian sculptor. First, Taj-Eddin's re-imagined *shabtis* (ancient Egyptian figurines that embody the servants of the dead) are physically suspended from arches, lighting frames and between floors of Manchester Museum's Ancient Worlds galleries. For the artist, the *shabtis* also are in a state of transition, 'suspended between the past and the present'. Liberated from ancient tombs and enslavement in the afterlife, Taj-Eddin imagines his *shabtis* are released in the present day only to find themselves in a troubled world and needing to set out on a journey in search of true freedom.



Preparatory drawings
by Zahed Taj-Eddin for
Shabtis: Suspended Truth
©the artist

In a parallel interpretation, 'suspension' alludes to the uncertainty of the dangerous journeys being made by people fleeing Syria across the Mediterranean as well as the 'suspended' lives of those in refugee camps and detention centres. This is reflected in the personal objects worn and carried by the *shabtis* (blankets, life jackets, iPhones) and in *Exodus*, a piece which depicts figures braving a seaward journey leaving from the coast of Alexandria, Northern Egypt. The *shabtis* perilous journey in an ancient vessel is powerfully evocative of the images of dinghies crammed with people, so recognisable from Press coverage of the Refugee Crisis. Devastated by the situation in his native Syria and with close family in Aleppo, Taj-Eddin's installation tells a story that is both deeply personal and powerfully relevant for humanity in 2017: an estimated eleven million Syrians have fled their homes since the outbreak of the civil war in March 2011 with roughly one tenth of this number - one million people - seeking asylum in Europe.

There is a growing activist movement within art centered particularly on the plight of migrants. In February 2016, Chinese conceptual artist Ai Weiwei tied 14,000 discarded refugee life vests to the columns of a Berlin concert hall. This March, Ai also installed, *The Law of the Journey* (2017), an enormous black rubber dinghy carrying 258 figures, in Prague - the capital city of an EU state that has opposed migrant resettlement among member nations. In London in 2015, Syrian artist, Issam Kourbaj created a series of models of Syrian refugee camps in miniature from scraps of old books, maps, and diaries. These are powerful sculptures made from human objects and about of human suffering, which force the viewer to become a complicit witness in their perpetuation.

In addition to their suspension through the museum galleries, Taj-Eddin's sculptures are also presented in display cases alongside *shabtis* from the Manchester Museum collection. In this, the artist creates a dialogue between the ancient and the contemporary to underline continuities in past and present products of human craftsmanship. Similarly, by presenting his *shabtis* as modern-day migrants and ancient Egyptian seafarers, the artist seeks to illustrate that people have been travelling across the sea in search of a new life for thousands of years. Whether in hope or in fear, to trade or to flee war, migration was as common and widespread a phenomenon in the ancient past as it is today.

The Law of the Journey (2017) by Ai Weiwei ©the artist & The National Gallery, Prague

