Seeing Perfection: Ancient Egyptian Images beyond Representation

RUNE NYORD, ART HISTORY

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4 - 5:30 PM
ACKERMAN HALL, CARLOS MUSEUM

Seeing Perfection presents a fresh examination of the main roles and purposes of ancient Egyptian images. In Egyptological tradition, approaches to this topic have tended to be strongly shaped by top-down frameworks with little evidential support, derived either from 19th-century hypotheses (e.g. the notion of the ka-spirit living in statues), from popular culture (e.g. execration figures as ‘voodoo dolls’), and/or from clear monotheistic expectations (e.g. Akhenaten’s iconoclasm as evidence of the monotheistic nature of his religion). Meanwhile in the overlapping fields of archaeology, anthropology, and art history, such intuitive bases of interpretation have come under heavy criticism in recent decades, leading to new theoretical frameworks and approaches under such headings as relational ontologies, new materialism, and technical art history. Combined with a crucial return to the primary sources (written and material), such frameworks hold significant potential for a new approach to ancient Egyptian images. In taking up this challenge, Seeing Perfection seeks to sidestep traditional perspectives on Egyptian art by focusing squarely on the ontological status of images in ancient thought and experience.