

Incredible Ramses exhibition at Australian Museum

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NOVEMBER 4, 2023



Image: Stephen J. Cottle, RAMSES AND THE GOLD OF THE PHARAOHS, Australian Museum. Image: supplied

It's been just over 100 years since the discovery of Egyptian boy pharaoh Tutankhamun's tomb in the Valley of the Kings

The discovery immediately started a worldwide mania for all things ancient Egyptian that was reflected in art, furniture, fashion and songs of the day.

Today, none of that enthusiasm has abated, and with the arrival of the Australian Museum's *Ramses and the Gold of the Pharaohs* exhibition in Sydney this November, be prepared for an onslaught of Egypt mania all over again.



The exhibition will feature 182 mostly priceless artefacts, with the highpoints including the sarcophagus of Ramses II, one of the most impressive royal coffins to be discovered, jewellery, masks, amulets and animal mummies.

"This is the biggest cultural exhibition that Australia has had in at least 10 years in terms of the range of objects, the value of them, the rarity of the objects and the fact that it is a multi-national exhibition," Fran Dovey, head of exhibitions, Australian Museum said.

The exhibition came about via a circuitous route, with a back story almost as mysterious as ancient Egypt.

"We were meant to get the Tutankhamun exhibition, but that fell through and we were left in the lurch," Dovey said.

In step the Indiana Jones of Egyptology, Dr Zahi Hawass, and Kim McKay, Australian Museum CEO, who had a long-standing relationship.



Ramses II coffin, RAMSES AND THE GOLD OF THE PHARAOHS, Australian Museum. Image: supplied

A deal was struck between Hawass, the Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities, Neon Global and World Heritage Exhibitions that resulted in Sydney becoming the second city in the world, after Paris, to exhibit the coffin.

"Ramses' coffin is a work of inestimable value and a powerful symbol of one of the greatest leaders of the ancient world," Kim McKay said in a statement.

While Tutankhamun is probably the best known pharaoh, he lived only a short time and left no great mark on ancient Egypt, while Ramses II lived to around 90 years of age, won many significant battles that led to peace and an extensive building campaign which included many monuments to himself.



RAMSES AND THE GOLD OF THE PHARAOHS, Australian Museum. Image: supplied

Married to Nefertari, who is also represented in the exhibition, Ramses went on to sire over 100 children with his numerous consorts.

Nine more pharaohs would take his name after his death.

The main shipment of objects, including the coffin, began arriving in specially built air-conditioned crates under armed guard at the Museum last week.

"Any of these objects that travel are incredibly valuable, and right from the beginning we have been working with the conservation team to create the atmosphere controlled crates and to make sure that they are stored in conservation grade facilities," Dovey said.



RAMSES AND THE GOLD OF THE PHARAOHS, Australian Museum. Image: supplied

"No expense is spared to make sure that an object leaves Egypt and gets around the world in one piece."

To make sure that the exhibition goer can see the artefacts in the best conditions the Museum is installing specially built plinths and new lighting.

"Many of the objects are in perfect condition and you can get quite close to them, and the lighting is so exquisite they just glow," Dovey said.

"They are what you would expect from Egyptian jewellery, the lapis lazuli, the gold with gods represented, and there is a section about the people who built the tombs with some of their objects and doodles."

In addition to the exhibition there is a Virtual Reality experience with motion chairs, where the viewer can take a journey through the ancient village of Abul Simbel, the place where Ramses was worshipped and four colossal statues representing him have been discovered.

"It's an 11-minute experience, unlike normal VR, here you sit in a special chair with your feet off the ground and the chair moves as you travel through Abu Simbel guided by Nevertari," Dovey said.

"There's an educational component and one where you get chased by the sand mummy."

The VR experience requires a separate ticket.

November 18, 2023 – May 19, 2024

Australian Museum, College St, Sydney

australian.museum/exhibition/ramses/

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