This exhibition would not have been possible without the co-operation of The Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, and in particular access to the following exhibit:

Mummy of a small boy, wrapped and bandaged in linen with gilded plaster studs
From the cemetery at Hawara, Egypt; Roman, about AD 80-120
Ashmolean Museum AN1888.820
Gift of H. Martyn Kennard

For the purposes of brevity, this exhibit will be referred to as The Ashmolean Mummy.
Introduction

We first saw Angela’s work at her final show at the Royal College of Art last year where we were struck by the extraordinary creativity and the artistic interpretation of her pieces. Perhaps unusually for a student, she had already exhibited at The Royal Academy’s Summer Exhibition where her work was bought by Laurence Graff, named as one of the top ten art collectors in the world. Another of her pieces has also just been acquired by the Wellcome Trust Collection in London.

Angela often works on very specific projects. This catalogue is largely dedicated to the ‘unravelling’ of an Egyptian mummy, which is part of the collection of The Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. We are extremely grateful to The Ashmolean, not only for allowing Angela unprecedented access to the mummy, but also for the loan of the actual mummy for the duration of the exhibition.

Exhibited alongside the work inspired by CT scans of The Ashmolean Mummy are a series of self-portraits that use MRI technology.

We leave the detailed analysis of Angela’s work and the significance of the subject in the far more capable hands of Andrew Nairne (Director, Modern Art Oxford) and Dr Helen Whitehouse (Curator, Egyptian Collections, The Ashmolean Museum), who have produced thoughtful and illuminating texts for this catalogue.

Jamie Anderson / Jemimah Patterson
Waterhouse & Dodd Contemporary

The artist Angela Palmer during filming in the village next to the Ashmolean mummy’s burial site at Hawara in the Faiyum, Egypt
Foreword

‘It is our duty to experiment,’ declared Alexander Rodchenko. Art in post-revolutionary Russia was to be about finding new paths, new ways of seeing and comprehending the modern world. Artists, alongside scientists and architects would shape the future. Nearly a century later, experimenting, searching, and being open to the unexpected and unknown continue to be among the characteristics of those artists with the most to offer. And while few of today’s artists would claim the political and social ambitions of the pioneers of Modernism, the best art always changes, however subtly, our relationship to the world.

Angela Palmer’s increasingly ambitious work reflects a fascination with how medical scanning techniques can be used to create alternative representations of the body and of our perception of identity. At the heart of her practice is a kind of intuitive personal research involving collaborations with, amongst others, scientists, engineers and archaeologists. There are many stories along the way and often the possibility of a new direction to be explored, giving her work an energy and generosity.

It was when studying at the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art in Oxford in 2003 that Palmer was inspired by a model she came across made by the Nobel Prize winning scientist Dorothy Hodgkin. A few thick black lines drawn on parallel sheets of Perspex created a ‘stunning three-dimensional map’ of the structure of Penicillin.

Since then, using CT and MRI scans of both her head and body Palmer has created a number of works in which she is the subject, though they are not recognisable portraits. The individual scans are hand-engraved or drawn on sheets of non-reflective glass. The sheets are then displayed together, creating an image built up from the lines of each delicate cross-section. The image only becomes visible if viewed from certain angles. From above and from the side it vanishes; there is nothing there but sheets of glass held on a glass or wooden base. These sculptures, of which a number are on display in Palmer’s new exhibition, seem to question the limits of our knowledge at exactly the moment of visibility and revelation; how much we know about ourselves and how much science and art might be able to tell us.

For the past two years the subject of Palmer’s research has been a mummy from the collection of Egyptian artefacts in Oxford’s Ashmolean Museum. The wrapped mummy is an unnamed child who died nearly 2000 years ago.

Instigated by Palmer, the mummy was taken out of the museum in the summer of 2006 and given a full CT body scan at the John Radcliffe Hospital. The scan showed that the child, aged about two, was a boy. From the scans two new sculptures have been made in which the boy’s body, free of his bandaging, appears to float within the 111 glass sheets needed to create each life-size image. Drawn with a black pen, instead of the engraving tool, the repeated lines have an intensity and energy reminiscent of Giacometti’s drawings.

For the exhibition the actual mummy of the boy will be presented in the gallery alongside Palmer’s two sculptural body images. This startling juxtaposition of artistic subject and its representation, has the potential to both disturb (removed from its usual historical context, what does it mean for a dead body to form part of an installation in an art gallery?) and at the same time to deepen our engagement with the artist’s project.

