

Lifestyle

T-Rex skeleton on show in Zurich before auction

Yolanda Schicker-Siber gingerly fastens a pointy claw bone with a thin metal wire, putting the finishing touches on a giant Tyrannosaurus-Rex skeleton before a rare auction in Switzerland next month.

The Aathal Dinosaur Museum's curator was on Tuesday helping complete perhaps the world's biggest construction kit -- reassembling a 67-million-year-old T-Rex dubbed Trinity. Trinity was sent to Zurich from Arizona in the United States in nine giant crates.

The 3.9-metre (12.8-foot) skeleton has been mounted on a red carpet and under crystal chandeliers in a Zurich concert hall, where it will be on public display before going under the hammer on April 18. The Koller auction house has estimated it will fetch between six to eight million Swiss francs (\$6.5-8.7 million).

But Christian Link, in charge of natural history memorabilia at Koller, said he believed that was a "pretty low" estimate. Trinity is made up of bone material from three T-Rex specimens, excavated between 2008 and 2013 from the Hell Creek and Lance Creek formations in Montana and Wyoming in the United States.

The two sites are known for the discoveries of two other significant T-Rex skeletons that have gone to auction: Sue went under the hammer in 1997 for \$8.4 million, and Stan, which took the world-record hammer price of \$31.8 million at Christie's, in 2020. Last year, Christie's withdrew another T-Rex skeleton days before it went on sale in Hong Kong, after doubts were reportedly raised about parts of the skeleton.

'Very, very old'

Reassembling Trinity was no easy feat, Schicker-Siber told AFP as she secured another toe bone. "The bones are very, very old. They are 67 million years old. So they are brittle, they have cracks," she said. "They are stabilised, but you never know if there is a crack that you haven't seen so far... You have to have the glue ready."

Aart Walen, an exhibit preparator from the Netherlands with 30 years' experience assembling dinosaur skeletons, agreed. "We didn't break anything yet," he said proudly, as he and his colleagues worked on two large ischium bones, which sat near the dinosaur's pelvic area where the eggs came out. With a parakeet named Ethel perched on his shoulder, Walen filled in cracks in the bones, using what looked like dental tools and modelling compound.

It was important for the fixes to remain visible, he said, showing the dark lines where the fissures had been. "You have to see where it has been repaired. There are some stories about fakes out there. We don't want that," he said, referring to the aborted Christie's auction. Knocking on different parts of the bone, he also demonstrated the different sounds made on original bone and the plastic additions used to fill out the skeleton.

Room for a T-Rex

Just over half of the bone material in the skeleton comes from the three Tyrannosaurus specimens -- above the 50 percent level needed for experts to consider such a skeleton high quality. Link said Koller was intent on being open and transparent about the origins of the bones that make up Trinity.

"Hence the name Trinity. We are not hiding in any way that this specimen comes from three different dig sites," he said. The skeleton is being sold by a "private individual" who wants to remain anonymous. Auction sales of dinosaur skeletons and other fossils have raked in tens of millions of dollars in recent years, but experts have warned the trade could be harmful to science by putting the specimens in private hands and out of the reach of researchers.

Link stressed though that 95 percent of known T-Rexes are currently in museums, and said any private collector who might snap up the



In this photograph manager Nils Knoetschke (left) takes part in the installation of 'Trinity'.



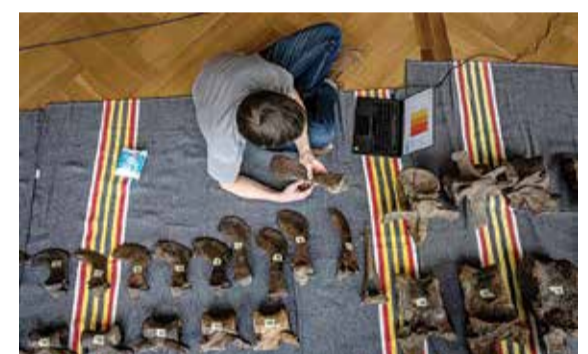
Project manager Nils Knoetschke takes part in the installation of 'Trinity'.



In this photograph a woman takes part in the installation of 'Trinity'.



In this photograph Yolanda Schicker-Siber (left) takes part in the installation of 'Trinity' a Tyrannosaurus-Rex skeleton dating back 67-million years which will be auctioned in Switzerland on April 18, 2023, marking the first such sale in Europe.—AFP photos



This photograph shows the installation of 'Trinity' a Tyrannosaurus-Rex skeleton dating back 67-million years.



