

SHOWCASE

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'Indiana Gurba'

"I didn't like getting all messy, freezing and boiling," says Lancaster Museum/Art Gallery curator Norma Gurba of her archaeology days. "People don't realize that archaeology is not Indiana Jones where you dig something and the gold just falls out of the ground." Her real love is Egyptology, and Gurba finally has the chance to host a show of Egyptian artifacts and a symposium. She talked to Karla Tipton about her work in Egypt, and about her pet peeve — space alien stories. See Page 3.

Also in Showcase:

- Cheaper housing brings many new residents; now cheaper facility rental has brought a major polka festival to the Antelope Valley Fairgrounds this weekend. See Page 2.

- Marimba player Linda Maxey comes to town as part of the Antelope Valley Community Concerts season, while the organization announces its next season. See Page 2.

- Table for Two reviews a delightful and different new restaurant, the India House, on Page 10.

— Valley Press photo by Gene Breckner



Egyptologist Gurba at home in Lancaster exhibit

By KARLA TIPTON
Assistant Showcase Editor

A sign that reads "Girl Egyptologist" hangs in the Lancaster Museum/Art Gallery office of curator Norma Gurba.

The term automatically conjures up the popular image of the tireless archaeologist, suffering gallantly under the midday heat unearthing pottery to further the knowledge of science and always hoping for that one groundbreaking discovery.

While Gurba's area of expertise is indeed Egyptology, she'll be the first to admit that it's not an image that fits her.

Although through her studies in anthropology she did some digging at an early man site in Calico, "I didn't like getting all messy, freezing and boiling," she said emphatically. "People don't realize that archaeology is not Indiana Jones where you dig something and the gold just falls out of the ground. I'm not crazy about cleaning potsherds. I'd rather work on the object after it's been discovered."

But while, for the past four years, Gurba has arranged exhibits at the museum ranging from local history to modern sculpture, the study of Egyptology remains at the top of her list of favorite things. Until March 25, she is sharing her interest and expertise through the museum's exhibit "Echoes of Ancient Egyptian Art in the Modern World." Like most exhibits, it required two years of planning to bring it to fruition. On Sunday, Gurba will be lecturing on Egyptology with three university professors at an all-day symposium from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The event is free to the public.

"I do enjoy sharing it, but it's a lot of work," she said. "On one hand, it's another exhibit. It's still just part of the job."

Gurba, 38, set her sights on museum work a short time into her anthropology and Egyptology studies at California State University, Fullerton, and UCLA — an undertaking which took eight years.

"You don't want to starve when you graduate, and your parents start bugging you, 'What are you going to do?'" said Gurba, with a laugh. "As an Egyptologist, your choices are kind of

On the cover

narrow: You either dig, teach or work in a museum. And since archaeology was my least favorite aspect and there are very few teaching jobs available, I took museum classes, too, and prepared for that. I like spending the meticulous, time-consuming work cleaning an object and figuring it out. And so I knew that I could handle museums, that I would like that."

While Gurba had completed

several unpaid internships — in museums from Los Angeles to Turin, Italy — she was seeking a paying position in the field. In 1986, six months after she and her husband Ron Kleit were attracted to the Antelope Valley by its low housing costs, Gurba was hired as museum assistant at the Lancaster Museum/Art Gallery. Within months, she took over as curator, when the previous director left in 1987, the title becoming official in October of that year.

During the course of the ex-

hibit, Gurba hopes to reveal the humanity of the ancient Egyptians — as well as debunk some popular misconceptions.

"Human nature hasn't changed in thousands of years," she said. "That's the part that's amazing to me when you study ancient societies. When you look at the love poetry and these people are just so sad because they haven't seen their boyfriend in three weeks, it sounds like a lovesick teen-ager today, and the songs that they play on the pop stations."

"People are people — don't make them out to have some mysterious force behind them," she stressed.

Which brings up one of Gurba's pet peeves: space aliens.

Occasionally, she said, there's someone who queries her about the construction of the pyramids. "They'll say, 'How'd they do this? No one knows how they did this.' But Egyptologists basically know how they did it. If you look in the museum in Cairo, you can see all the tools."

Most people don't realize that the evolution resulting in the Great Pyramids at Giza took hundreds of years, she said. "The shape of a pyramid did not just appear overnight. Studying the architecture, you can see that it was a very long process. There's nothing mysterious."

On their way to the construction of the perfect pyramid, the ancient Egyptians did make a few mistakes that just crumbled apart, she added. "If they had all this knowledge from these strange visitors, why were there mistakes?"