Palmer recently visited and documented the site south west of Cairo where the mummy was discovered in 1888. Here she gathered sand, and filmed and photographed her journey. Exhibited alongside her sculptures are short films and a series of informal photographic portraits of local boys from the village where she stayed. These will ‘reunite’ the Ashmolean boy with his homeland, the place he knew during his short life. If the mummy, as a small wrapped body, even at this distance in time has something of the melancholy of a child’s gravestone, Palmer’s films and photographs are brimming with life.

Palmer’s project means we know a little more of the narrative of what happened to a small boy in Egypt during the Roman period. As well as gender and revealing the shape of the body and skeleton, the scan revealed the detail of the elaborate bandaging of the body and use of gold studs. Each piece of information contributes to creating a more detailed picture of another era. But as art we have even more to gain from an exhibition which merges past and present, engaging with science and other disciplines while always considering the aesthetic impact of each work and display.

Palmer’s achievement is to have found a way of experimenting which enriches us all.

Andrew Nairne,
Director, Modern Art Oxford
April, 2008
Self Portrait 1
Ink drawing on 14 sheets of Mirogard glass  30 x 27 x 21cm (series of 5)
Self Portrait 2
Ink drawing on 25 sheets of Mirogard glass  27 x 27 x 21 cm (series of 5)
Self Portrait 3
Based on scans taken at The London Upright MRI Centre
Engraving on 17 sheets of Mirogard glass 30 x 45 x 15 cm (series of 5)
Self Portrait 4
Based on scans taken at The London Upright MRI Centre
Ink drawing on 19 sheets of Mirogard glass 45 x 30 x 16 cm (series of 5)
Self Portrait 5
Based on scans taken at Aberdeen University
Engraving on 16 sheets of Mirogard glass 27.5 x 27.5 x 18 cm (series of 5)
Self Portrait 6
Based on scans taken at University College London
Engraving on 1 sheet of Mirogard glass 42 x 31.5 cm (series of 5)

Self Portrait 7
Based on scans taken at the John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford
Engraving on 1 sheet of Mirogard glass 42 x 31.5 cm (series of 5)

Self Portrait 8
Based on scans taken at Aberdeen University
Engraving on 1 sheet of Mirogard glass 42 x 31.5 cm (series of 5)
Self Portrait 9
Based on scans taken at Aberdeen University
Ink drawing on 13 sheets of Mirogard glass 30 x 45 x 19.5 cm (series of 5)
A Child from the Egyptian Lakeland

In January 1888, the British archaeologist W.M.F. Petrie began work at a site which contained the ruins of one of the great tourist attractions of antiquity: the funerary pyramid and temple of Pharaoh Amenemhet III. The site is known as Hawara, and it lies at the inner end of the ‘Illahun gap’, through which the Bahr Yusuf branch of the Nile flows into the Faiyum depression, its water eventually feeding into the lake now known as the Birket Qarun.

Amenemhet III was the first ruler to carry out Faiyum water-engineering works, turning the swamps into irrigated agricultural land, by diverting and controlling the waters of the Bahr Yusuf before they drained into the lake. One of the most powerful rulers of the 12th Dynasty (1991-1783 BC), after his death he was deified and worshipped at Hawara, and the area around his pyramid became a favoured burial place for non-royal people as well.

A millennium and a half later, the Macedonian conquerors who ruled Egypt for three centuries as the Ptolemaic Dynasty carried out even more extensive Faiyum water works, to control the height of the ‘Great Lake’ and increase the area of cultivated land. They settled their own military veterans and colonists there, but other Egyptians came to join the existing population and work on the land. A multi-cultural society was thus created in this productive lakeland. Its members absorbed some of each other’s customs, especially in the matter of funerary beliefs, where traditional pharaonic practices emphasizing the preservation of the body for the afterlife were a potent influence.

The most important settlement was the city of Arsinoe (modern Medinet el-Faiyum, still the regional centre). Its inhabitants buried their dead in the hallowed ground around the royal pyramid at Hawara, 12 km to the south-east; the cemetery was also used by the Hawara villagers (some of them the families who ran the embalming businesses), and it continued in use well after the Roman conquest, at least as late as the 4th century AD.

It was the pyramid and lost mortuary temple that had attracted Petrie to the site in January 1888, but within a short time of beginning work, he wrote in his weekly newsletter, ‘I find, what I did not expect, a great cemetery here, covering perhaps 100 acres.’ For the rest of the season he excavated burials: 12th-dynasty tombs which had been re-used, rock-cut shafts containing priestly coffins and funerary equipment, and - most famously - the graves of those who had lived in the first three centuries of Roman rule in Egypt. They were not placed in coffins, but deposited in multiple burials, in mudbrick chambers or pits in the ground. Their bodies had been mummiﬁed in traditional Egyptian fashion (though less carefully), then bandaged. Some of the bodies were given masks and foot-cases, even complete body-coverings, of painted and gilded cartonnage; others had a portrait painted on wood or linen, placed over the face and framed by the bandaging.

