



American Federation of Arts

For Immediate Release

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**LANDMARK EXHIBITION OF ANCIENT EGYPTIAN ART FROM THE BRITISH MUSEUM
ON EIGHT-CITY U.S. TOUR**

**Thirty-five Centuries of Egyptian Art Examined in Major Survey
*Eternal Egypt: Masterworks of Ancient Art from The British Museum***

(December 2000)-*Eternal Egypt: Masterworks of Ancient Art from The British Museum*, a major exhibition comprising over 144 objects selected exclusively from one of the foremost collections of Egyptian antiquities in the world, premieres at The Toledo Museum of Art on March 2, 2001, the first venue of an extensive national tour (see page 4 for itinerary). Over half of the works on view—from renowned masterpieces to intimate treasures—have never before been presented outside The British Museum. The exhibition is organized by the American Federation of Arts and The British Museum.

This exhibition and its national tour are made possible by Ford Motor Company. Additional support has been provided by the Benefactors Circle of the AFA.

Eternal Egypt is the first comprehensive survey to take an art historical approach to this great culture, examining the quality and significance of the full range of pharaonic art, as both a cultural expression and as a high art revealing fundamental human values.

Julia Brown, director, AFA, stated, "We are delighted to be collaborating with The British Museum in bringing these exceptional works of art to the United States for the first time. We are grateful to Ford Motor Company for its support of this outstanding exhibition."

"The art of Egypt inspires people of all ages and backgrounds," said William Clay Ford, Jr., chairman, Ford Motor Company. "Its appeal crosses boundaries of time, geography, and culture, and for many schoolchildren it is the first exposure to history, art, archaeology, and social studies. Ford is committed to supporting the education and enjoyment that come from experiencing extraordinary cultures, and we are proud to be a partner in this historic exhibition."

Selected by Edna R. Russmann, curator, Department of Egyptian, Classical, and Ancient Middle Eastern Art, Brooklyn Museum of Art, in conjunction with W. V. Davies, keeper of Egyptian antiquities, The British Museum, the works in the exhibition are arranged chronologically to reveal artistic development over 35 dynamic centuries, from shortly before the 1st Dynasty, about 3100 B.C., through to the Roman occupation in the 4th century A.D.

According to Ms. Russmann, "The chronological installation allows the viewer to see how dramatically this art changed over time and provides an overview of the richness and scope of this exceptional collection."

The exhibition comprises masterworks in a variety of media, including stone, wood, terra cotta, ivory, gold, glass, and papyrus. A key contribution of the Egyptians to art history, the development of portraiture, is examined in monumental sculpture, statuary, relief, stelae, coffin lids, and papyri sections from the *Book of the Dead*.

The four periods into which ancient Egyptian history is divided—the Old Kingdom, Middle Kingdom, New Kingdom, and the Late Period—form the underlying structure of the exhibition. Within each section, the unique and innovative aspects of the period's art, as well as its characteristic styles, forms, and genres, are demonstrated.

Early Dynastic Period (ca. 3100–2686 B.C.) and Old Kingdom (ca. 2686–2181 B.C.)

Among the themes explored in the section devoted to the art of the early dynasties and the Old Kingdom are the establishment of artistic conventions and standards; the rise of kingship and its decisive role in the formation of Egyptian art; the simultaneous developments in art and hieroglyphic writing and the interplay of these modes of expression; and the way in which religious and magical beliefs led to the centrality of the human figure in Egyptian art. The distinctively Egyptian way of rendering the human figure in relief and painting (particularly on those that proliferated on the walls of temples, tombs, and pyramids) became standardized. A selection from the period between the collapse of the Old Kingdom and the beginning of the Middle Kingdom is included.

Middle Kingdom, ca. 2060–1633 B.C.

This section focuses on the important developments in relief and freestanding sculpture, including the introduction of greater naturalism and new artistic forms such as the block statue. Egyptian portraiture, an invention of the early Old Kingdom that became a recurring genre in Egyptian art, is also featured. While examples are evident throughout the exhibition, the full significance and function of portraiture is best appreciated during the Middle Kingdom.

New Kingdom, ca. 1550–1070 B.C.

This rich period, which witnessed the imperial expansion of Egypt during the 18th Dynasty, the religious revolution of the Amarna Period, and the Ramesside 19th and 20th Dynasties, is represented by statues and personal possessions of renowned pharaohs including Amenhotep III, Akhenaten, and Ramesses the Great.