In "Echoes of Ancient Egyptian Art in the Modern World" (which also features modern works by artist Ahmed Chiha), Gurba focuses on the everyday lives of the ancients, rather than on exotic treasures. The wide range of ancient Egyptian artifacts includes, among other objects, tools, cosmetics — and a human mummy.

But there's nothing mystical about her, either.

"You have to remember that mummies are still people — you don't want to disgrace the dead," said Gurba. "On one hand you have a lot of people oohing and ahing. It's a touchy thing. So we try to do it so that they're learning about the culture."

However, she admits that sometimes "it almost becomes an object to you, but it is a person. I wouldn't care what happens 3,000 years from now, but I think this mummy never thought she'd end up in a new world, so far away from home. So I want people to respect her."

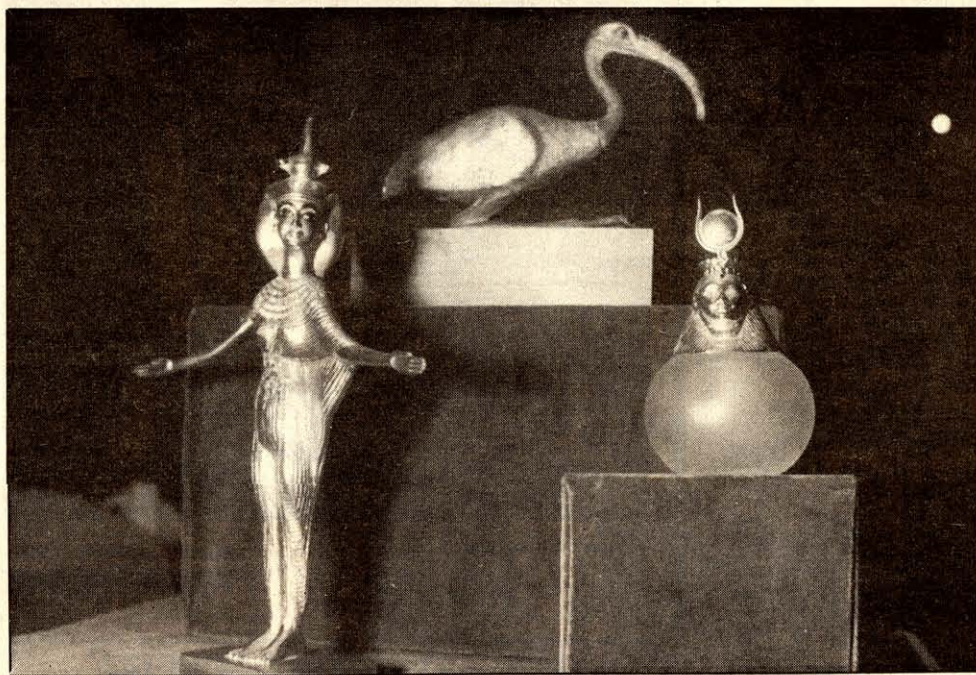
Gurba herself has spent plenty of time respecting the ancient Egyptians. She has visited the country three times, the first time to get acquainted with the sites, the next two times for research.

While she smiles at the mention of "religious experiences" ("Once I was lifting a sarcophagus lid and the lights started blinking"), Gurba was admittedly moved by humankind's historical presence across the expanse of three thousand years.

"It's really amazing when you see the graffiti written by the ancient Egyptians ... the ancient Greeks ... people from the 1700s ... and all the different languages," she said. "And you

See GURBA on H14

'The shape of a pyramid did not just appear overnight. Studying the architecture, you can see that it was a very long process. There's nothing mysterious'



THE TRUE story behind such Egyptian artifacts as these is found through painstaking and often dirty work, not in heroic searches or

mysterious theories. These are included in the Egyptian exhibit running at the Lancaster Museum/Art Gallery.

GENE BRECKNER/valley press

Gurba

From H3

see the thousands of years that people have been admiring the monument. It makes you take notice of how many people have stood where you're standing. Then when you look at our history — oh, Western Hotel, 1888."

Gurba hasn't yet finished her work in the field of Egyptology. She wants to do some writing on the subject — and she will be returning to Egypt in summer 1991, to do the one thing she hasn't yet done there: archaeology.

"I've done research, but I haven't been on a dig in Egypt," she said. "I'm not crazy about archaeology, but I do want to do some."

Chances are she won't be homesick for the weather: "It's in the south and it's very, very hot. Very hot," she said. "Sister city with the Antelope Valley."