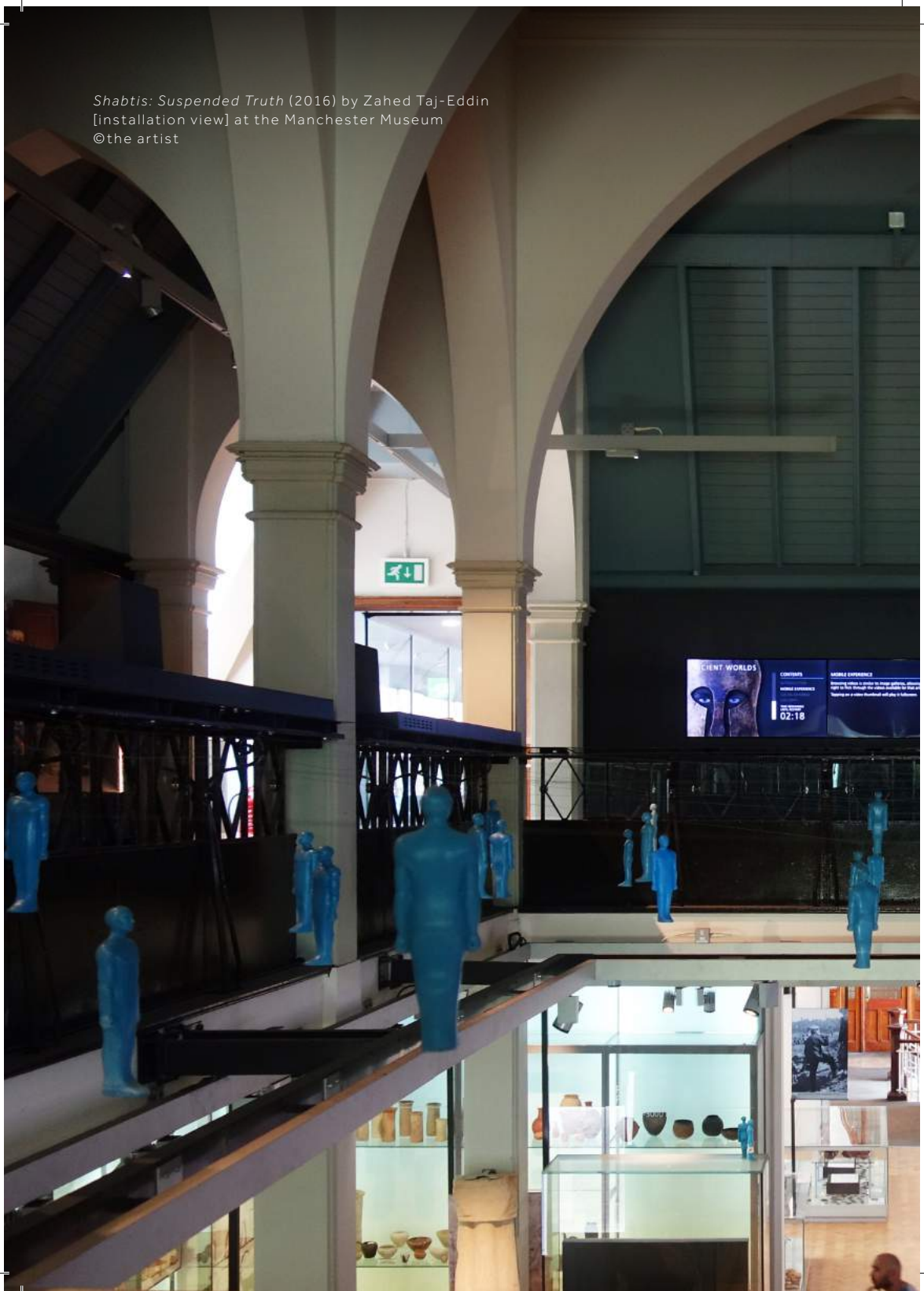
Made from faience, Taj-Eddin's *shabtis* also throw light on this important Ancient Egyptian technology. As part of his PhD research, Taj-Eddin used precise archaeometric experiments to work out the exact recipe used to achieve the bright blue-green material valued by the Egyptians and has since used it to create his own sculptures. Faience is a fired ceramic-glass primarily composed of sand; ancient *shabtis* are therefore essentially made from the Egyptian deserts in which they were buried and subsequently discovered. To reflect this source of origin and the alchemical properties of the material, Taj-Eddin has displayed some of his contemporary *shabtis* in Ancient Worlds as emerging from sand dunes. One parallel installation, similar in both its role and material, is Andy Goldsworthy's *Sandwork* (1994/5) at the British Museum. The British artist used thirty tonnes of sand to create a sculpture that snaked between cabinets and figures of the iconic Egyptian Sculpture Gallery and returned the ancient statues to the desert; encouraging visitors to imagine the artefacts in their original context.

Since the 1990s, collaboration between museums and contemporary artists has become increasingly common. This echoes a broader shift towards interdisciplinarity across the arts and sciences and rejection of the 'white space' of contemporary art galleries. Museums often call upon artists to energise their collections; likewise, artists frequently select museums as sites for critical enquiry. One well-known example of this burgeoning relationship is Grayson Perry's *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* at the British Museum in 2011. For the exhibition, Perry presented a selection of museum artefacts alongside his own artworks and personal reasoning behind their display, connecting for example, a 19th century Hindu portable shrine with iPhone photo galleries. This approach emphasised affinities between artefacts and the people who make or own them, from different periods and parts of the globe.

