

# Press Release: The British Museum announces most successful year ever Annual Review Launch 2016

*Embargoed until 08.30 Friday 1 July*

This morning (1 July 2016) the British Museum launches its Annual Review 2016. 2015/16 was the Museum's most successful year ever with nearly 6.9 million visitors to Bloomsbury (6,853,540) and a digital audience in excess of 40 million. An astonishing 7.7million people in the UK saw British Museum objects outside London thanks to the Museum's National Programmes partnership scheme. The Museum was the leading *visitor attraction in the UK for the ninth year* running and the second most visited museum in the world. Lonely Planet named the Museum as one of the world's must-see destinations. Hartwig Fischer joined the Museum as Director in April 2016 following the retirement of Neil MacGregor.

**Sir Richard Lambert**, Chair of the British Museum Trustees, said, 'This year the British Museum has proved once again it is a museum for London, the UK and the world with a diverse programme onsite, offsite and online. As always, the Trustees would like to thank all supporters of and benefactors to the Museum. Every donation makes a difference, from the visitor who makes a contribution in the donation box to a philanthropic donor, all supporters enable the Museum to achieve its ambition to entertain and educate on the widest possible scale.'

**Hartwig Fischer**, Director of the British Museum, said, 'It has been another hugely successful year for the British Museum, a testimony to the extraordinary efforts of Neil and his team. I took up the post of Director in April 2016. With the continuing generosity and commitment of the Museum's many supporters and staff, my ambition is to carry the British Museum forward— to plan

imaginatively for all that the Museum can be in the future, and to build on all that is excellent in its past.'

## Highlights of 2015/16

### Bloomsbury

2015/16 saw great successes in the temporary exhibition programme with nearly 400,000 exhibition visitors. A display featuring a mummified crocodile from ancient Egypt was the most popular free exhibition last year with 183,287 visitors and was supported by The Asahi Shimbun. Sicily: culture and conquest, sponsored by Julius Baer, and the BP exhibition Sunken cities: Egypt's lost worlds opened in April and May respectively, and have proven very popular with visitors.

**259,000 school pupils** visited the Museum in 2015/16. Volunteer tours and handling desks attracted **290,000 visitors** last year. The Museum celebrated ten years of its involvement in the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Collaborative Doctoral Research Award Scheme. The programme gives the British Museum accreditation to supervise PhD students in conjunction with a number of UK universities. Its popularity has significantly widened the collection's use as an intellectual resource. The Museum remains one of the largest supporters of the scheme and has trained more than **55** young researchers since its inception.

**4,500 objects** went on display digitally via the Google Cultural Institute as the Museum unveiled a new partnership to widen access to the collection. Visitors can now take a virtual tour through the Museum's galleries using Google Street View. A virtual reality weekend sponsored

by Samsung was experienced by over 1,200 visitors. Visitors had a chance to use Samsung Gear VR headsets to explore a Bronze Age roundhouse, augmenting their experience with virtual objects from the collection. The Museum's social media channels continued to grow, with over a million followers on Facebook and over 450,000 on Instagram. An updated audio guide, sponsored by Korean Air, was launched in 2015 allowing visitors to explore the Museum in their own way, and in ten languages.

### UK

The British Museum is a national presence and this year celebrates 15 years of National Programmes activity working with partners across the UK. Over **3,000 objects were loaned to nearly 170 venues** in the UK in 2015/16. This includes single-object tours, touring exhibitions, partnership galleries, short-term loans and long-term loans, supported by the Dorset Foundation. From Aberdeen to York, the Museum has lent everything from African textiles to Iron Age mirrors to Roman coins, to venues large and small. Citizen archaeology is a growing phenomenon with **82,000 finds** recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme last year – including finds by detecting superfan Mackenzie Crook.

### International

The British Museum lends more objects more widely than any other museum in the world. In 2015/16 the Museum loaned over **2,000** objects to more than 100 institutions outside the UK, including one of three surviving bronzes of the Roman emperor Hadrian to Jerusalem and an ivory model depicting a ysakh, the central ceremony of the Sakha people (the object was sent to the National Arts Museum of the Sakha Republic (in Russia) for display). A touring version of *A history of the world in 100 objects* has been seen by 850,000 people worldwide in Australia and Japan (in 2017 it travels to China). The Museum continued to offer training to colleagues around the world. The **International Training Programme** welcomed 24 participants from 13 countries in 2015, and was underpinned by a significant grant from the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust. Over the course of a decade the programme has trained more than 200

participants and has generated a unique curatorial network across geographical regions and disciplines. The first part of the Museum's **Emergency Heritage Management Programme** (made possible with a grant of £3 million from the Department for Culture, Media & Sport) is just concluding. The programme focuses on Iraq and is designed to establish a dedicated corps of Iraqi heritage professionals, fully skilled to deal with the aftermath of the destruction of archaeological sites. An initial contingent of six Iraqi heritage professionals are in London for the first part of the training which concludes in early July.

