LONDON, 6 November: The first permanent display at the British Museum of Peruvian and Andean culture has opened in the Wellcome Trust Gallery at an event attended by Peru’s Minister of Foreign Trade and Tourism.

Part of the Living and Dying exhibition, the new display focuses on the stories of the people of Peru and the Andean world, how they survived and thrived across thousands of years by establishing a special relationship with the sea and land. The objects on display shine a light on how these societies understood their environment as an animate being, which could be threatening but also looked to for survival, healing, subsistence, and protection.

Split into two sections the display explores the richness and value of marine life, looking at the threats of climate change and illegal fishing alongside the mythical ocean and the symbolic meaning of the spiny oyster. Elsewhere the tradition of sailing in totora reed boats is demonstrated through digital media fully encompassing the special relationship held by the groups who lived and continue to live in the region with the sea and islands.

The second section of the display focuses on the land and its resources, which were seen as a natural force to provide life. Here, the objects demonstrate fertility ceremonies and celebrations to honour the Pachamama (Mother Earth). Elsewhere, the showcase looks at examples of coca chewing and amulets, and the key value of natural fibres coming from plants and animals used for textile weaving. The display includes a full range of material culture, ranging from pottery and textiles to metalwork and conch shells.

The new case is the first permanent space devoted to stories about past and present cultures from the coast and highlands of South America. It will allow the British Museum to share and amplify the work of scholars, artists and members of source communities who have been working with the collection.

Juan Carlos Mathews, Peru’s Minister of Foreign Trade and Tourism, said: “The British Museum receives nearly seven million visitors annually so we are delighted that as from today, every single one of them will now be able to learn more about our pre-Columbian cultures such as the Moche, Nasca, Lambayeque, Chimú, Chincha and Inca. This experience is the perfect stepping stone for every traveller to our beautiful country!”

Ricardo Romero, Director, PromPeru London, said: “This is not the first time that the British Museum has exhibited the richness of Peruvian cultures. In 2021, the first temporary exhibition: “Peru: A Journey in Time,” was opened. Featuring 80 pieces from the British Museum’s own collection, and an additional 43 objects borrowed from across seven Peruvian museums, this exhibition attracted over 73,000 visitors in just four months.
“On the back of this success, the British Museum and PROMPERÚ have continued to work closely together to shed light on the beauty and history of Andean cultures. And now, for the first time in its 270-year history, Peru will have its own permanent space for the display of Peruvian cultural artefacts in one of the most iconic museums in the world.”

Cecilia Pardo Grau, Curator, said: “The Peru and the Andes permanent display, part of the Living and Dying Gallery at the British Museum, brings new stories about how Andean societies from the past and present have dealt with the world around them. Through fifty objects from different periods and places, this exhibit provides a glimpse of the enormous potential of what can be done with these fabulous collections. I hope it fosters new conversations and, simultaneously, enhances further collaborations with the communities these objects represent.”

Lissant Bolton, Keeper of Africa, Oceania and the Americas, said: “It is wonderful to be able to display some of the amazing objects in the Museum’s Andean collections, including very beautiful ancient and modern textiles and marvellous ceramics. This Peru case brings new perspectives to questions about how different societies deal with the troubles of life, the theme of the Living and Dying Gallery.”

The Trustees of the British Museum acknowledge with gratitude the generosity of Madeleine Osterling Letts, Macarena Rojas Osterling, and Cristina Rojas Osterling, alongside the continued support of PROMPERÚ, in creating this display and promoting the Peru programme.

About PROMPERÚ
As an independent division of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism, PROMPERÚ is a government promotion agency, connecting both public and private initiatives, whose mission is to promote a competitive and diversified offer of products and services with the highest quality standards suitable for the international markets. PROMPERÚ carries out a wide range of activities related to trade, investment, and tourism promotion, focused on those linked with the expansion of businesses in foreign markets, the generation of job opportunities and spreading the image of Peru as an exporting country and an attractive investment and tourist destination: https://www.peru.travel/en

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