

**Hartwig Fischer to step down  
as Director of the British  
Museum in 2024 with a smooth  
transition over the next year**

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After eight successful years at the helm of Britain's most important cultural institution, Hartwig Fischer will leave his post in 2024. An international search for the next Director of the British Museum will begin in the Autumn. Fischer will support the transition over the coming months.

The British Museum cares for the world's most significant collection of artefacts spanning two million years of human history in an iconic building in the heart of London. With 6 million visitors in a normal year, it is one of the country's largest tourist attractions and the driving force behind an extraordinary network of national collaborations and global partnerships, sharing and circulating knowledge and objects worldwide.

Fischer arrived in April 2016 with the task to develop a comprehensive Masterplan for the badly needed renovation of the historic building and for the redisplay of the world-renowned collection. Work on the Masterplan is now nearing completion, it will be published this Autumn and an international architectural competition will follow.

Fischer has led the first phases of this multigenerational project, the construction of the British Museum's vast new research and storage facility – the British Museum Archaeological Research Collection, which will open next year. He has also set the Museum on course for a comprehensive energy transition towards greener, more sustainable energy sources over the coming years.

The Director has led on acclaimed refurbishments of galleries at the Bloomsbury site including the renewal of the Sir Joseph Hotung Gallery of China and South Asia, the Mitsubishi Corporation Japanese Galleries, and the Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic World.

Under his leadership, the British Museum has organised ground-breaking grand exhibitions including Ashurbanipal, Manga, Troy, Arctic, Peru, Hieroglyphs, Feminine power, to name a few, and exhibitions and public events on the history of Empire, colonialism, cultural heritage, reclamation and migration.

During his tenure the British Museum has significantly expanded its global partnerships with major collaborative research projects in Africa, China, India, South America, Australia, and cultural heritage preservation projects in Iraq and Nigeria.

External support for the British Museum's many activities has multiplied since 2016, with research grants, donations and sponsorship enabling the Museum to collaborate on projects across the UK and worldwide in partnership with hundreds of institutions, and to share the collection at an unprecedented level.

Fischer saw the institution through the Covid pandemic, making sure the 900 dedicated colleagues working for the Museum came out of the crisis as one team, despite the individual hardship. During lockdown the Museum massively stepped up its online offer to remain accessible to millions of people around the globe, providing inspiration, solace and encouragement, and it has kept expanding work on digital since, to become one of the leaders in the field.

Hartwig Fischer said:

"In 2016, I was called to the British Museum to prepare the essential renovation of a building in need of rejuvenation, a global icon of museum architecture whose complex architectural substance calls for urgent, large-scale intervention. The renovation work itself will take several decades, but the mission I was given by the Trustees has been accomplished: the foundations of the BM Masterplan are now laid. It will serve as the basis for all subsequent work and forms the foundation to innovative concepts for the future display.

"I have had the privilege of leading a team of outstanding professionals and collaborating with inspiring partners, communities and institutions from across the UK and the world. I am very proud of what we have achieved. It is now time to pass on leadership to continue creating a truly global museum whilst remaining at the heart of Britain's cultural life.

"Over the next year, I will push ahead with our plans and secure a successful transition. Looking ahead, I am excited about the next phase of my career, moving beyond the institutional framework of a single museum to engage in

the rescue and preservation of cultural heritage in times of climate crisis, conflict, war, and violence.”

George Osborne, Chair of the British Museum, said:

“On behalf of the Trustees and the staff of the British Museum, I want to thank Hartwig for his incredible service. Hartwig can look back on his eight years as Director with pride in his great achievements.

“He has led the British Museum through a pivotal period, developing a comprehensive Masterplan for a bright, long-term future. He has been an intellectual tour de force, helping the British Museum present its collection to new audiences in new ways in brilliant exhibitions like *Stonehenge* and *China’s hidden century*.

“He has led the dedicated staff of the Museum through difficult periods, such as the Covid lockdowns and today’s inflation pressures, and overseen major steps forward, such as the construction of the new research and storage facility in Reading. He has reached out with projects, from Benin City to Mumbai, that better connect the Museum to the rest of the world and extended our reach in the UK with new projects from Norwich to Manchester.

“Above all, he has been a person of integrity, inquiry and industry who has given everything to the British Museum over these years. The Trustees respect his decision to move on to new ventures next year. The publication of our Masterplan this autumn, and the architectural competition and construction work that follows will be a great challenge.

“We will start the search after the summer for that new Director. Whoever follows will have the great advantage of building on all that Hartwig has done to put us in such a strong position for the future.”

Culture Secretary Lucy Frazer said:

“I thank Hartwig for his sterling leadership of the British Museum over the last eight years.

“From leading the organisation through the pandemic and welcoming back millions of visitors a year, to opening up a world-class storage and research facility and developing partnerships around the world, Hartwig leaves a valuable legacy.

"The British Museum will continue to thrive and I look forward to seeing what the next chapter in this great institution's history holds."

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**Notes to editors:**

The British Museum

Founded in 1753, the British Museum was the first national public museum in the world. From the outset it was a museum of the world, for the world, and this idea still lies at the heart of the Museum's mission today. The collection tells the stories of cultures across the world, from the dawn of human history, over two million years ago, to the present. Objects range from the earliest tools made by humans and remarkable finds from the ancient world to more recent acquisitions from Africa, Oceania and the Americas, the Middle East, Asia and Europe, as well as the national collections of prints and drawings, and coins and medals. In addition to work in London, the Museum takes part in an extensive programme of loans and tours, both across the UK and throughout the world. Research with international impact continues to underpin the British Museum's exhibitions and wider work.



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**Further information**

Contact the Communications team: [communications@britishmuseum.org](mailto:communications@britishmuseum.org)

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