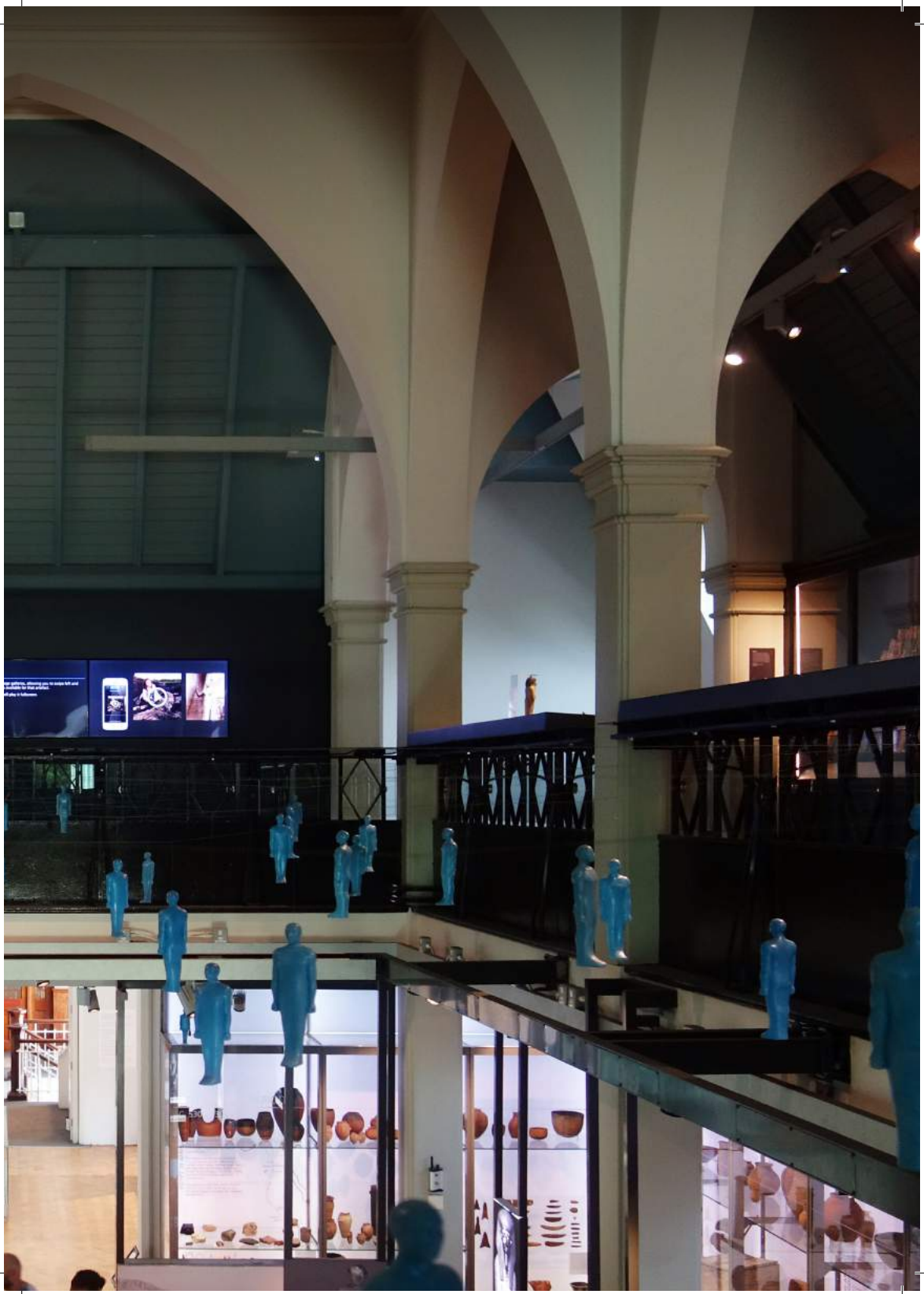
Sandwork (1994/5) by Andy Goldsworthy for Time Machine at the British Museum
©the artist & James Putnam

The notion of artist as catalyst is not a new one. In the 1970s, artists like Andy Warhol rejected established curatorial methods in favour of radical approaches to display. Warhol was fascinated by the untold stories of objects in mass collections usually disregarded as duplicates by curators and therefore absent from public displays. For example, in the installation *Raid the Icebox* (1970) at the Museum of Art in Providence, Rhode Island, Warhol presented complete collections of object types from the museum stores, challenging the curatorial dogma of selecting exceptional examples for display. Shoes, umbrellas and chairs – objects, profoundly related to human scale - were displayed en masse for visitors to see and touch. This exhibition set a precedent for what has now become common practice in museums: inviting artists to act as guest curators.

Taj-Eddin fits into the museological lineage in contemporary art by intervening in the museum, but rather than prescribing new curatorial methods he disrupts existing practice to create an atmosphere in which the traditional museum experience is augmented with pressing social narratives. The juxtaposition of Ancient Worlds' displayed artefacts with an artwork exploring the greatest humanitarian challenge of today brings into focus the role of the museum as an arena for public debate. Ultimately, this bold sculptural intervention highlights that migration is a universal, timeless and fundamentally human phenomenon; a reminder that the Refugee Crisis should be answered with compassion and humanity.



Shabtis: Suspended Truth (2016) by Zahed Taj-Eddin [installation view] at the Manchester Museum ©the artist



SHABTIS: SUSPENDED TRUTH

Zahed Taj-Eddin
Artist, Archaeologist and Conservator

'Among the many thousands of things that I have never been able to understand, one in particular stands out. That is the question of who was the first person who stood by a pile of sand and said, you know, I bet if we took some of this and mixed it with potash and heated it, we could make a material that would be solid and yet transparent. We could call it glass.'

Bill Bryson, 'Notes from a Small Island' 1995

'Nu' Shabti at the Victoria & Albert Museum (2015) by Zahed Taj-Eddin ©Peter Klleher and the Victoria& Albert Museum

Sodium salts efflorescence before firing a *'Nu' Shabti* (2014) by Zahed Taj-Eddin ©the artist

'Nu' Shabti

The *u-shabti* or *shabti* were funerary figurines often made from faience in Ancient Egypt. They were produced in large numbers to be placed in tombs as substitutes or as servants for the deceased once they were activated in the afterlife. In the New Kingdom the deceased were supplied with 365 *shabtis* with one *shabti* for each day of the year, in addition to 36 'overseer' figures to organise the workers. One example of the activation spell reads:

'O shabti, allotted to me, if I be summoned or if I be detailed to do any work which has to be done in the realm of the dead; if indeed obstacles are implanted for you therewith as a man at his duties, you shall detail yourself for me on every occasion of making arable the fields, of flooding the banks or of conveying sand from east to west; 'Here I am,' you shall say.'

