

# EGYPT REBORN

## ART FOR ETERNITY

**News Release**  
Public Information  
Department

***Egypt Reborn: Art for Eternity* Presents More than 600 Additional Objects  
From Brooklyn Museum of Art Ancient Egyptian Holdings**

**On Long-Term View Beginning April 12, 2003**

**Press Preview Wednesday April 9, 10 a.m.–2 p.m.**

*Egypt Reborn: Art for Eternity*, a presentation of more than six hundred objects from the world-renowned ancient Egyptian holdings of the Brooklyn Museum of Art will be added to the extraordinary selection currently on view. The new material, three-quarters of which has not been on public view for at least a decade, will be presented in newly refurbished gallery space that will open to the public on April 12, 2003. The new presentation will begin with a thematic installation entitled “Permanence and Change,” encompassing all of ancient Egyptian history. It will be followed by a chronological presentation ranging from the Predynastic Period through the 18th Dynasty reign of Amunhotep III.

Egyptologist James F. Romano, Ph.D., is project director of the reinstallation that has been more than a decade in planning, during the course of which he has reviewed over 4,000 Egyptian objects in the Museum’s galleries and storerooms. Other members of the team are Richard A. Fazzini, Chair, Department of Egyptian, Classical, and Ancient Middle Eastern Art, Curators Edna R. Russmann, Ph.D., Edward Bleiberg, Ph.D., and Research Associate Madeleine C. Cody. Each object in the new presentation has been evaluated by the BMA’s conservation laboratory and stabilized and repaired where necessary.

*Egypt Reborn: Art for Eternity* is made possible by the National Endowment for the Humanities, with additional major support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the BMA’s Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund, and funds from private donors. *Where New York* is a media sponsor.

The new exhibition complements the more than 500 ancient Egyptian treasures now on view, which were installed in 1993 when the newly renovated galleries in the Morris A. and Meyer Schapiro Wing opened. That installation begins with a chronological presentation of material dating from the Amarna Period and the reign of Amunhotep IV, later

**Brooklyn Museum of Art**

200 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, NY 11238-6052

Telephone (718) 638-5000 Fax (718) 501-6134 [www.brooklynmuseum.org](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org)

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known as Akhenaten, and his wife Nefertiti through the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods. The final galleries of the 1993 installation contain a thematic presentation entitled “Temples, Tombs, and the Egyptian Universe,” exploring the connection between ancient Egyptian religious beliefs and art.

“Permanence and Change,” the thematic section in *Egypt Reborn*, is organized around four topics: “Early Life along the Nile,” “Life & Belief,” “Art & Communication,” and “Materials & Technology.” Questions such as how the form and style of pottery changed over the course of 2000 years, how objects left in tombs provide clues about how the Egyptians lived, and how most works of Egyptian sculpture were really three-dimensional hieroglyphs will be addressed. In addition, the gallery display will explore how sculptural form, style, and iconography evolved from 2650 B.C. to the first century A.D. This gallery also contains the doors that originally served as the Museum’s main entrance before the removal of the front staircase in 1934. The doors, which lead out on to a small balcony, will afford visitors a superb view of the new front entrance and plaza area when it is completed.

The chronological presentation will begin with the Predynastic Period and conclude with the 18th dynasty reign of Amunhotep III. The Predynastic Period, dating from 4400 to 3000 B.C., comprised the Badarian Period and the Naqada I, II, and III Periods. This era was characterized by developments in writing and large-scale architecture, and with contacts with Nubia, Mesopotamia and other Near Eastern lands. During this time there was increased urbanization and centralization of political authority as distinct cultures were eventually unified from 3000 to 2675 B.C. during the First and Second Dynasties. Among the objects on view in this gallery will be a flint knife with an elaborately carved ivory handle depicting 227 animals of 19 species, an abstract terracotta female figure with outflung arms, and an array of vessels, among them a late Naqada vase, adorned with a painted procession of mammals, created between 3400-3300 B.C.

Three Old Kingdom galleries, encompassing Dynasties 3 through 6 from about 2675 through 2170 B.C., reflect the transition to a more classic expression through royal pyramid tombs and funerary temples with statuary and reliefs, as well as major tombs of powerful private individuals. Among the Old Kingdom material on view is a limestone group statue depicting a man, his wife, and their small son. It was the first major work of Egyptian art ever exhibited in America. Other notable objects in this section include three elaborately painted wooden tomb statues depicting a man at various stages of his life, and an exquisite alabaster statue of King Pepy II, who became king while a small child, seated on the lap of his mother Queen Ankhnes-meryre II.

