

Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide

a journal of nineteenth-century visual culture

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Sculpted Glyphs: Egypt and the Musée Charles X: Introduction & 3D Model

Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide 13, no. 1 (Spring 2014)

Citation: Elizabeth Buhe, with David Eisenberg, Nicholas Fischer, Daniel Suo, "Sculpted Glyphs: Egypt and the Musée Charles X," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2014), <http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/spring14/sculpted-glyphs-an-introduction>.

Published by: [Association of Historians of Nineteenth-Century Art](#)

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Abstract:

This article proposes that the linguist Jean-François Champollion posited a new theory of Egyptian art in the mid-1820s and takes his theory as a means for interpreting France's first museum of Egyptian antiquities, the Musée Charles X, of which he was curator. This interpretation is made possible through the unprecedented use of digital tools to visualize a historic museum display. In addition to a scholarly essay and downloadable primary source material, this article invites readers to explore a fully-navigable, three-dimensional model of the Musée Charles X.

Digital Humanities and Art History

sponsored by The A.W. Mellon Foundation

Sculpted Glyphs: Egypt and the Musée Charles X: Introduction & 3D Model

by Elizabeth Buhe

with David Eisenberg, Nicholas Fischer, and Daniel Suo



Screenshot of virtual model of the Musée Charles X, *salle civile*, showing cabinets 5 and 6.

Introduction

As curator of the Egyptian section of the Musée Charles X from 1827 to 1832, Jean-François Champollion (1790–1832) was expected to organize a display of thousands of Egyptian objects newly acquired by the Louvre. His challenge was to conceptualize a manner in which these artifacts could be understood, since their purchase brought Egypt on a grand scale to France for the first time. Champollion's presentation of these objects was thematic by gallery—a *salle civile*, a *salle des dieux*, and two *salles funéraires*—with more specific chronological and thematic groupings within each cabinet. By presenting ancient Egyptian civilization in this way, Champollion enabled an interpretation of Egyptian culture that obviated the need for understanding Egyptian art through aesthetic models developed for Greco-Roman antiquities in favor of viewing Egyptian objects in their own right.

What is remarkable about the Musée Charles X is that archival inventories provide precise information about the placement of Egyptian artifacts inside the museum by room and by cabinet—a wealth of information not often extant within the museological record. Digital humanities tools have provided a means by which to draw insight from this data in a more intuitive and visual way. Here, we have built a three-dimensional, high-resolution, and fully-navigable model of the museum displaying a representative sample of the objects placed within it by Champollion.

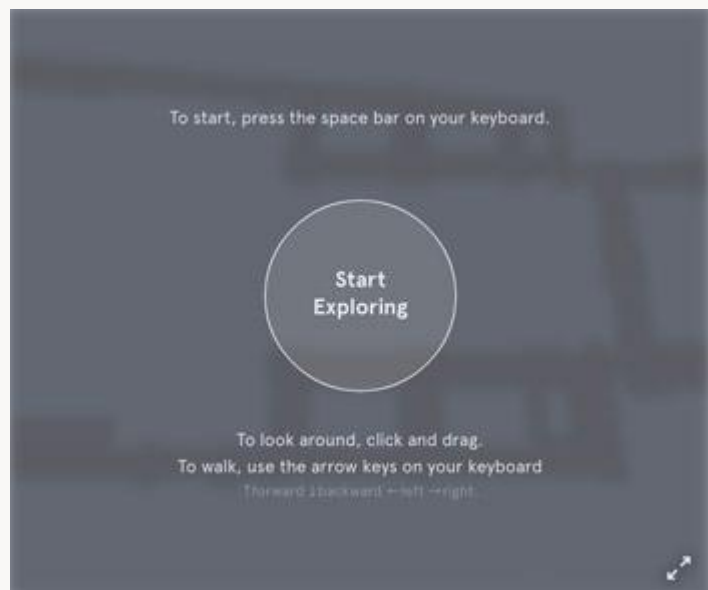
This study consists of several components that seek to address Champollion’s museum. In addition to the three-dimensional model, a scholarly essay provides context for Champollion’s view of Egyptian art, and offers some perspective on his organizational logic in the Musée Charles X. The digital format of this journal has enabled the publication of transcriptions of archival inventories, the primary sources from which data for the virtual exhibition was culled, alongside links to the main textual sources written by Champollion and cited in the article. Finally, a project narrative addresses the challenges associated with the conception and collaborative production of this digital humanities work.

3D Model

[Egyptian Antiquities in the Musée Charles X: A 3D Model](#)

NOTE: To best view interactive 3D content, built in WebGL, we strongly recommend using Google Chrome as your browser on recent operating systems such as OSX Mavericks and Windows 8.1. The 3D model is not compatible with Safari or Internet Explorer. Depending on your operating system and the speed of your internet connection, the model may take some time to load. If the software detects that your browser is unable to display the fully-navigable model, you will see an alternative version, either an entirely static or partially navigable version depending on your browser and your device’s capability. Text will indicate that your browser does not support WebGL, and that you are viewing an alternative version of the 3D model.

A 3D model provides a means to visualize the display of Egyptian antiquities in the Musée Charles X as conceptualized by Champollion. A representative sample of 3D objects has been placed inside the tall armoires and short window vitrines. Given time and budgetary constraints, it was impractical to render all the artifacts that were displayed in each cabinet. Furthermore, in Champollion’s installation, objects were often shown alongside many of the same type. As a general rule, rather than rendering many like artifacts, we opted for greater breadth by representing single but diverse examples. However, we made an exception in two cabinets of the third room (*salle funéraire*) by replicating a single ushabti “dummy”



[Credit: Floored, Inc. \(featuring David Eisenberg, Nicholas Fischer, Daniel Suo\).](#)

many times with the goal of suggesting the historic density of objects in each cabinet. For a complete list of the objects that were exhibited in each cabinet, please consult [Primary Sources](#).

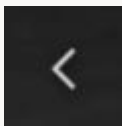
This model is intended as an interpretive tool that provides a fully-dimensional sense of what the French public would have observed in the Musée Charles X from its inauguration in late 1827 onward.

To navigate horizontally within the model, use the arrows on your keyboard.

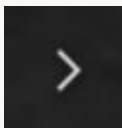
Press R and F to move vertically and adjust your vantage point.



Click to expand into full screen mode.



Click to move back one gallery.



Click to move forward one gallery.

Click on any object to view a pop-up window that reproduces and translates the associated passage from Champollion's guidebook, the *Notice descriptive*, and that also displays that object's historic and contemporary accession numbers.

How to Cite this Model

Elizabeth Buhe with David Eisenberg, Nicholas Fischer, and Daniel Suo, "Egyptian Antiquities in the Musée Charles X: A 3D Model," in "Sculpted Glyphs: Egypt and the Musée Charles X," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2014).

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