

3150

Relief of King Montuhotep III

James Romano: We're now standing in front of a massive relief from the end of the 11th Dynasty. You see two images of King Montuhotep III, one on the left and one on the right, with a goddess in between. Now I want to try a little experiment with you. Just walk from one figure to the other, focusing on their ears. Really, try it, and you will get an idea of how the Egyptians worked.

You'll notice that the ear of the king on the far left is at a slight angle; the goddess in the middle is at a more pronounced angle, while the king on the far right has his ear almost vertical. This suggests to me that you had three different stone carvers sitting side by side, each working simultaneously to finish the relief, but each adding a little bit of his own idiosyncratic approach to the human figure, each differing slightly in the treatment of the ear. We tend to think that all Egyptian art is the same, but here in these three figures that are just a couple of feet apart, you can see how three different artists treated this minute detail. Look for such variations in other works as you go through our galleries.