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Among the Middle Kingdom material, covering the first half of Dynasty 11, Dynasty 12, and part of Dynasty 13 (from about 2008 B.C. to 1630 B.C.), will be sections devoted to statues, stelae, and funerary items. Included will be the colossal head of a queen or princess, considered by experts to be one of the finest such surviving sculptures from this major epoch of Egyptian history. It was found at the emperor Hadrian's Roman villa and is believed to have been part of his collection of ancient Egyptian art. This section also features a quartzite statue thought to have been given to Josephine by Napoleon as a souvenir of his unsuccessful military campaign in Egypt. Among the other objects here are a remarkably preserved black granite statue of Senwosret III, one of the most powerful kings of the Twelfth Dynasty; delightful small faience objects, including a bristling hedgehog and a charming sleeping dog; and a number of objects left by pious pilgrims to Abydos, cult center of the god Osiris.

The Second Intermediate Period installation continues the chronology from the second half of Dynasty 13 through Dynasty 17, covering circa 1630–1539 B.C. Here will be displayed material from the reigns of the six Asian Hyksos kings including a stylized terracotta female fertility figure, a copper statue of a royal princess nursing a child, and a fragment of a relief from an island near Aswan that may have been from a massive altar.

The section devoted to the early New Kingdom, dating from around 1539 to 1353 B.C. will contain several masterpieces from the Museum's preeminent holdings. Considered by scholars to be the most important period in Egyptian history, it began with the reign of the King Ahmose, who succeeded in defeating the Hyksos and reuniting Egypt. On view will be an extraordinary gilded ebony statue of Amunhotep III, whose reign was distinguished by the opulence and grandeur of the objects and buildings that it produced; a jar painted with a scene of cattle and women; and a kneeling statue of the official Senenmut, chief advisor to the legendary female pharaoh Hatshepsut.

*Egypt Reborn* will include extensive wall labels, as well as computer terminals that will provide in-depth information about select objects in the presentation. One gallery will be devoted to rotating exhibitions, the first of which will be an exhibition of important material from the Museum's Wilbour Library of Egyptology including books created for collectors as well as those published for a mass audience. The information, lithographs, engravings, and photographs in these books created the excitement about Egypt that led to excavations by both professionals and amateurs in the 19th century. There will also be a section here devoted to Charles Edwin Wilbour, from whom the BMA received much of the material in its collection. This presentation has been organized by Chief Librarian Deirdre Lawrence, with Wilbour librarians Jim Vishkochil and Mary Gow, along with Egyptologist Edward Bleiberg.

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The galleries containing the ancient Egyptian material span the entire length of the front façade of the building, the equivalent of two average city blocks. The principal entrance will be through the newly installed Hagop Kevorkian Gallery of Ancient Middle Eastern Art, containing the Museum's collection of twelve of the ancient Assyrian reliefs (circa 883–859 B.C.) from the Northwest Palace of King Ashur-nasir-pal II in Nimrud (modern Iraq). This gallery has been equipped with motorized lifts that make them completely wheelchair accessible for the first time in the history of the building.

The new presentation will be dramatically different in appearance than the 1993 installation. The thematic gallery will feature a large-scale rendering of an ancient Egyptian map of the heavens mounted on the ceiling, based on a creation by an artist in Napoleon's retinue and reproduced in a volume in the Wilbour Library. Other features of the new installation will be the introduction of color, including red mica, metallic gold, and deep blue, a colonnade suggesting heaven and earth, and dramatic lighting. Specially designed architectural casework will maintain a constant 50% humidity.

### **About the Collection**

The Brooklyn Museum of Art began collecting ancient Egyptian material in the beginning of the twentieth century. Two early sources of objects were a Brooklyn Museum archaeological expedition from 1906 to 1908 that came about through a relationship with Britain's Egypt Exploration Fund, and acquisitions from the holdings of private collector Armand de Potter. In 1916, 1935, and 1947, the collection of pioneer American Egyptologist Charles Edwin Wilbour (1833–1896) was given in stages to the BMA. The gifts of Wilbour's heirs included the contents of his professional library and, in 1931, an endowment in his memory that has funded the establishment of both the Wilbour Library of Egyptology and a curatorial department for ancient Egyptian Art. In 1948 the Museum purchased the Egyptian collection of The New-York Historical Society, which included more than 2,000 objects. Gifts and purchases continue to add significant objects to the collection.

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### **Media Contact: (718) 638-5000**

Sally Williams, Public Information Officer, 718-501-6330

James Gordon, Media Relations Manager, 718-501-6334

Reggie Cameron, Sr. Public Information Associate, 718-501-6354

Adam Husted, Public Information Associate, 718-501-6331