R.O. Faulkner, 'The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead' 1972

For this exhibition, I imagine that Ancient Egyptian tombs are opened in the present and that the *shabtis* awaiting activation are released but quickly discover that there is no afterlife, no god of the underworld, no master to substitute for and no labours to perform. They are liberated and become free to do whatever they like. I call them *'Nu' Shabti*, where *'Nu'* gives the meaning of new and liberated. The *'Nu' Shabtis* take a new form; they have no wig and their arms are free to act and carry various objects and so vary from the traditional mummified form that carries farming tools. However, I have chosen for my *'Nu' Shabtis* to remain mummified from the waist down to suggest that their freedom is limited. These '*Nu' Shabtis* would wander among us today finding things to do with their lives. Some follow our lifestyle and consumption patterns (e.g. shopping and travel). Other '*Nu' Shabtis* remain restless and continue to search for freedom and liberty.

The Arab Spring in 2011 brought millions of protesters to the streets of countries like Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria. The crowds called for justice and freedom from their oppressive rulers. Some of the *'Nu' Shabtis* also become demonstrators and freedom fighters, and so join us in mankind's eternal quest for liberty. As these revolutions brought instability and war to these countries, many people forced to leave their homes, escape the devastation and seek refuge in Europe. The *'Nu' Shabtis* also embark on an exodus into the unknown. They are shown suspended in the air in a state between time and space and tied to a boat sailing on a dangerous journey to a new reality. Overall, the *'Nu' Shabtis* reflect the many complications and contradictions of the modern world in which we live.

Shabtis: Suspended Truth (2016) by Zahed Taj-Eddin [cabinet view detail] at the Manchester Museum ©the artist

EGYPTIAN FAIENCE

This enigmatic, ancient ceramic material has been described as 'the first high-tech ceramic'. In a broad definition, it is a kind of ceramic that contains a body of sintered crushed quartz coated with alkaline glaze on the surface. However, the material is virtually clay-free. Faience is remarkable in that it is made from the simplest raw materials, namely crushed desert sand and pebbles, combined with small amounts of desert plant ashes or salts from dried-up lakes. Through the addition of minor amounts of colouring oxides to the recipe, ancient craftsmen produced a luminescent material equal in appearance to semi-precious stones such as turquoise and lapis lazuli. Faience was regarded in the ancient world as a luxury item and ranked by the elite next to gold.

'Nu' Shabti travel to Cairo (2014) by Zahed Taj-Eddin ©the artist

'Nu' Shabti (2014)
by Zahed Taj-Eddin
at the Petrie Museum
©the artist

To the ancient Egyptian, faience was known as *'tjehnet'*, which meant 'brilliant' or 'dazzling' and it was thought to shine with light as a symbol of life, rebirth and immortality. Another word was *'khesbedj'*, which meant blue and was also used to mean lapis lazuli; it was later used in the New Kingdom for faience. A recent study discusses the terms *'jnr nwdh'* and *'t wdht'* that were commonly used for glass as meaning, 'stone of the kind that flows', which suggests that stone workers may have been the originators of faience and that the material was regarded as an artificial stone.

Whilst, as the name indicates, Egyptian faience was widespread in Egypt, it has also been found to have been manufactured in the rest of the Near East, Persia, the Indus Valley and the Mediterranean region. Faience objects were very common in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia from the early fourth millennium BC until the late Roman period in the 7th century AD. Faience as a material was used to produce a wide range of artefacts including: beads, amulets, vessels, tiles and architectural elements. However, due to the poor workability of the faience paste, the use of the material gradually declined and the production techniques were lost.

It has been a great privilege to work on and with this remarkable 'lost' material in my research and artistic practice. One of the aims of my *'Nu' Shabtis* was to investigate the technological processes involved in the production of ancient faience artefacts. I researched the methods used to make and shape faience objects and produced practical evidence on how to overcome the difficulties in shaping the faience paste. The work combined fundamental, analytical and structured experimental research, which led to the creation of a body of artworks designed to explore the characteristic elements of the material and investigate its potential in contemporary sculptural practice.

'Nu' Shabti (2014) by Zahed Taj-Eddin at the Petrie Museum ©theartist

IMMORTALISING THE BODY IN ANCIENT EGYPT

Dr Campbell Price
Curator of Egypt and Sudan at Manchester Museum

'May his body rest in the necropolis, his ba-spirit in the sky, his images enduring on earth ...'

Egyptian funerary text, 1200-600 BC

For over a century, the Manchester Museum has been home to one of the most important UK collections of antiquities from ancient Egypt and Sudan. At around 18,000 artefacts, it is the fifth largest British collection of its type. The development of such a comprehensive Egyptology collection in Manchester is thanks in large part to the generosity of one man, a wealthy local industrialist, Jesse Haworth (1835-1921).

In October 2012, exactly 100 years to the day after Flinders Petrie inaugurated the first dedicated Egypt gallery, the Manchester Museum opened its new Ancient Worlds galleries to the public. In preparation for the redisplay, the Museum consulted visitors about what they wanted to see in the galleries. One opinion related to the amount of material which remained out of view in storage. Quite simply, visitors wanted to see more of the Museum's holdings. In response, the new galleries include the dense display of some types of object, highlighting that museums rarely collect an even spread of objects:

certain object types are represented by hundreds of specimens where we have very few or none of others. One very well represented category is that of ancient Egyptian shabti figurines.

