



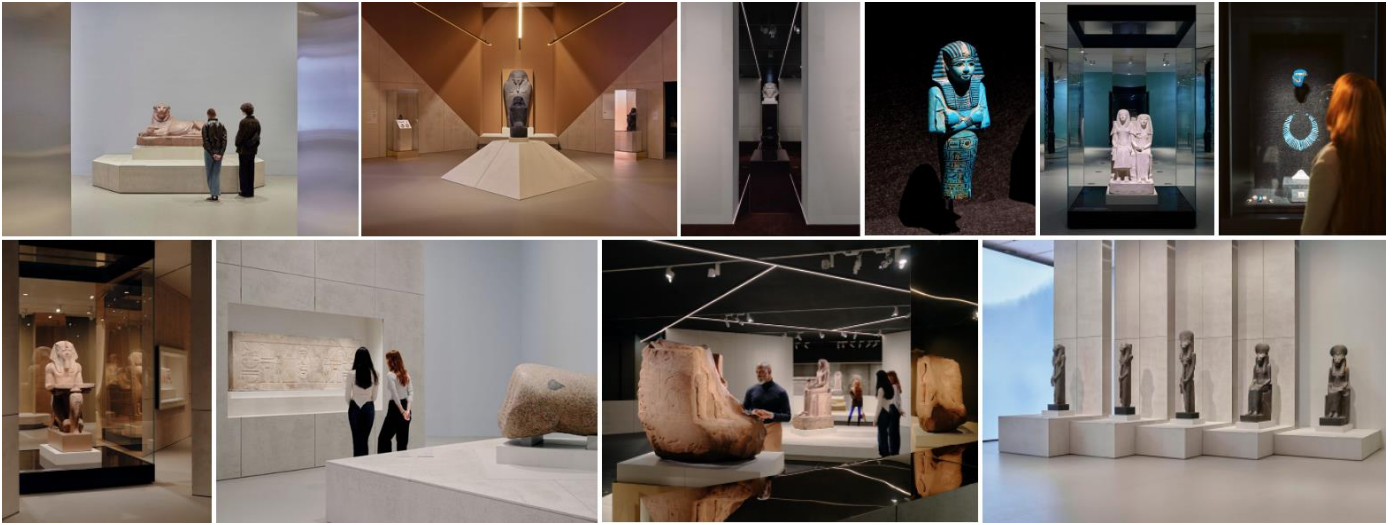
MEDIA RELEASE

NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

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Melbourne Winter Masterpieces® exhibition *Pharaoh*

NGV International | 14 June – 6 October 2024 | Ticketed



Thursday 13 June: The internationally exclusive blockbuster exhibition, *Pharaoh*, celebrates three thousand years of ancient Egyptian art and culture through more than 500 objects on loan from the British Museum, including monumental sculpture, tomb and temple architecture, coffins and funerary objects, as well as a significant display of exquisite ancient Egyptian jewellery.

Curated especially for the National Gallery of Victoria by the British Museum as part of the Victorian Government's Melbourne Winter Masterpieces® series, *Pharaoh* is the largest international exhibition the British Museum has ever presented in its 270-year history. With many works on display in Australia for the very first time, this Melbourne-exclusive presentation constitutes the single largest ancient Egyptian exhibition ever mounted in this country.

Spanning from the 1st Dynasty (c.3000 BCE) to the Roman period (3rd century CE), *Pharaoh* explores the fascinating lives, myths and images of the successive rulers of ancient Egypt through meticulously crafted examples of art, design and architecture. The works on display were commissioned by and celebrate some of Egypt's most famous kings and queens, including the boy king **Tutankhamun**; **Ramses II** and Queen **Nefertari**; **Khufu**, builder of the Great Pyramid of Giza; as well as foreign leaders such as **Alexander the Great**.

From small sacred sculptures, to monuments of colossal scale, the pharaohs presented an idealised image of themselves as invincible warriors who defended Egypt and maintained the order of the universe. The exhibition will highlight the art and artistry of ancient Egypt and give audiences an appreciation of the artistic skill of ancient Egyptian sculptors, painters and craftspeople, whose lives were largely spent working in service of the pharaoh.

Outstanding examples of sculpture, statuary and art featuring the iconic image of the pharaoh include:

- At just over 5 centimetres wide, the earliest object in the exhibition is a small ivory label depicting King Den of the 1st Dynasty, shown as a powerful ruler subduing his enemy with physical force. Even at this early period, c.3000 BCE, the pharaoh is depicted in a characteristic pose with royal regalia, an image that continued to be used by pharaohs for the next three millennia.
- A superbly carved green siltstone *Head of Thutmose III*, one of ancient Egypt's most successful military pharaohs of the 18th Dynasty who expanded Egypt's empire to its greatest extent. Wearing the tall white crown of Upper Egypt and cobra (*uraeus*) – the consummate symbol of royalty – the head presents the timeless image of the Egyptian pharaoh.
- A larger-than-life limestone statue of Ramses II (c.1279-1213 BCE) depicts one of ancient Egypt's most famous kings as a high priest, making offerings to appease the gods in his capacity as the gods' representative on earth. Ramses II was one of Egypt's longest ruling pharaohs who had numerous wives, is said to have fathered more than eighty children and commissioned a vast number of temples, monuments and statuary for his own self-glorification.