In this photograph Yolanda Schicker-Siber takes part in the installation of 'Trinity' a Tyrannosaurus-Rex skeleton dating back 67-million years.

skeleton was also likely to lend it out museums. Personally, he said he would like to see a Swiss museum buy Trinity, adding "it would be nice to

have it here permanently." Schicker-Siber said the dinosaur museum she runs with her father outside Zurich unfortunately could not afford to acquire

Trinity. "But if somebody buys it and doesn't know where to put it, we have a museum (with room) for a T-Rex," she said.—AFP

Libyan Berbers revive their language in class and on air

A pupil shyly approached the whiteboard, picked up a marker and carefully traced a letter from the Berber alphabet as the teacher watched — a scene unimaginable under Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi.

Tamazight has been the native language of indigenous people across North Africa since pre-Roman times. It has survived despite centuries of Arab domination and has undergone a revival in Libya since Kadhafi's four-decade rule ended in a 2011 revolution. In the city of Zuwara, a majority-Berber community near the border with Tunisia, teacher Assirem Shawashi encourages her nine-year-old pupils to approach the board, one by one, to draw out symbols.

"Children love this subject because they find their identity and their culture in books," said Shawashi, dressed in a black dress and grey hijab. "It's not just about the alphabet and vocabulary, but it's a whole culture we're passing on to them." Around 10 percent of Libya's seven million people are ethnically Berber.

Kadhafi worked to crush their culture while promoting Arab identity. But some, especially in the remote western mountains, continued to speak their language at home, out of earshot of the feared secret police. They include residents of Zuwara, 120 kilometres (75 miles) west of the capital Tripoli, who have held onto their culture throughout Greek, Roman, Arab, Ottoman and Italian rule.

'Natural Right'

Libya has seen a decade of complex and often violent power struggles since Kadhafi's fall in a NATO-backed uprising, but authorities in Tripoli have been accommodating towards Berber culture, even providing textbooks — although they have not given the language official status.

Shawashi is a member of the first-ever class to graduate with degrees in Tamazight last year from the University of Zuwara. Her younger pupils never knew life under Kadhafi,

she notes. "It's just a natural right to learn their mother tongue, and they can't imagine that anyone would ever ban that."

She said that Tamazight textbooks arrived immediately after the revolution, from Morocco where the language is constitutionally recognised. Since then, the community has made "enormous advances", Shawashi added.

"We ourselves are surprised."

School director Sondoss Saki said the first classes in 2012 had "difficult beginnings" due to a lack of trained teachers and confusion about which curriculum to follow. Some parents feared the children would be overloaded, arguing that Arabic and English were a higher priority.

"But the children come here to learn, and their minds are wide open to knowledge," Saki said confidently, sitting behind her desk where the Libyan and Amazigh (Berber) flags stood side by side. When classes are over, Shawashi heads off to the studio of Kasas FM, founded in 2012 as Libya's first local radio station to broadcast in Tamazight. Shawashi, who works as a presenter in her spare time, meets programme director Ismail Abudib to discuss his upcoming shows on Amazigh literature.

Abudib, a 28-year-old architect in a white shirt and grey blazer, says he sees it as his duty to defend his community's rights. Kasas FM is one way of doing that, he said, sitting in front of a small mixing desk in the station's control booth. The station covers social issues, culture, religion, entertainment and sport, he said, "all the subjects that interest listeners, in the language they know best". "Respecting your language and being proud of your identity doesn't stop you living with other communities," Abudib said. "We're walking forward and not looking back to the times of repression and marginalisation. The whole world is full of diversity, and as Libyans we should be able to live together in peace."—AFP



In this picture Libyan students study Tamazight language at a school in Zuwara, a majority-Berber community near the border with Tunisia.—AFP photos



In this picture a Libyan student studies Tamazight language at a school in Zuwara, a majority-Berber community near the border with Tunisia.



In this picture teacher Assirem Shuwashia (left) watches as a Libyan pupil writes Tamazight language at a school in Zuwara, a majority-Berber community near the border with Tunisia.



In this picture a Libyan student studies Tamazight language at a school in Zuwara, a majority-Berber community near the border with Tunisia.



In this picture school director Sondoss Saki gestures at a school teaching Tamazight language in Zuwara, a majority-Berber community near the border with Tunisia.



In this picture teacher Assirem Shuwashia (left) and architect Ismail Abudib (right), present a radio program in Tamazight language at Kasas FM in Zuwara, a majority-Berber community near the border with Tunisia.



In this picture a fan holds a flag with the logo of the Tamazight language during a handball match between Al-Jazira Zuwara and Al-Ahly Tripoli, in Zuwara, a majority-Berber community near the border with Tunisia.