The growing sophistication that occurred during this 500-year period was reflected in newly elaborate self-imagery; the creation of colossal royal figures; the startlingly exaggerated stylistic innovation of the Amarna revolutions; and the revisionist arts of the counterreformation that followed. Examples of jewelry, mirrors, cosmetic containers, and other items of luxury widely produced during the New Kingdom are included.

Late Period, ca. 1070 B.C.–395 A.D.

Despite its increasing political weakness during the Late Period, Egyptian culture retained much of its strength, and art production continued to flourish. Egyptian art remained relatively unchanged by foreign ideas until the arrival of the Ptolemies (ca. 305–30 B.C.) when it became increasingly influenced by Hellenistic style. This section examines the complex interaction between these strong but very different artistic traditions.

An important theme of the final section is the manners in which Egyptian art renewed itself, primarily through the imitation of its own past. Archaism, always an important factor in Egyptian art, is fully explored, from the question of which models were chosen and why, to the use of archaism as a vehicle for creativity and change.

Eternal Egypt is accompanied by a major catalogue published by the University of California Press in association with the AFA. It features a major essay by the guest curator, Ms. Russmann, on archaism, portraiture, and stylistic innovations in Egyptian art and an essay on the formation of the collection by T. G. H. James, former keeper of Egyptian art at The British Museum, in addition to individual entries on the objects on view.

NATIONAL TOUR

The Toledo Museum of Art

March 2–May 27, 2001
Toledo, OH

Wonders: Memphis International Cultural Series

June 28–October 21, 2001
Memphis, TN

Brooklyn Museum of Art

November 23, 2001–February 24, 2002
Brooklyn, NY

Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

April 12–July 7, 2002
Kansas City, MO

The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

California Palace of the Legion of Honor

August 10–November 3, 2002
San Francisco, CA

The Minneapolis Institute of Arts

December 22, 2002–March 16, 2003
Minneapolis, MN

The Field Museum

April 26–August 10, 2003
Chicago, IL

Walters Art Museum

September 21, 2003–January 4, 2004
Baltimore, MD

PUBLICATION

A fully illustrated catalogue accompanies the exhibition. In addition to Ms. Russmann, contributors include, from the Department of Egyptian Antiquities, The British Museum: Carol Andrews, former Assistant Keeper; T. G. H. James, former Keeper; Nigel Strudwick, Assistant Keeper; and John Taylor, Assistant Keeper; from the Department of Egyptian, Classical, and Ancient Middle Eastern Art, the Brooklyn Museum of Art: Edward Bleiberg, Associate Curator; Richard A. Fazzini, Chairman; and James F. Romano, Curator; from the Department of Egyptian Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Dorothea Arnold, Lila Acheson Wallace Curator in Charge; Marsha Hill, Associate Curator; from the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Science and Humanities, Marianne Eaton-Krauss, Research Associate; Biri A. Fay, independent scholar specializing in Egyptology; Gay Robins, Professor, Art History Department, Emory University; and Hourig Sourouzian, art historian and archaeologist, German Archaeological Institute, Cairo. Published by the University of California Press in association with the AFA. 288 pages; 12 x 10 in.; 300 colorplates; 50 black-and-white comparative illustrations; softcover \$40.00, clothbound \$65.00. The catalogue is supported in part by Helen H. Scheidt.

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS

The American Federation of Arts is the nation's oldest and most comprehensive non-profit art museum service organization. Founded by an act of Congress in 1909, the AFA provides its more than 550 member institutions with traveling art exhibitions and educational, professional, and technical support programs developed in collaboration with the museum community. Through these programs, the AFA seeks to strengthen the ability of museums to enrich the public's experience and understanding of art. Please visit our Web site at www.afaweb.org.

THE BRITISH MUSEUM

The British Museum, which attracts over 5.5 million visitors annually, illuminates ancient and living cultures around the world by preserving, presenting, enhancing, and researching the unique collections in its care. Founded in 1753, it has been open to the public since 1759. The Department of Egyptian Antiquities is the largest and most comprehensive collection of its kind outside Cairo, and illustrates every aspect of ancient Egyptian culture, from the Predynastic period through the Coptic (Christian) era, from 4000 B.C. to the 12th century A.D. We invite you to explore our Web site at www.british-museum.ac.uk.

FORD MOTOR COMPANY

Since its founding in 1903, Ford Motor Company has supported arts institutions and cultural programs in the United States and around the world. As a global company with 400,000 employees, Ford is committed to creating opportunities that stimulate creativity and innovation, promote cultural diversity, and enhance the quality of life in our communities. To learn more about *Eternal Egypt* and other programs made possible by Ford Motor Company, visit www.ford.com.

** As museum schedules are subject to change, please confirm dates before going to press. **