

The Asahi Shimbun Displays
**Greek Revival:
simplicity and
splendour**

Press Images: <https://bit.ly/3IZeqL7>

10 March - 8 May 2022 Room 3,

Free

Supported by the Asahi Shimbun

A new, free display celebrating the ancient Greek architectural influence on the British Museum building is now open

The Asahi Shimbun Displays *Greek Revival: simplicity and splendour* (10 March - 8 May 2022) centres on a remarkable 200-year-old drawing of the west side of the Parthenon in Athens, by the British architect Robert Smirke. Smirke drew the Parthenon when he was just 23 years old and when the building was still surrounded by medieval and later structures. His watercolour shows the building's white marble glowing and Smirke was enraptured by the simple grandeur of the architecture. It shows the profound emotional impact that the Acropolis monuments had upon the architect when he visited Athens at the very start of the 19th century.

Smirke would go on to design the British Museum, one of the largest and most famous Greek Revival buildings in the world. When designing the Museum's new home in Bloomsbury, Smirke used architectural forms and details from many ancient buildings of different styles to create a highly modern structure. He also used all of the three main Greek orders of architecture—the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian.

The Smirke watercolour is shown in the display alongside two other watercolours from the British Museum collection, and a number of contextual images. Visitors will discover more about the rise of Greek Revival architecture in London from the 1750s, and how Robert Smirke employed it for the new British Museum building in the 1820s.

Launched alongside this display is an accompanying online visitor trail that features 11 stops that explore the British Museum's Greek Revival style. Highlights include the south façade of the Museum which is dominated by a massive colonnade and portico of 44 Ionic columns, and the opulent Enlightenment Gallery with its elaborate plaster ceiling decorated with Greek motifs. Visitors can access the trail for free via britishmuseum.org/visit/object-trails/greek-revival-architecture-simplicity-and-splendour .

Thomas Kiely, A.G Leventis Curator at the British Museum, said: *"The Parthenon inspired the British Museum's entrance hall and what is now the Egyptian sculpture gallery, while the building's colonnade and decorative mouldings derive from Ionic-*

style temples in Athens and Turkey. The genesis of these beautiful Greek influences was this stunning watercolour by Robert Smirke and the deep impact drawing the Acropolis had on him. We're delighted to take this rare opportunity to celebrate the British Museum building and the ways ancient Greece influenced it."

The original idea for this display was developed by Dr Ian Jenkins OBE (1953-2020), curator of Ancient Greek sculpture at the British Museum from 1978 to 2020, and it is presented in his memory.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

The Asahi Shimbun Displays *Greek Revival: simplicity and splendour* runs from 10 March to 8 May 2022 in Room 3 at the British Museum.

Open Saturday – Thursday 10.00–17.00, Friday 10.00–20.30.

Last entry 80 mins before closing.

britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/greek-revival-simplicity-and-splendour

The Asahi Shimbun Displays are a series of regularly changing displays which look at objects in new or different ways. Sometimes the display highlights a well-known item, sometimes it surprises the audience with extraordinary items from times and cultures that may not be very familiar. This is also an opportunity for the Museum to learn how it can improve its larger exhibitions and permanent gallery displays. These displays have been made possible by the generous sponsorship of The Asahi Shimbun Company, who are long-standing supporters of the British Museum. With a circulation of about 6 million for the morning edition alone, *The Asahi Shimbun* is the most prestigious newspaper in Japan. The company also publishes magazines and books, and provides a substantial information service on the Internet. The Asahi Shimbun Company has a century long tradition of staging exhibitions in Japan of art, culture and history from around the world.



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High resolution images and caption sheet available <https://bit.ly/3lZeqL7>