

**News Release  
Public Information  
Department**

“Eternal Egypt: Masterworks of Ancient Art from The British Museum” on view at the Brooklyn Museum of Art November 23, 2001 through February 24, 2002

April 2001

*Eternal Egypt: Masterworks of Ancient Art from The British Museum* will provide a unique opportunity to view more than 140 masterpieces from the extraordinary holdings of The British Museum. The presentation at the **Brooklyn Museum of Art**, from November 23 through February 24, 2002, will be the only Northeast venue of this exhibition, drawn from one of the most important collections of ancient Egyptian material in the world.

The exhibition encompasses the entire period of pharaonic history, from the First Dynasty into the first centuries of the Roman conquest of Egypt, with works of art ranging in size from minute to colossal. Many of these objects have never before traveled outside of Great Britain.

The exhibition is organized by the American Federation of Arts and The British Museum. Dr. Edna R. Russmann, Curator of the Department of Egyptian, Classical and Ancient Middle Eastern Art at the Brooklyn Museum of Art is the guest curator.

This exhibition and its national tour are made possible by Ford Motor Company.

Additional support is provided by the Benefactors Circle of the AFA.

“We are delighted to be the northeastern venue for this extraordinary exhibition of Egyptian masterworks from The British Museum, said Brooklyn Museum of Art

Director Arnold L. Lehman. “It complements the Museum’s own world-renowned holdings of ancient Egyptian art. We are grateful to the American Federation of Arts and the British Museum for organizing this traveling exhibition and to Ford Motor Company for their support in bringing “Eternal Egypt” to the Brooklyn Museum of Art and New York City.”

“The art of Egypt inspires people of all ages and backgrounds,” said William Clay Ford, Jr., Chairman, Ford Motor Company. “Its appeal crosses boundaries of time, geography, and culture, and for many schoolchildren it is the first exposure to history, art, archaeology, and social studies. Ford is committed to supporting the education and enjoyment that come from experiencing extraordinary cultures, and we are proud to be a partner in this historic exhibition.”

Most of the statues and reliefs in the exhibition will be arranged chronologically, providing the viewer with a panorama of Egyptian art that spans over 3,000 years of continuous development. Other objects will highlight specific aspect of Egyptian artists’ training, as well as their responses to artistic and technical challenges.

One of the oldest objects in the exhibition is a small ivory plaque that served as a label for a pair of sandals deposited in the tomb of the first Dynasty king Den, shortly after (or about) 3,000 B.C.

From Dynasty 3, the formative period of the early Old Kingdom (ca. 2686–2613 B.C.) comes a seated granite figure of a Third Dynasty shipbuilder named Ankhwa. Ankhwa’s strong, blunt features and the shape of the chair on which he sits are marks of the archaic style of Egyptian art.

One of the most remarkable objects in the exhibition, the wooden statuette of Meryrahashtef, was made late in the Old Kingdom, when the sturdy, muscular forms of earlier Old Kingdom sculpture had given way to more slender, elongated figures which were sometimes represented nude. The statue depicts Meryrahashtef as a young man. An asymmetrical torso, which bends forward and slightly to the right, emphasizes his vigorous stride.

A number of colossal works, many broken in antiquity are included in the exhibition. The largest complete statue is a magnificent over-life-sized red granite lion, one of a pair from the temple of King Amenhotep III at Soleb, in Nubia (now Sudan). Layers of Inscriptions testify to this statue's interesting history, which included restoration under Tutankhamun.

The exhibition also features a superb collection of sculpture from Dynasty 18 including a graywacke head of Thutmose III in a white crown, and a figure of Senenmut, Queen Hatshepsut's steward and the tutor of her only child, Princess Neferure. The little girl sits on her guardian's lap and, enveloped in his cloak is invisible but for her head and right hand. She holds her forefinger to her mouth, in the emblematic Egyptian gesture of childhood.

A selection of Middle Kingdom jewelry emphasizes the symbolic, protective qualities of Egyptian ornament. An electrum and gold amulet depicting a loop of papyrus stalks represents an early form of preserver. Also a hieroglyph, for the word *sa*, "protection," the amulet provided magical protection through both image and word. The row of images on a curious bangle-like object of gold and silver includes amuletic symbols such as *ankh* signs and *wadjet* eyes, interspersed with representations of such dangerous or ill-omened creatures as snakes, turtles and desert hares, thus diverting their power to beneficial purposes.

In addition to such famous works from the Amarna period such as a stela depicting Amenhotep III and Queen Tiye, there are several lesser-known pieces in the exhibition. One is the molded-plaster face of a young royal person, a tool used by Amarna sculptors to develop portrait images of Akhenaten and his family. The coarseness of the plaster and the soft, sweet features of the face indicate that this example was made near the end of the Amarna period. A strong resemblance to early statues of Tutankhamun suggests that it represents either the young prince or his future queen, Princess Ankhesenpaaten. Another image of Tutankhamun appears on a statue inscribed for King Horemheb. Since the facial features correspond with those on Tutankhamun's latest sculpture, it seems likely that the king died before the statue could be finished by carving the king's name.