THE MANCHESTER MUSEUM *SHABTI* COLLECTION

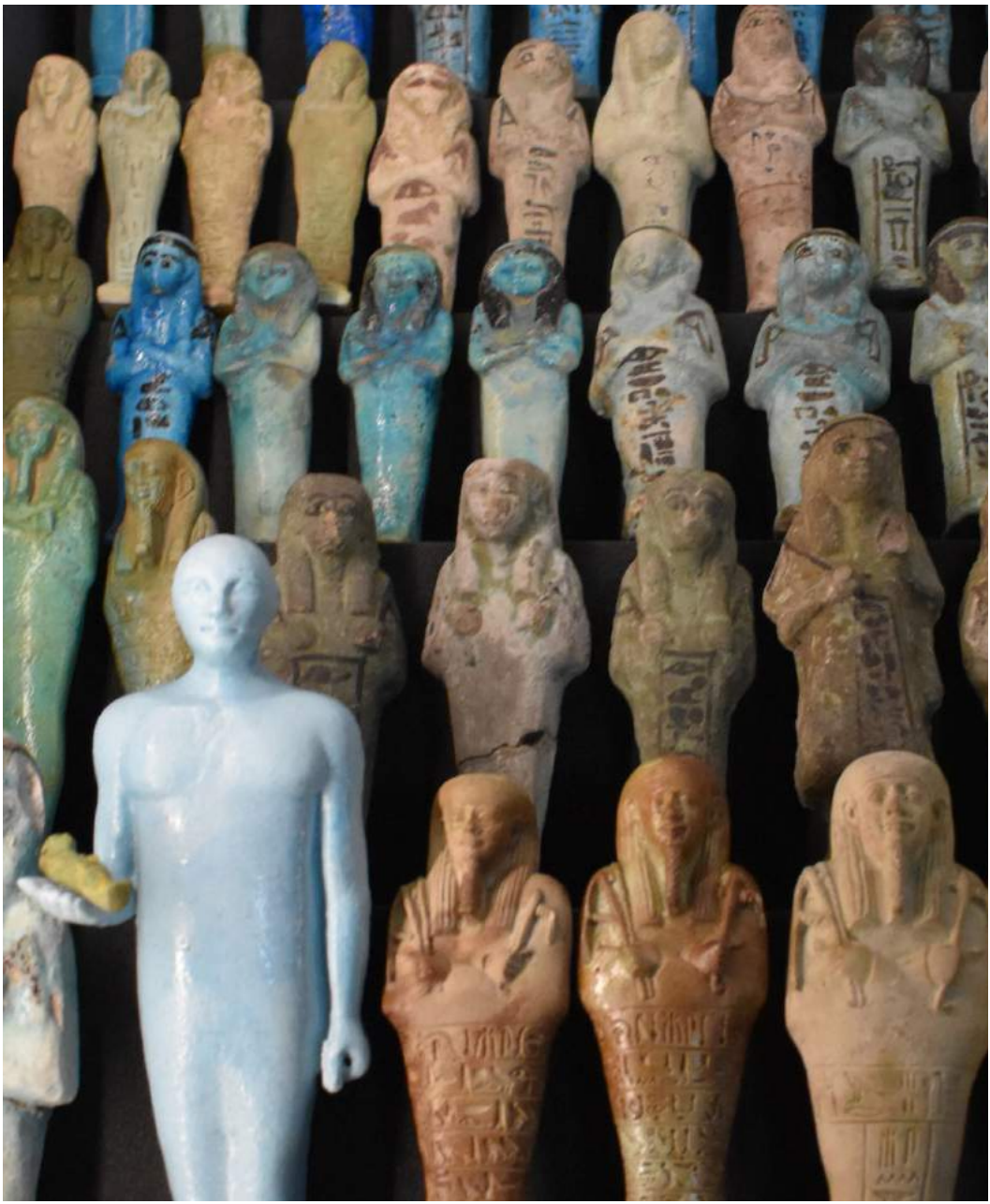
The Manchester Museum houses around 1000 complete and fragmentary shabtis, though only a few dozen of the 'best' examples were on display prior to 2012. It was therefore decided to dedicate one case to this mass collection, and fill it with over 300 *shabtis*. We arranged this group in a roughly chronological grouping, to illustrate changes in colour and form in *shabti* production over time. The resulting display creates a striking impression of aesthetic appeal even to those without an interest in archaeology.

Faience *shabti* for Pinudjem II, c. 970 BC, from Deir el-Bahari, (The Manchester Museum, 13958)©Manchester Museum, University of Manchester

The appeal of *shabtis* is in large part because they are among the most ubiquitous items of ancient Egyptian funerary equipment. To an extent, this is because so many were produced. Given the importance for wealthy ancient Egyptians of including *shabti* figurines as a standard element of their burial equipment over a period of some 2000 years, it is hardly surprising that so many examples have survived to find their way into countless museums and private collections.

