

Egypt demands queen Nefertiti restoration

Contributed by Egypt News
Tuesday, 20 October 2009

WITH her almond-shaped eyes and swan-like neck, Queen Nefertiti of Egypt is regarded as an icon of beauty - a crowd-puller who has attracted millions of admirers to Berlin.

Now, as the 3400-year-old bust becomes the centrepiece of a grand new museum in the German capital, the Egyptians have demanded their queen back.

Thousands of people have been queueing since the weekend to see Nefertiti in a dramatically lit room in the restored Neues Museum, in what used to be East Berlin, which had been closed since the war. The building was restored by the British architect David Chipperfield, who designed a modern museum around walls still pockmarked by bullets and grenade blasts.

The German authorities argue the bust of Nefertiti - once hailed by her husband, the Pharaoh Akhenaten, as "heiress, great of favours, possessed of charm, exuding happiness, mistress of sweetness" - is too fragile to transport and that the legal arguments for repatriation are too flimsy.

"Nefertiti is accepted, not assimilated. She keeps her separateness and her uniqueness - yet she belongs here," said Dietrich Wildung, Germany's top Egyptologist. Before its appearance in the Neues Museum, the bust was kept in the Egyptian museum in West Berlin.

But Egypt has a new museum of its own to grace with ancient treasures, the Grand Egyptian Museum, which is scheduled to open in 2012 at Giza.

The Germans are concerned that if they do lend the bust she will never return.

The bust of Nefertiti was taken out of Egypt in dubious circumstances. Ludwig Borchardt, the archeologist who took it to Berlin in 1913, disguised its true worth.