The bust of a colossal standing statue represents Ramesses the Great from the temple of Khnum on Elephantine Island. A silver statuette of the god Amun, overlaid with gold, may date to Ramesses's reign or that of his father, Sety I. Since it was made entirely of precious metals, the figure may have been a cult statue, very few of which have survived. Gold jewelry from the New Kingdom includes three cats on spacer bars from a pair of bracelets made for a Seventeenth Dynasty queen, and an earring with the name of the Nineteenth Dynasty queen, Tauset.

Several works come from the funerary temple at Deir el Buhri of the early Middle Kingdom king Mentuhotep II. The grand scale of some of this temple's painted wall reliefs is evident in a fragment depicting dead and dying foreigners. Though sizable, it was only a detail of a much larger composition showing the capture of a Middle Eastern walled city by Egyptian soldiers.

Additional funerary material in *Eternal Egypt* includes a shabti inscribed for King Ahmose, the founder of the New Kingdom. This impressive little figure is also an important historical document because it is one of just three statues known to represent Ahmose, and the only one that is complete. Two masks provide a striking contrast: one early example is lavishly gilded while another, painted much later, is entirely Graeco-Roman in style. Both, however, were placed over the head of a mummy.

The sophistication of Egyptian drawing and painting in the New Kingdom and later is demonstrated by illustrated sheets from several *Book of the Dead* papyrus rolls, including three from the celebrated Nineteenth Dynasty papyrus of Ani. A vignette from the *Book of the Dead* of Nakht shows him with his wife on their earthly estate, which includes a rare representation of a house, with ventilator hoods on the roof. The couple worships Osiris, the king of the dead, who is shown in his domain, the mythical West of the Afterworld.

A colossal Hathor-headed column capital from the temple of the cat goddess Bastet at Bubastis is a work of the Third Intermediate Period (ca. 924–850 B.C.) Other examples from this period include the upper part of a large, little-known bronze statue of a man and the head of a Kushite king, almost certainly Shabako.

A standing statue of a man named Tjayasetimu, closely modeled on much earlier Old Kingdom sculpture, exemplifies the archaism which was characteristic of the Third Intermediate Period and the early Late Period. In a statue made at the end of the of Dynasty 26 or the early Dynasty 27, the period of the first Persian occupation of Egypt, a priest named Amenhotep from the city of Sais holds a naos containing a figure of the goddess Neith. Though his heavy kilt was formerly considered a Persian style, and his rather mournful expression a response to Persian oppression, we now know that both features had already entered the Egyptian sculptural repertoire during the Twenty-sixth Dynasty.

Another statue of a priest holding a shrine with a figure of the god Atum is a rare example of a Ptolemaic portrait head still attached to its original body. The statue appears to be the work of two sculptors—a mediocre craftsman who carved the body, while a specialist in portraiture would have carved the finely detailed head to the owner's specifications.

The exhibition is accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue, with two essays on Egyptian art by Dr. Russmann, and a history of the British Museum's Department of Egyptian Antiquities written by its former Curator, T.G.H. James. The catalogue is supported in part by Helen H. Scheidt

*Eternal Egypt: Masterworks of Ancient Art from The British Museum* will be a ticketed exhibition.

Eternal Egypt opened its North American tour March 2, 2001 at the Toledo Museum of Art, where it will be on view through May 27, 2001. It then travels to Wonders: The Memphis International Cultural Series (June 28 through October 21, 2001), the Brooklyn Museum of Art (November 23 through February 24, 2002), the Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City (April 12 through July 2, 2002). It will also be on view at The Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco (August 10 through November 3, 2002), the Minneapolis Institute of Art (December 22 through March 16, 2003), the Field Museum, Chicago (April 26 through August 10, 2003) and the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore (September 21 through January 4, 2004).

The American Federation of Arts is the nation's oldest and most comprehensive non-profit art museum service organization. Founded by an act of Congress in 1909, the AFA provided its more than 550 member institutions with traveling art exhibitions and educational, professional, and technical support programs developed in collaboration with the museum community. Through these programs, the AFA seeks to strengthen the ability of museums to enrich the public's experience and understanding of art. Please visit our Web site at [www.afaweb.com](http://www.afaweb.com).

Since its founding in 1903, Ford Motor Company has supported arts institutions and cultural programs in the United States and around the world. As a global company with 400,000 employees, Ford is committed to creating opportunities that stimulate creativity and innovation, promote cultural diversity, and enhance the quality of life in our communities. To learn more about Eternal Egypt and other programs made possible by Ford Motor Company, visit [www.ford.com](http://www.ford.com).

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<http://www.brooklynart.org>

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

**Museum Hours:**

Wednesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.;  
First Saturday of each month, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.; all other Saturdays, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.;  
Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. Museum Café open until 4 p.m. Wednesday through Friday and 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Saturday, Sunday, and holidays. Museum Libraries and Archives are open by appointment. Museum shops are open 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; till 6 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays.

**Directions:**

Subway: Seventh Avenue express (2 or 3) to Eastern Parkway/Brooklyn Museum stop. Buses: B71, B41, B69, B48. On-site parking available