

SMART NEWS

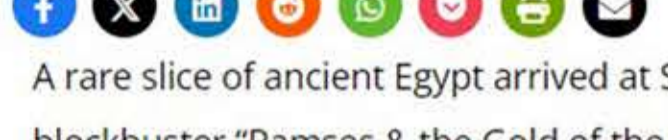
# Why Egyptomania Is Taking Over Australia

A series of exhibitions in the country spotlight the enduring appeal of ancient Egypt for modern audiences

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The sarcophagus of Ramses II is a major attraction in a new exhibition, as it has rarely been shown publicly outside of Egypt. James Alcock © Australian Museum



A rare slice of ancient Egypt arrived at Sydney's [Australian Museum](#) this month, with the blockbuster "[Ramses & the Gold of the Pharaohs](#)" exhibition making the fourth stop on its international tour. The immersive show, which [premiered in Houston](#) in 2021, offers an expansive look into the reign of [Ramses II](#), one of Egypt's most powerful pharaohs.

"Ramses the Great was a phenomenon—a beloved father, incomparable warrior and prolific builder whose legacy is both political and cultural," says Kim McKay, the Australian Museum's director and CEO, in a [statement](#). "Responsible for countless temples, pyramids and statues, the first ever peace treaty and an enormous, influential family, the stories of Ramses have been retold through generations."

Of the exhibition's 181 objects, the star is Ramses' sarcophagus. Unearthed in 1881, it had never been shown publicly outside of Egypt until this year, writes the [Guardian's](#) Kelly Burke. Other artifacts demonstrating the artistic innovation of the pharaoh's reign include golden masks, carved sarcophagi, ornate jewelry and even a mummified lion cub.



A gold mask of King Amenemope is one of 181 artifacts on display in the new exhibition. Anna Kučera © Australian Museum

The exhibition, which runs until May 19, 2024, also presents multimedia and immersive elements. One such technological feature is a recreation of the 1275 B.C.E. [Battle of Kadesh](#), Ramses' greatest military achievement, that uses a layered display and CGI, or computer-generated imagery. In 2022, [Smithsonian magazine's](#) Emma Schkloven called the recreation a "feat of technology."

An offshoot of the exhibition offers a virtual reality tour of the historic Abu Simbel temple, guided by the pharaoh's first wife, Queen Nefertari, though the [Guardian](#) notes that this experience eschews historical accuracy in favor of entertainment value.

"Ramses & the Gold of the Pharaohs" is the latest of several Egypt-focused shows to travel to Australia. Next month, the National Museum of Australia will open "[Discovering Ancient Egypt](#)," comprising more than 220 objects from the collections of the [Dutch National Museum of Antiquities](#). In 2024, "[Pharaoh](#)," the largest international exhibition the British Museum has ever presented, will debut at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV).

These Egyptian exhibitions arriving in a row is largely thanks to the pandemic's disruption of museum schedules and loans for two years, the [Sydney Morning Herald's](#) Linda Morris reports.

"These things do happen," Miranda Wallace, NGV's senior curator of international programs, tells the [Sydney Morning Herald](#). "It's like buses: There's nothing for ages, then three come along."



A gold vase found in the tomb of Psusennes I, on display in "Ramses & the Gold of the Pharaohs" James Alcock © Australian Museum

For now, oversaturation doesn't seem to be an issue: Ahead of the Ramses exhibition's opening weekend, the Australian Museum announced it had already presold more than 100,000 tickets to the show. Indeed, the NGV is hoping that its show will help attract new visitors to the usually painting-focused gallery, Wallace tells the [Sydney Morning Herald](#).

These experiences are just the latest in a long line of Egyptian-centric exhibitions. Australian institutions hosted at least seven such shows between 2007 and 2018, writes [Ania Kotarba-Morley](#), an archaeologist and cultural heritage professional at the University of Adelaide, for the [Conversation](#). Australia's fascination with ancient Egypt is part of the larger obsession the West has with the subject—a phenomenon that prompted the coining of the term "[Egyptomania](#)," which can be traced back to Napoleon Bonaparte's [expedition to Egypt](#) in the late 18th century, Kotarba-Morley writes.

Visitors continue to attend exhibitions like "Ramses & the Gold of the Pharaohs" because they offer the chance to see what life was like in an ancient society, McKay tells the [Sydney Morning Herald](#).

"It's that human interest, that curiosity to go back in time," she says. "It's the same level of curiosity an adventurer might have exploring a new ocean or a new shore, a new country."

"[Ramses & the Gold of the Pharaohs](#)" is on view at the Australian Museum in Sydney through May 19, 2024.

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