Yet it is, perhaps, the *shabti* form itself that has proved so eminently collectable. Often brightly coloured, covered in hieroglyphs and in the quintessentially pharaonic shape of a mummy, *shabtis* are among the most easily recognisable and attractive Egyptian antiquities. Importantly, their small size makes them easily portable and quintessentially consumable. *Shabtis* were, therefore, a popular early souvenir for travellers and later tourists to Egypt, and among the first such objects to be forged. Manchester holds several such fake *shabti* figures, dating to the 19th Century. *Shabti* figures still regularly appear in the sale catalogues of auction houses, and on internet sites, attesting to their continuing popularity as tokens of – and cyphers for – ancient Egypt.

Shabtis display in Manchester Museum including one of Zahed Taj-Eddin's *'Nu' Shabtis* ©the artist



SHABTIS AS SCULPTURE

Ancient Egyptian visual culture placed great emphasis on the depiction of the elite human body. Representing objects such as plants, animals, and people in durable materials like stone and faience, enabled them to eternally embody their living roles in society.

Of primary concern was the survival of the human body. This cultural focus on preservation is best-known today through the process of mummification - a ritual designed to purify and reify the corpse of the wealthy - with the aim of enabling aspects of the spirit of the deceased to have an eternal home and anchor on earth. Even so, equal if not greater effort was expended in creating separate images of a person that might act as alternative homes for those itinerant spiritual forms. Sculpture was, therefore, produced in both two and three dimensions as an assurance against spiritual homelessness.

Although *shabtis* are often categorised among the 'minor arts', the figurines represent a significant form of ancient Egyptian sculpture in their own right. The first shabtis of around 2000 BC are not really '*shabtis*' at all. They lack any identifying inscription as '*shabtis*' and were sometimes placed in model coffins. These are best described as 'sah'-images: images of the deceased in a perfected, eternal, god-like form. The linen represented as shrouding the body has contours suggesting the limbs beneath, but it also in some sense anonymises the body - making it more divine and capable of surviving eternity.

Finely carved stone examples of the late Middle Kingdom (c. 1800 BC) echo contemporary elite sculpture. These sometimes carry brief inscriptions, identifying the owner, usually described as 'imakhu' - 'venerated' or 'august'. The purpose of these figurines in being buried with the deceased may have been to act as essential substitutes for the deceased individual - both in case the body itself was damaged (the prime function of a statue) but perhaps also in terms of anticipated tasks in the afterlife, although this is not articulated explicitly until later.

Egyptian sculpture did not function by means of visual similarity to a living individual. This intent challenges modern Western expectations of how 'art' and 'portraiture' ought to work and has led to somewhat misleading interpretations of Egyptian visual culture. Rather, the key to activating an image was the inclusion of a name inscribed on the object in question; this also enabled spiritual entities to recognise suitable vessels to partake of offerings. An individual would ideally have multiple images of him or herself in both tomb and temple, to maximise chance of interaction with the living. Shabtis accord with this desire for multiplicity, although the large number of shabti figurines in a typical 'set' of several hundred rather implies a rather diluted sense of the identity of the deceased. Undeniably, their primary purpose was as servants, articulated explicitly in 'contracts of sale' for shabti sets in the First Millennium BC.

While the conception of 'service' almost certainly continues with time, by the 26th Dynasty *shabtis* feature back pillars and square bases; both standard features of stone sculpture and emphasising the essential statue-ness of the figurines. This iconography is also shared by contemporary anthropoid coffins. Each represents a perfect, impervious, eternal image of the deceased.

Shabtis demonstrate, perhaps more than any other form of Egyptian sculpture, the importance of the repeated representation of an eternally perfect (i.e. mummiform) human image. Importantly, in this form the human shape echoes the image of a god—this is the reason, for example, that so many gods are shown in Egyptian representations as 'mummiform' in shape. *Shabtis*' magical potential for activation and use in the afterlife is made explicit in the so-called '*Shabti spell*' (Chapter 6 of the Book of the Dead). Yet the multiplicity of *shabtis* in modern museum collections do not reflect their ancient availability. *Shabti* production was motivated by the concerns of a small elite keen to avoid arduous eternal work, and *shabtis* were never common amongst the majority of the population.

Exodus (2016) by Zahed Taj-Eddin, a sculptural installation at Manchester Museum comprising four Egyptian Faience figures, a carved mahogony boat and a film taken by the artist in Alexandria, Egypt in Winter 2016. The artwork depicts Taj-Eddin's *'Nu' shabtis* braving a perilous seaward journey from the coast of Northern Egypt towards Europe. ©the artist

These small sculptures emphasise the inequality of ancient Egyptian society; they represent both idealised conception of the elite body replicated numerous times but also the nameless identities of subservient labourers.

