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Ibis Coffin

Arnold Lehman: Hello, I'm Arnold Lehman, Director of the Brooklyn Museum.

I've been fascinated with this exquisite object from the moment I first saw it at the Museum about fifty years ago when I was seven or eight years old, and every time I visited the Museum over these many years, I made sure to pay a call on it. But I'm not alone, as this object has fascinated countless visitors as well as Egyptologists for decades. For me, personally, its beauty and exquisite craftsmanship are the most striking things about it. Just look at the exceptional details on the neck and legs. The artist has even included the creases in the bird's flesh where its legs bend. This work is so graceful and natural—to me, it's easy to see why the Egyptians considered the ibis to be a sacred animal, the symbol of the intellect.

The naturalism of the ibis is balanced by the precious materials—gold gilding, rock crystal, silver. In fact, specific aspects of the work's materials and construction and the idea that it is “too good to be true” have caused some people to question whether this object, or parts of it, is actually ancient.

Continuing research will confirm or disprove its authenticity—that's part of the excitement and fascination of museum work, where new questions are raised all the time, provoking new answers and new ways of looking at our objects. But for me, whatever the findings, this unique object will always be my special point of connection with the Brooklyn Museum.

For more information about these objects, be sure to visit www.brooklynmuseum.org