

Press Release | New Exhibition

26 November 2021

Visions of Ancient Egypt Supported by Viking



Nefertiti (Black Power), Awol Erizku, 2018 © The Artist, Courtesy Ben Brown Fine Arts

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3 September 2022 – 1 January 2023

High-resolution images available for download: <https://bit.ly/3wuG0uk>

The Sainsbury Centre presents a major new exhibition exploring the enduring appeal of Egypt in art and design from the ancient past to the present day. Supported by Viking, the leading small ship river, ocean and expedition cruise line, the exhibition features over 150 works drawn from collections in the UK and internationally and will examine how ancient Egypt has shaped our cultural imagination.

From antiquity, when the Great Pyramid was revered as a wonder of the ancient world, to the Cleopatra of Shakespeare's stage, and from the medieval Arab scholars who sought hieroglyphs' mystical wisdom, to the Biblical stories still told today, this ground-breaking exhibition explores this ongoing engagement with ancient Egypt and charts its many forms across centuries of art and design. Unpicking the constructed fantasies of this ancient culture, the exhibition examines how the iconic motifs and visual styles of Egypt have been re-imagined and re-invented over time – revealing a history closely entwined with conquest and colonial politics.

The exhibition opens with a spotlight on Cleopatra, to explore how her image and identity have been continually reinterpreted throughout history – from the seductive temptress, to the wise scholar of medieval Arabic tradition, to the glamorous Hollywood icon embodied by Liz Taylor. These central key visions will reveal Western myths of Cleopatra. The exhibition will then outline Roman engagements with ancient Egypt, showing how Egyptian motifs later became key sources for artists such as Piranesi and Wedgwood, who were among the first to look to ancient Egypt for inspiration.

The exhibition then highlights the key moment in the nineteenth century when Franco-British imperial rivalry led to a fashion for all things Egyptian. Growing colonial interests and the development of travel networks brought Egypt closer to Europe than ever before, not only for artists but also tourists. An image of ancient Egypt was constructed in the Western imagination, which emphasised monumental scale and exoticism, and which translated across media, from watercolours to lithography and photography. Growing archaeological excavations in Egypt furnished museums in Europe with objects, which in turn inspired Orientalist painters.

Turning to the early twentieth century, the exhibition will explore how the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb unleashed a 'Tutmania' in the West that played out in the Art Deco style and in fashion and film while, in Egypt, the same discovery fed into a nationalist style of modern art that bolstered growing calls for independence. The section will also shine a light on Robert and Lisa Sainsbury's collection of Egyptian antiquities and its links to Modernism, especially through artists such as Alberto Giacometti and Francis Bacon. In the final section, the exhibition brings international contemporary artists who engage critically with ancient Egyptian heritage together for the first time to offer a powerful critique of constructed visions of ancient Egypt within the West and to explore how ideas of ancient Egypt continue to remain relevant today.

Opening in September 2022, the exhibition coincides with the anniversaries of two key events: the bicentenary of Jean-François Champollion's decipherment of hieroglyphs and the centenary of Howard Carter's discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb. The exhibition invites audiences to understand, to debate and to discuss this complex history of ancient Egypt and to ask who these visions serve - both then and now.

The exhibition will include painting, sculpture, writing, fashion and architecture, alongside photography, film and installation art. It will feature work from artists as wide ranging as Joshua Reynolds, Hector Horeau, Lawrence Alma-Tadema, David Hockney and Chris Ofili alongside works by modern and contemporary Egyptian artists, rarely exhibited in Britain.

Working in partnership with the Sainsbury Centre for the first time, Viking, which is known for its destination focus and culturally enriching experiences, is the first and only Western company to build, own and operate ships on the Nile. Accommodating 82 guests in 41 staterooms, Viking Osiris, a brand new ship built specifically for the Nile River, will launch in 2022. Egypt is a popular destination for Viking guests with most of the sailings on its 'Pharaohs & Pyramids' itinerary being fully booked more than a year in advance. On the 12 day cruisetour guests follow in the wake of pharaohs along the banks of the Nile between Luxor and Aswan as Viking's expert Egyptologists provide insights into one of history's

greatest civilisations. The itinerary includes the fascinating city of Cairo where guests can visit iconic sites such as the Great Pyramids of Giza, the necropolis of Sakkara and the Mosque of Muhammad Ali.

