

Press Release | New Exhibition

16 May 2022

**Visions of Ancient Egypt supported by Viking**



LEFT: Awol Erizku, *Nefertiti (Black Power)*, 2018 © The Artist, Courtesy Ben Brown Fine Arts  
RIGHT: David Hockney, *Egyptian Head Disappearing Into Descending Clouds*, 1961 © York Museums Trust (York Art Gallery)

**Visions of Ancient Egypt supported by Viking:** 3 September 2022 – 1 January 2023

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

**High-resolution renderings of Viking's new Nile ship launching in 2022, Viking Osiris:**  
<https://bit.ly/3ytXNDe>

This autumn the Sainsbury Centre will present a major new exhibition exploring the enduring appeal of ancient Egypt in art, design and the cultural imagination. 'Visions of Ancient Egypt supported by Viking' will run 3 September 2022 – 1 January 2023 and feature nearly 200 works drawn from collections in the UK and internationally. Painting, sculpture, photography and design will be shown alongside rare books, film, fashion and jewellery, with objects spanning two millennia from antiquity to the present day. The exhibition will feature work from artists as wide-ranging as Joshua Reynolds, Hector Horeau, Edwin Long, Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Christopher Dresser, Lee Miller, Alberto Giacometti, Francis Bacon, David Hockney, Andreas Gursky and Chris Ofili, as well as works by modern and contemporary Egyptian artists rarely exhibited in Britain including Chant Avedissian, Sara Sallam and Maha Maamoun.

Coinciding with two important anniversaries – the bicentenary of Jean-François Champollion’s decipherment of hieroglyphs and the centenary of Howard Carter’s discovery of Tutankhamun’s tomb – this ground-breaking exhibition will be the first to explore Western

fascination with ancient Egypt side-by-side with Egypt’s own engagement with its ancient past, inviting audiences to debate and discuss who these visions serve both then and now. Exploring constructed fantasies of ancient Egypt that have been re-imagined and re-invented across centuries of art and design, ‘Visions of Ancient Egypt supported by Viking’ will reveal a visual history closely entwined with conquest and colonialism.

Opening with a spotlight on Cleopatra, the exhibition will explore the ways in which her identity has been reinterpreted throughout history – from the wise scholar of medieval Arabic tradition to the glamorous Hollywood icon embodied by Elizabeth Taylor. A 1759 socialite’s portrait as Cleopatra by Joshua Reynolds will be featured alongside *Cleopatra* by Chris Ofili, depicting her as a Black queen.

The exhibition will show how Egypt became embedded in the Western artistic imagination in the 18th century, despite most artists and designers not having visited Egypt themselves. Artists such as Josiah Wedgwood and Giovanni Battista Piranesi relied on a vision of ancient Egypt mediated through ancient Rome and the classical lens. Highlight objects will include a Roman Osiris-Canopus jar, works by Wedgwood and illustrated Western travelogues. These travelogues will be contrasted with medieval Arabic manuscripts, responding to the same sites and monuments, in order to distinguish the European ‘rediscovery’ of ancient Egypt from Egypt’s own unbroken engagement with its ancient past.

In the 19th century, in the wake of Napoleon Bonaparte’s campaigns in Egypt, an image of ancient Egypt cemented in the Western imagination that emphasised its exoticism and monumental scale. The exhibition will trace the transmission of this image through works in many media including oil painting, watercolours, lithography and photography, as well as large numbers of objects in museums garnered from growing archaeological excavations. The exhibition will also highlight how world fairs contributed to the spread of ancient Egyptian imagery, notably the Great Exhibition in 1851.

Whilst ancient Egyptian motifs were used as propaganda for the French and British imperial regimes, at the same time the Egyptian state was increasingly taking ownership of this history and imagery. On public display for the first time will be a striking garniture de cheminée (mantlepiece ornament) made by French goldsmith Emile Froment-Meurice that was commissioned in pharaonic style by Isma’il Pasha, Khedive of Egypt from 1863-1879, as a gift for the P&O shipping company.

The discovery of Tutankhamun’s tomb in 1922 unleashed ‘Tutmania’ around the world and the exhibition will examine the ways in which this much photographed archaeological excavation shaped the Art Deco style, influencing fashion, architecture and design. Jewellery by Van Cleef and Arpels, 1920s and ’30s eveningwear and a book cover design for Agatha Christie’s *Death on the Nile* will show how a fascination for Egypt seeped into every part of cultural life in the West. In Egypt the same discovery fed into the development of a nationalist style of modern art that came at a time of increasing demand for independence.

In the final section, the exhibition will bring together for the first time international contemporary artists who offer a powerful critique of constructed visions of ancient Egypt. Famous images such as the bust of Nefertiti continue to be re-interpreted and re-imagined to highlight contemporary issues of race and identity, as with Awol Erizku’s (b. 1988) *Nefertiti (Black Power)*. Amongst other works, a multidisciplinary work by Sara Sallam (b. 1991), *The Fourth Pyramid Belongs To Her*, explores contemporary Egyptians’ relationship with their

pharaonic ancestors, while Maha Maamoun's (b. 1972) *Domestic Tourism II* reinscribes the pyramids in Egypt's own social and political context.

The exhibition is supported by Viking, the leading small ship river, ocean and expedition travel company. Viking, which is celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2022, 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. Viking Osiris will sail on Viking's popular 12-day 'Pharaohs & Pyramids' cruisetour.

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: [www.sainsburycentre.ac.uk/whats-on/visions-of-ancient-egypt/](http://www.sainsburycentre.ac.uk/whats-on/visions-of-ancient-egypt/)

For more information about Viking's Pharaohs & Pyramids itinerary go to [www.viking.com](http://www.viking.com) or call 0800 319 66 60.

– ENDS –

## Notes to Editors

## Press Enquiries

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## Exhibition Information

Visions of Ancient Egypt

3 September 2022 – 1 January 2023

Tickets £14/£12 concessions

Visit [sainsburycentre.ac.uk](http://sainsburycentre.ac.uk) or call 01603 593199 (Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm)

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## 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](http://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 nearly 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.

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.

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