The first paintings of this kind had been found in the Faiyum a year before Petrie’s work there, and they generated great excitement when exhibited in Europe: they were ancient portraits painted in a style that was close to the

Orthodontist Lars Christensen found the boy was ‘quite special’ as he was missing his baby side front teeth - a 0.4% occurrence today

The Ashmolean Mummy about to undergo CT scans at the John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford
Image by Liam McNamara
might have had masks or portraits. In his published report Petrie cited the area with limestone chippings south-east of the pyramid as particularly rich in mummy-portrait burials.

Dental and cranial evidence suggest that the boy was under 18 months of age at death. The Hawara cemetery provided ample evidence for the high rate of infant mortality - not just the bodies themselves, but also children’s toys, shoes, and clothing found with many burials, especially those of the late Roman period when bodies were no longer mummified and bandaged, but deposited in the ground wearing everyday clothes, and provided with a stock of worldly possessions for the next life. Like the portraits, these poignant relics of childhood attracted great public attention when Petrie exhibited the Hawara finds in London in the summer of 1888.

Infants do not figure in the census-lists on papyrus which have been preserved from sites like Hawara, and ancient infant mortality rates can only be approximated, but it is thought that more than 25% of children did not survive beyond the first year, and 60% or more had probably died before reaching reproductive maturity. Though it was a fertile and pleasantly green environment, there were particular hazards in the Faiyum - the diseases, insects, and parasitic worms found wherever there is standing, stagnating water; malaria was particularly prevalent here until the 20th century.

Dr Helen Whitehouse, Curator, Egyptian Collections, Department of Antiquities, Ashmolean Museum

The effect of the lozenge-forms seen in perspective is similar to that of contemporary coffering executed in wood or plaster, but - like the process of mummification and the provision of an image of the head or face - the pattern is anchored in traditional Egyptian funerary practices. Depictions of the god Osiris, ruler of the underworld who died and was resurrected, show his mummiform body encased in a diamond-pattern covering; a network of beads strung in this formation was sometimes placed on the bodies of mummies.

The exact spot where Petrie found this mummy is unknown, but the boy was very likely to have come from a multiple burial, possibly a family group, in which some of the other mummies

The Ashmolean Mummy is revealed on the radiologist’s screen, complete with gilded studs Image by Liam McNamara

The Ashmolean Mummy undergoing CT scans at the John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford Image by Liam McNamara

The Ashmolean Mummy is revealed on the radiologist’s screen, complete with gilded studs Image by Liam McNamara
The Ashmolean Mummy Boy 1 (head)
Based on scans taken at John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford
Engraving on 28 sheets of Mirogard glass  30 x 27 x 23 cm (series of 5)
12 Stills from a sequence of axial CT scans of The Ashmolean Mummy
The skull is devoid of the brain, in accordance with ancient funerary practices
Based on scans taken at John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford
The Ashmolean Mummy Boy 2 (full body)
Based on scans taken at John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford
Engraving on 7 sheets of Mirogard glass  29 x 45 x 11.5 cm (series of 5)
12 Stills from a sequence of sagittal CT scans of The Ashmolean Mummy
Based on scans taken at John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford
The Ashmolean Mummy Boy 3 (lying on his back)
Based on scans taken at John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford
Ink drawing on 111 sheets of Mirogard glass
Presented on a base of sycamore, one of the native Egyptian woods most commonly used in ancient Egypt for all purposes, including coffins
32 x 94 x 30 cm (series of 3)
12 Stills from a sequence of coronal CT scans of The Ashmolean Mummy
Based on scans taken at John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford
The Ashmolean Mummy Boy 4 (lying on his side)
Based on scans taken at John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford
Ink drawing on 111 sheets of Mirogard glass
Presented on a slated sycamore wood base 32 x 94 x 30 cm (series of 3)
The ancient Egyptians believed the sun god Ra, their most important god, had ‘flesh of gold and bones of silver.’ In ‘The Satyricon,’ written around 60AD, Petronius describes a scene at Trimalchio’s dinner party: ‘Naturally we drank and missed no opportunity of admiring his elegant hospitality. In the middle of this a slave brought in a silver skeleton, put together in such a way that its joints and backbone could be pulled out and twisted in all directions. After he had flung it about on the table once or twice, its flexible joints falling into various postures, Trimalchio recited:

“Man’s life alas! is but a span,
So let us live it while we can,
We’ll be like this when dead.”'
The inspiration for the circular ‘bales’ of tightly wound linen was drawn from the virtual ‘unravelling’ of the mummy. As the CT scanner passed through the little boy’s mummified body for the first time – starting with the tiny toes on his right foot – the journey through the packed layers of linen had a compelling effect: the movement created by the passage through the bandaging - the child’s protective ‘shell’ for almost 2,000 years - was mesmerising.