Viking also offers pre-cruise extensions which are designed to enhance guests' knowledge of Egyptology prior to arriving in Cairo. These five-day extensions to Viking's Pharaohs & Pyramids itinerary provide guests with Privileged Access to archives and exhibits in London and Oxford that are not normally accessible to the public.

Speaking about the new partnership between the Sainsbury Centre and Viking, Wendy Atkin-Smith, Managing Director at Viking UK, said: "With our destination focus and our commitment to providing culturally enriching experiences, Viking shares the Sainsbury Centre's passion for connecting different cultures and opening up the world even when we're close to home. Egypt is a fascinating destination which has inspired travellers for hundreds of years - including guests on our popular Pharaohs & Pyramids cruisetour - so we're proud to support this important exhibition which promises to offer a fresh perspective on this ancient civilisation."

Exhibition link: sainsburycentre.ac.uk/whats-on/visions-of-ancient-egypt/

For more information about Viking's Pharaohs & Pyramids itinerary go to www.viking.com or call 0800 319 66 60.

– ENDS –

Notes to Editors

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Exhibition Information

Visions of Ancient Egypt
3 September 2022 – 1 January 2023
Tickets £13/£12 concessions, on sale in 2022
Visit sainsburycentre.ac.uk or call 01603 593199 (Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm)
Follow @sainsburycentre on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram #VisionsOfAncientEgypt

About the Sainsbury Centre

The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts is one of the most important public university art galleries in Britain. It was founded in 1973 at the University of East Anglia (UEA) with the support of one of the nation's great philanthropic families, Sir Robert and Lady Sainsbury, who donated their extraordinary art collection which includes works dating from prehistory to the late 20th century from across the globe. A radical new building by Norman Foster was designed to house the collection and was his first public work.

The Sainsbury Centre holds one of the most impressive art collections outside of the national institutions. It includes a significant number of works by modern masters of European art such as Pablo Picasso, Edgar Degas, Elisabeth Frink, Alberto Giacometti, Henry Moore, Sonia Delaunay, Tess Jaray, Francis Bacon, Cornelia Parker, Jean Arp, Mary Martin, Rachel Kneebone and Amedeo Modigliani. There are major holdings from Oceania, Africa, the Americas, Asia, the ancient Mediterranean cultures of Egypt, Greece and Rome, as well as Medieval Europe. Alongside these permanent collections, it hosts a range of exhibitions in the largest suite of temporary exhibitions galleries in Eastern England.

sainsburycentre.ac.uk

About Viking

Founded in 1997, Viking offers culturally enriching, destination-focused river, ocean and expedition cruises for travellers curious about the world, its rich culture and varied history. Each journey includes a shore excursion in every port, and an exclusive Viking Culture Curriculum programme that provides deep immersion in the destination through performances of music and art, cooking demonstrations, informative port talks and carefully selected guest lecturers.

Viking takes its guests on curated, elegant voyages to some of the most iconic rivers in Europe, Africa and the Far East, allowing a unique window on inspiring destinations and rewarding experiences. Viking revolutionised river cruising with the introduction of its state-of-the-art Viking Longships which, since their introduction in 2012, now make up 80 percent of its river fleet.

In 2015 Viking debuted its maiden season of ocean cruising and in April 2021 Viking took delivery of its newest ocean ship, Viking Venus, making it the largest small ship ocean cruise line. The sophisticated state-of-the-art Viking ocean ships can accommodate 930 guests on itineraries all across the world. Viking will launch two new ocean ships in 2022 – Viking Mars and Viking Neptune.

Viking will soon expand its destination-focused travel experiences with the launch of new expedition voyages. Viking Expeditions will begin sailing in January 2022 with its first vessel, Viking Octantis, embarking on voyages to Antarctica and North America's Great Lakes. A second expedition vessel, Viking Polaris, will debut in August 2022, sailing to Antarctica and the Arctic.

Viking was recently voted both the Best Ocean Cruise Line and Best River Cruise Line by Condé Nast Traveller in the publication's 2021 Readers' Choice Awards - the only cruise line with the top scores in two categories in the same year.

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