Zahed Taj-Eddin's *'Nu' shabtis* evoke the nature of ancient Egyptian *shabti* figurines in new and important ways. Their contoured forms are anonymised – echoing the original, divinised intentions of the 'sah'-form and the later anonymity of *shabti* figures proper. His sculptures are both serious political commentary and enthralling objects in their own right. They speak as individual pieces and as a group; their vivid colours imitate the lustrous faience glazes of ancient examples; their recognisably 'Egyptian' feel is a testament to the Pharaonic emphasis on the depiction of the human body. Perhaps most powerfully, the *'Nu' shabtis* reflect contemporary anxieties for the future of human kind as their ancient precursors were designed to anticipate the unknowable fate of every (elite) human being.

Faience *ushabti* for Horudja,
Late Period,
30th Dynasty, from Hawara
(The Manchester Museum,
3730) ©Glenn Janes

THE DEVELOPMENT AND ICONOGRAPHY OF SHABTIS

Glenn Janes
Shabti expert
and author

'You may forget, but let me tell you this: someone in some future time will think of us.'

Sappho c. 630- c. 570 BC

Death and the need to prepare for life thereafter provided Egypt with one of its greatest industries. The manufacture of *shabtis*, small mummy-shaped figurines, was a small but nonetheless essential part of it.

The statuettes vary in height from just a few centimetres (cm) to nearly 60 cm. tall. The majority however, stand at between 10 and 20 cm. They were called *shabtis, shawabtis* or *ushabtis*, depending on when they were made but today, are generally known as *shabtis*.

Shabtis use and production lasted for around 2,000 years. Because of the sheer number produced during this period they are among the most numerous of Egyptian antiquities. Every museum with an Egyptological collection has *shabtis* on display and in reserve collections. When displayed en-mass as in the Manchester Museum they make a captivating spectacle for visitors.

Polished limestone funerary statuette for Henut-wedjat, Middle Kingdom, 12th Dynasty, from Hawara (The Manchester Museum, 5344)©Glenn Janes

Shabtis were made in a variety of materials including stone (e.g. limestone, alabaster, sandstone, granite), wood, pottery and more rarely, bronze, glass and wax. The majority however, are made of faience, an artificial composition made by firing silica with soda and pot-ash. *Shabtis* vary in terms of their quality. Some are rather crude in their execution, while others are extremely fine.

A CHRONOLOGY OF THE CHANGING *SHABTI* FORM

Shabtis were first introduced in tombs during the Middle Kingdom, late 11th Dynasty around 2000 BC. They probably evolved from a type of small human-shaped wax figure placed in a miniature coffin. Wax was considered to have magical properties associated with protection, however, its use was extremely short lived, perhaps explained by its fragile nature.

The concept of the *shabti* also seems to have been influenced by wooden statuettes placed in tombs from the end of the Old Kingdom. These figures were primarily concerned with the production of food and performing agricultural duties. During the 12th Dynasty, this type of statuette seems to have been replaced by mummiform figures - likely forerunners of true *shabtis*.

Most statuettes from the Middle Kingdom are sculpted of stone, although faience and wood examples do exist. They are mummiform in shape and wear a tripartite wig. Some depict the arms folded across the chest while others simply show the hands protruding from the shroud. These *shabtis* were often placed in their own miniature coffins like the earlier wax figures.

Wooden tent-peg shaped shawabti, name illegible, Second Intermediate Period, 17th Dynasty (World Museum, Liverpool, M13598) ©Glenn Janes

The statuettes of the Middle Kingdom were considered substitutes for the mummy of the deceased in case it was destroyed. The deceased was initially provided with only one or two *shabtis* however, this number gradually increased to perhaps five by the end of the Middle Kingdom. Most are uninscribed, except for a few that give the name and title of their owner(s). A few examples however, include longer inscriptions of a simple version of the so-called *shabti* spell, taken from Chapter 6 of the Book of the Dead relating the deceased with Osiris, the god of the Netherworld. The spell gives agricultural instructions for maintaining irrigation ditches and canals to water the land and enable crops to be grown and cultivated, thus providing the dead person with an everlasting supply of food. It is out of this phase that the concept of *shabtis* as servant figures began to develop.

During the Second Intermediate Period (c. 1750-1550 BC), the practice of including *shabtis* in tombs became less common. However, in certain places, particularly Thebes, very crude wooden figures resembling tent-pegs have been found. A number are inscribed with the offering formula, 'a boon (offering) that the king gives.' These were called *shawabtis*, after the word for Persea wood (*shawab*) from which they were probably made.

In the New Kingdom (c. 1550-1069 BC), during the reign of Tuthmosis IV of the 18th Dynasty, the role of *shabtis* changed. Rather than servants, they were now regarded as deputies for the deceased. Agricultural implements, such as picks, hoes, seed baskets and water pots carried on a yoke were included as part of their iconography. Many of the figures are also inscribed with the *shabti* spell stipulating their agricultural duties. These *shabtis* were typically made in stone, wood or faience.

During the brief interlude towards the end the New Kingdom known as the Amarna Period, Akhenaten introduced a new monotheistic religion based on the worship of the sun disc, the Aten. The few surviving *shabtis* for private persons have softer features, reflecting the more restrained art of the time. Akhenaten's *shabtis* show they were not provided with agricultural tools. Instead he chose the ankh-sign, symbol of life, or the crook and flail, symbols of kingship.