The ‘bale’ illustrated here is natural flax linen, the same material used to wrap the child mummy. At the time of his death, funerary bandages mostly comprised strips of worn household linen; they accounted for more than a third of the cost of a burial. According to records of the Roman Faiyum, as soon as a family member died, relatives and friends would be contacted and asked for linen - such as used tunics - for the burial; they would have had ample time as wrapping only began around the 35th or 40th day following death, after which time the body would have been desiccated.

Writing on ‘Death and Funerals in the Roman Faiyum,’ Dominic Montserrat observed: ‘An appropriately conducted funeral would enable the deceased to arise nightly and cast off their mummy bandages when the sun-god shone in the otherworldly darkness and spoke the word of creation. For a while, they would live again and have the benefit of all the things they had enjoyed on earth then the cyclical and eternal process of mummification would continue.’

The dyes found on funerary wrappings, including those found in Hawara, have become the subject of much analysis. Shown on following three pages are respective linen ‘bales’ dyed in weld (yellow); woad (blue) and madder (red), the traditional and commonly used pigments in the Roman Faiyum. These bales were dyed using the traditional methods of plant dyes by the specialist Penny Walsh who grows the plants at a city farm in Vauxhall, South London. Weld (Reseda luteola) was one of the most important sources of yellow dye in the Roman period and according to Pliny was used exclusively for dyeing women’s garments; Woad (Isatis tinctoria), which was widely cultivated in the Faiyum from the 1st to the 4th Century AD, was often ‘fixed’ using urine as a mordant (records dating to 200BC describe the foul smelling hands of the dyer); Madder (Rubia tinctorum), the world’s oldest red dye, was introduced into Egypt during the 18th Dynasty, probably from the Levant. Red had particular significance for the Egyptians - its colour symbolised the desert and thus death, but also life and regeneration through red’s association with the sun.
Woad Bale (unique)
Linen 32 cm diameter (depth 7 cm)

Madder Bale (unique)
Linen 32 cm diameter (depth 7 cm)
ANGELA PALMER

EDUCATION

2002-2005 Bachelor of Fine Art, The Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art, University of Oxford
Awarded Scholarship and Fitzgerald Prize

EXHIBITIONS & AWARDS

2008
Unravelled, Waterhouse & Dodd

2007
ArtFairs Abu Dhabi Fair, Abu Dhabi
Art London, Chelsea
'the Royal College of Art Society and Thames and Hudson Award'
Royal College of Art
Winner, Polly Campbell Award, Jerwood Space, London
Inside Out, Hunterian Museum at The Royal College of Surgeons

Fleming Collection, Berkeley Street, London
Talbot Rice Gallery, University of Edinburgh
Nallon Gallery, University of Newcastle

2006
Summer Exhibition, Royal Academy
Solo Show, Bourne Fine Art, Edinburgh
Winchester Festival of Science and Art
Modern Art, Oxford, (Ruskin Show)
Director's Chair Exhibition, Open Eye Gallery, Edinburgh

2005
Group Show, Fine Art Society, London

2003
Group Show, Fine Art Society, London
Medical Sciences Department, University of Oxford

COLLECTIONS

Wellcome Trust Collection, London
Laurence Graff
Kenneth Clark Art Collection, Pembroke College, University of Oxford
Exeter College, University of Oxford
Institute of Medical Sciences, Aberdeen University
Royal Bank of Scotland

PUBLICATIONS

Cover, The Lancet magazine, December 2006
"New world of interiors, when science meets art"
The Times, May 26th 2007
"The cleanest place on earth - and the dirtiest"
The Guardian, July 9th 2007

Among the many experts and specialists who collaborated towards the work in this exhibition, the artist would particularly like to thank:
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Dr Lars Christiansen, orthodontic dentist, Oxford;
Dr Mary Lewis, Dept of Archaeology (Palaeohealth), University of Reading; Professor Frank Smith, Aberdeen University;
Dr Mark Lythgoe and Dr David Thomas, UCL;
Penny Walsh, dyestuff specialist, Dyework, London;
Ibrahim Abd-El-Baset Ahmed, Fayyum University, Egypt;
Kathryn Bevis, St Anne’s College, Oxford.

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