### **The future**

#### Bloomsbury

##### *Exhibitions:*

This autumn the British Museum will host the first major UK exhibition on South African art that explores a 3 million year long history through archaeological, historic and contemporary artworks, which look at the long and rich artistic heritage of the country. The exhibition will use art to tell the story of the region's deep history, the colonial period, apartheid, the birth of the 'rainbow nation' and South Africa today. Objects from the British Museum's own collection will be displayed alongside new contemporary acquisitions, as well as significant loans, including many objects coming to the UK for the very first time.

**South Africa: 3 million years of art** runs from 27 October 2016 to 26 February 2017. Sponsored by Betsy and Jack Ryan. Logistics partner IAG Cargo.

2017 will see major exhibitions on American printmaking, Japanese art and Russian archaeology.

##### *Galleries:*

In 2017/18, the Museum will open two major new galleries devoted to China and South Asia, and to the Islamic world. The Joseph E Hotung Gallery of China and South Asia will feature a new narrative bringing the story of this region up to the present day. The gallery will allow the Museum to display a wider range of objects from its collection, including paintings and textiles, alongside sculpture, ceramics, lacquer, jade and metal ware.

Understanding Asia is crucial for all our futures and this gallery will help visitors to better understand the long and significant history of these regions. Generous funding for the refurbished gallery comes from the Sir Joseph Hotung Charitable Settlement.

The Albukhary Foundation is providing significant support for major new galleries to redisplay the collections from the Islamic world at the British Museum. The Albukhary Foundation Galleries of the Islamic world will open to the public in October 2018 at the heart of the British Museum. They will reveal the British Museum's outstanding collections in engaging new ways, underscoring the global connections of this vast region of the world. The collections encompass the art and material culture of the Islamic world from Africa to China, including archaeology, decorative arts, the arts of the book, Middle Eastern and Central Asian ethnography and textiles, and modern and contemporary Middle Eastern art. The Albukhary Foundation Galleries of the Islamic world will also reflect the connections between the cultures of Islam and the ancient world on the one hand, and the cultures of the Mediterranean world and Europe on the other.

#### UK

The Museum will continue its commitment to developing partnerships within the UK. 2016/17 has already seen significant loans such as an exhibition of Picasso linocuts developed in partnership with the Lady Lever Gallery in Liverpool, and a long-term loan of six Lewis Chessmen to Lews Castle in Stornoway. The year ahead will see a loan of contemporary and Old Master drawings to Poole, Hull and Belfast

through the new touring exhibition *Lines of thought: drawing from Michelangelo to now*. The Museum will also work collaboratively with the Manchester Museum on their new South Asia gallery (opening in 2020), consulting on interpretation and lending objects. A £5 million grant from DCMS will support the plans. A new partnership gallery, the British Museum gallery of the medieval period, will form a part of the multimillion pound plan to transform Norwich Castle's iconic Keep. The project is supported by funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Both galleries are indicative of the Museum's desire to share the collection as widely as possible across the existing network of UK museums.

#### International

The British Museum continues to share its collection and expertise with audiences across the globe through touring exhibitions. 2016 will mark the beginning of a collaboration with the La Caixa Foundation in Spain, which will see four exhibitions displayed at 16 venues over the next four years, including *Medieval Europe: power and legacy* and *Ancient Greeks: athletes, warriors and heroes*. *A history of the world in 100 objects* continues its world tour and will open at the National Museum of Australia, Canberra in September 2016. Our first international partner to host *Egyptian mummies: exploring ancient lives* (a touring version of the exhibition displayed in Bloomsbury) will be the Museum of Applied Arts and Science in Sydney. The Museum's prints and drawings exhibitions are also in more demand than ever, with a new show, *Italian Renaissance drawings*, opening at Suzhou Museum in Jiangsu Province in China, and *Curious beasts* enjoying its final display at the South Australian Museum in Adelaide.

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#### **Notes to Editors**

Exhibition visitor figures – *Defining beauty: the body in ancient Greek art* (111,130 visitors, sponsored by Julius Baer), the BP exhibition *Indigenous Australia: enduring civilisation* (59,287), *Celts: art and identity* (160,371) and *Egypt: faith after the pharaohs* (66,004, generously supported by the Blavatnik Family Foundation).

Major acquisitions in 2015/16 include contemporary Middle Eastern art, examples of the UK's first polymer banknotes, the Presidential robe and scarf of former leader of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai, Mario Testino

photography of Peruvian dancers, and the Lampedusa cross.

#### **For further information or images, please contact**

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