From left to right:
Wooden polychrome decorated shabti for Ra-mose, New Kingdom,19th Dynasty, from Sedment (The Manchester Museum, 6964)
©Glenn Janes

Faience 'overseer' shabti for Nes-pa-her-an, Third Intermediate Period, 21st Dynasty (Kemehu Collection)
©Glenn Janes

Steatite shabti for Amen-em-ipet wearing the dress of daily life, New Kingdom, 19th Dynasty (World Museum, Liverpool, 56-20-579)©Glenn Janes

The number of *shabtis* placed in burials gradually increased during the New Kingdom and reached perhaps as many as ten by the early 19th Dynasty, with the number increasing still further thereafter. A new figure type was also introduced alongside the other *shabtis*, showing the deceased wearing the dress of daily life with the characteristic short-sleeved tunic, kilt, triangular apron and a bipartite or duplex wig. Beautifully painted wooden *shabti* boxes or pottery *shabti* jars were also introduced as a means of storing the figures in tombs.

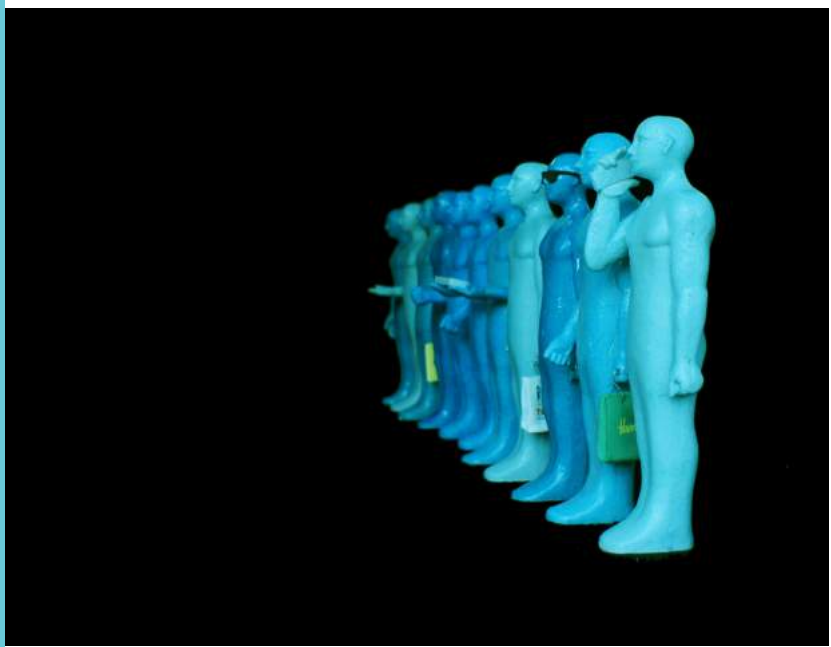
A group of *shabtis* peculiar to the 20th Dynasty are referred to by Egyptologists as 'contours perdus,' literally meaning 'lost contours.' Made of alabaster with details added in coloured wax, their shape is usually basic with the feet tapering to a point. Examples of this are associated with private individuals as well as several of the Ramesside kings. This simplistic shape probably reflects the general decline in funerary provision with the period of economic instability that followed the reign of Ramesses IV.

By the Third Intermediate Period (c. 1069-656 BC), numbers of *shabtis* increased dramatically, although they became smaller in size. The figures wearing everyday dress during the 19th Dynasty evolved into 'overseer' figures by the 21st Dynasty - distinguished by carrying a whip. This suggests that the worker *shabti* figures were now considered slaves or servants rather than deputies for the deceased. The prescribed number of figures was 401, comprising one *shabti* for every day of the year and 36 'overseer' figures, one for every ten workers. Usually made of blue faience, they were crudely formed in open moulds with flat trimmed backs and sides. Two notable additions to the appearance of *shabtis* during this period are the seshed headband and the modelling of breasts on female worker *shabtis*. Both elements were copied from coffins of the period.

Shabti box for Pa-en-pa-khenty, New Kingdom, 19th Dynasty, probably from Western Thebes (Kemehu Collection) ©Glenn Janes

By the Late Period (664-343 BC), funerary statuettes became known as *ushabtis*, which translates as 'answerers.' They were usually made of light green or blue faience, and were carefully modelled. A feature common in *ushabtis* of this time is the dorsal pillar and trapezoidal base, popular in statues of the period. They were made in two-piece pottery moulds and incised prior to firing with various passages from Chapter 6 of the Book of the Dead. The prerequisite number of *ushabtis* continued to be 401 and although the figures were sometimes placed in boxes, the majority were placed in niches or burial chambers. During the Ptolemaic Period (305-30 BC) however, funerary statuettes - sometimes still called *shabtis* - became less common and less well made, before disappearing altogether as the religious ideology changed.

The development and iconography of *shabtis* is an endlessly fascinating study. This brief synopsis is an indication of the astounding array of examples that survive to tell the tale – recalling the tombs from whence they came and the people for whom they were made.



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