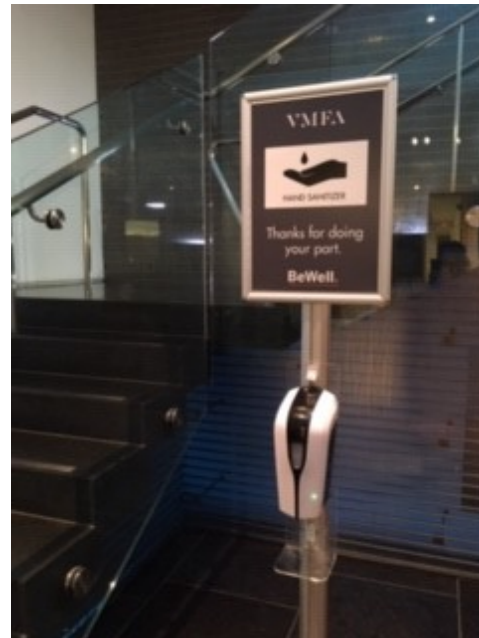


Visiting an Exhibition Post-COVID: Our Experience

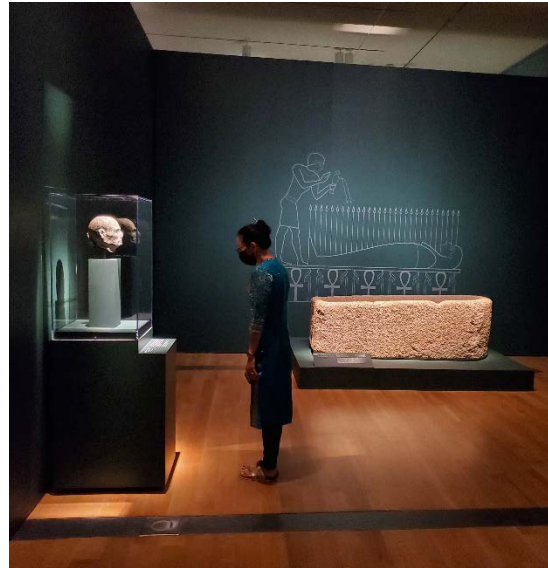
Last Friday, VAM Staff had the opportunity to visit the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts to see their new exhibition, Treasures of Ancient Egypt: Sunken Cities. Aside from the fascinating topic and artifacts, we were most excited by the fact that we could actually go visit a museum in person for the first time since March. While nothing is the same as it was pre-COVID, I felt that the VMFA did a wonderful job of welcoming people into the exhibition environment, while keeping everyone safe. There were obvious signs of “the new normal”, and everyone was required to wear a mask, but the precautions the museum has added into their gallery design and layout did nothing, I felt, to take away from our enjoyment of the exhibition.



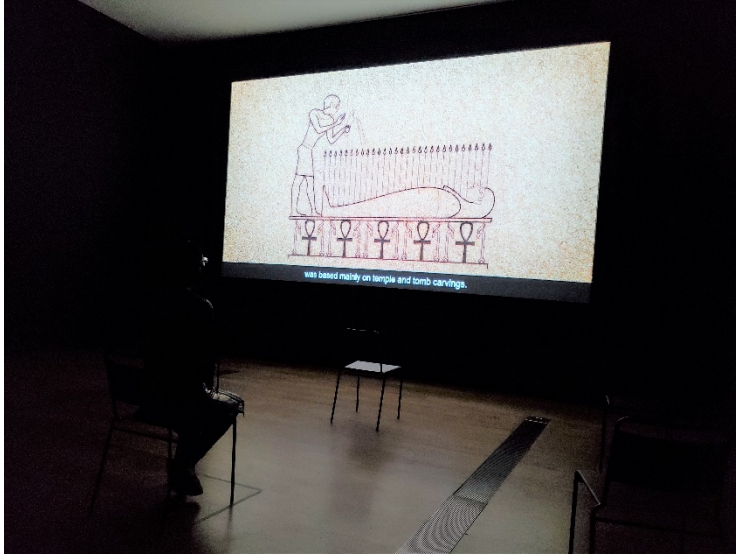
Entering the museum, there was ample signage indicating the changes that had been made, and offering opportunities for hand sanitizer. All of the member service areas—from the gift shop to the member desk to the exhibition entrance desk—had been outfitted with plexiglass dividers and touchless payment systems and ticket taking. Each area also had floor signage marking off 6 feet of distance between people in line—and it was great to see that not only was there a line waiting to get in, but they were all very respectful of the need for distancing.



Once inside the exhibition, it was easy to forget that we weren't just enjoying our day in the museum. The signage was still there, and there were directional cues to make sure everyone continued one-way, and didn't overlap. And of course, all visitors and staff were masked. But the artifacts were still, well, amazing, and made you forget all of the extra steps you had to go through to get there.



The exhibition even boasted an introductory movie. All chairs were carefully arranged within squares, placed on the floor six feet apart. With the lights out, it wasn't even distracting—it just felt like a movie, which was a great feeling.



As we wrapped up our visit in the exhibition gift shop, it was the perfect time to reflect. Yes, things looked different in the museum, and yes, we had to wear masks and be more thoughtful as we moved through the space. But in the end, it was a welcome return to the wonder that is a good museum exhibition—exploration, reflection, good artifacts, and great conversations with the people you choose to enjoy it with. Museums may change and adapt to the new post-COVID environment, but they are still, essentially, museums. They are places of wonder, and education, and beauty—and no pandemic can erase that.