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- The *Seated statue of Pharaoh Sety II*, c.1200-1194 BCE, a grandson of Ramses II, is the most complete sculpture of a pharaoh in the British Museum's collection to survive from ancient Egypt, offering audiences a rare chance to experience the exceptional craftsmanship of Egyptian sculptors.

Highlights of the exhibition include a number of works depicting ancient Egyptian gods and goddesses, including a group of ten impressive lion-headed statues representing the goddess Sekhmet (c.1350 BCE). Sekhmet was the goddess of war and pestilence, and the pharaoh Amenhotep III commissioned hundreds of statues of this goddess for his mortuary temple at Thebes in an effort to appease her. The display constitutes one of the the largest groupings of Sekhmet statues from the British Museum's collection ever to be on display at one time.

The exhibition evokes the grandeur and monumental scale of ancient Egypt through large-scale statuary and architecture, including a limestone wall from an Old Kingdom *mastaba* tomb standing nearly 2.5 metres high and over 3 metres wide, elaborately carved with hieroglyphic texts and depictions of the tomb owner seated in front of offering tables.

An enormous granite statue of a lion, weighing approximately 3 tonnes, features hieroglyphs around its base which refer to the lion as a symbol of the almighty pharaoh". The statue also bears the remains of the cartouche of Tutankhamun, who added his name when he became pharaoh (around 1336 BC), illustrating the importance of dynastic succession for the ancient Egyptians. Also on display is a rare fragmentary sculpture of the torso of Tutankhamun, in which his cartouche has been erased and replaced with the name of his successor, Horemheb.

Revealing the centrality of jewellery and body adornment in life and the afterlife in ancient Egypt, the exhibition includes a comprehensive display of more than 180 examples of ancient jewellery, including necklaces, amulets, girdles and rings made from gold, silver, electrum, faience and semi-precious stones. Featuring some previously unexhibited works and constituting the largest loan of ancient Egyptian jewellery in the British Museum's history, the pieces on display reveal the highly sophisticated craftsmanship and skill of Egyptian makers.

A unique section of the exhibition looks at the highly skilled craftspeople who cut and decorated the royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings. Personal objects on display in the exhibition, including limestone fragments inscribed with notes and artistic sketches offer an in-depth insight into the everyday lives of these ancient craftspeople and their families. One particularly poignant work in the exhibition, a fragment with the drawing of a donkey's head, reveals the artist's skill at capturing the essence of the animal through a few bold strokes.

Three millennia of pharaonic rule will unfold before audiences through an immersive, contemporary exhibition design and soundscape that evokes the grandeur and timelessness of ancient Egypt. *Pharaoh* is also accompanied by an ambitious publication, authored by international specialists and richly illustrated with works from the exhibition.

The NGV has also conceived and curated a free exhibition for children and families *Ancient Egypt for Kids* which introduces the art and culture of ancient Egypt through engaging hands-on activities, as well as a new season of NGV Friday Nights running throughout the exhibition period each week from June to October.

To mark the exhibition's opening to the public, on Saturday 15 June the NGV will host free drop-by conversations with exhibition curators and scholars, offering audiences a behind-the-scenes insight into the making of this exhibition and a deep-dive into ancient Egyptian culture. There will also be an in-depth presentation by exhibition curator Dr Marie Vandenberg, Curator: Funerary Culture of the Nile Valley, British Museum, presented by premium partner HSBC.

Steve Dimopoulos, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, said: '*Pharaoh* is the largest ancient Egyptian exhibition ever mounted in this country, and we are proud to showcase this international exclusive in Melbourne. We're proud to back this monumental exhibition, which marks 20 years of backing blockbuster art and culture exhibitions that have captivated audiences of all ages and drawn millions of visitors from across the state, country and beyond.'

Colin Brooks, Minister for Creative Industries, said: 'This world-class exhibition will be a major drawcard for Melbourne this winter, attracting visitors from near and far with its program for all ages, including a free children's exhibition and Friday night events for art and music lovers.'

Tony Ellwood AM, Director, NGV, said: '*Pharaoh* will introduce a new generation of visitors to the perennially fascinating visual culture of ancient Egypt through an unprecedented exhibition of sculpture, architecture, jewellery and more from the British Museum in London. The NGV's exhibition places precedence on the exceptional craftsmanship of the ancient Egyptians, highlighting their refined artistic sensibility and technical skill.'

Daniel Antoine, Keeper, Egypt and Sudan, British Museum, said: ‘The British Museum’s collection of ancient Egyptian objects – one of the most comprehensive outside of Egypt – tells the fascinating story of life and death in the ancient Nile Valley in unparalleled depth and breadth. We are thrilled to be able to share the collection with the Australian public and celebrate the extraordinary artistry of the ancient Egyptians with a new international audience.’

Pharaoh is on display from 14 June – 6 October 2024 at NGV International on St Kilda Road, Melbourne. Admission fees apply. Tickets and information are available via the NGV website: [NGV.MELBOURNE](https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au)

A collaboration between the British Museum and the National Gallery of Victoria.

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IMAGES: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/tnmg1ca8l1bwwkg/AAAMOtXLv3jSjWDjWoSR19lla?st=hd3o1t8q&dl=0>

Image caption: Installation view of the 2024 Melbourne Winter Masterpieces® exhibition *Pharaoh* on display from 14 June – 6 October 2024 at NGV International, Melbourne. Photo: Tom Ross

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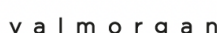
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