

Updated Release: June 28, 2002

## "The Quest for Immortality: Treasures of Ancient Egypt" Presents the Largest Group of Antiquities Ever Loaned by Egypt for Exhibition in North America; National Tour Begins In Washington, DC June 30-October 14, 2002

Washington, DC --Ancient Egyptian beliefs and practices based on the afterlife journey of pharaohs will be dramatically illustrated through approximately 115 magnificent objects from Egypt and a life-sized reconstruction of the burial chamber of the New Kingdom pharaoh Thutmose III (1479-1425 B.C.) in **The Quest for Immortality: Treasures of Ancient Egypt** at the National Gallery of Art, East Building, Washington, D.C., June 30 through October 14, 2002. This exhibition is the largest selection of antiquities ever loaned by Egypt for exhibition in North America. It includes objects that have never been on public display and many that have never been seen outside of Egypt.

The exhibition is supported in part by Chevy Chase Bank.

The announcement of the exhibition was made today at the National Gallery of Art by Earl A. Powell III, director; His Excellency M. Nabil Fahmy, The Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt; and Teit Ritzau, president, United Exhibits Group, Copenhagen.

"Egypt is proud of its rich heritage and feels duty bound to share it with the world at large. *The Quest for Immortality* is a fascinating and vivid exhibition that will leave longstanding impressions and have an invaluable contribution to better cultural understanding between Americans and Egyptians," said Ambassador Fahmy.

"*The Quest for Immortality* is part of the Gallery's long tradition of bringing great art to the United States to expand Americans' understanding of world cultures throughout human history," said Powell. "We are grateful to our partners, United Exhibits Group, and the Supreme Council of Antiquities, Cairo, for making this important exhibition a reality."

*The Quest for Immortality* is the Gallery's fourth exhibition dedicated to the ancient art of Egypt. *Tutankhamun Treasures* (1961) included 34 small objects, and the renowned blockbuster, *Treasures of Tutankhamun*, included 55 objects and attracted 835,924 people to the Gallery in 1976-1977 before traveling to Chicago, New Orleans, Los Angeles, Seattle, New York, and San Francisco.

### **Organization and Tour**

The exhibition is organized by United Exhibits Group, Copenhagen, and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, in association with the Supreme Council of Antiquities, Cairo. Objects are loaned by the Egyptian government and come from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, the Luxor Museum, and the sites of Tanis and Deir el-Bahari.

The exhibition will travel throughout the United States and Canada for a period of five years. To date, in addition to the National Gallery of Art, the venues include:

Museum of Science, Boston, November 20, 2002 - March 30, 2003

Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, May 4 - September 14, 2003

New Orleans Museum of Art, October 19, 2003 - February 25, 2004

Milwaukee Public Museum, March 28 - August 8, 2004

Denver Museum of Nature and Science, September 12, 2004 - January 23, 2005

Frist Center for the Visual Arts, Nashville, June 11 - October 9, 2006

Portland Museum of Art, Portland, Oregon, November 5, 2006 - March 4, 2007

## The Exhibition

From the earliest times, Egyptians denied the physical impermanence of life. They formulated a remarkably complex set of religious beliefs and funneled vast material resources into the quest for immortality. The exhibition focuses on the understanding of the afterlife among Egyptians some 3,000 years ago, in the period of the New Kingdom (1550-1069 BC) through the Late Period (664-332 BC). The New Kingdom marked the beginning of an era of great wealth, power, and stability for Egypt, and was accompanied by a burst of cultural activity, much of which was devoted to the quest for eternal life.

The exhibition is divided into six sections: Journey to the Afterworld, The New Kingdom, The Royal Tomb, Tombs of Nobles, The Realm of the Gods, and The Tomb of Thutmose III.

Among the objects in the exhibition are the *Boat from the tomb of Amenhotep II* (18th Dynasty), an 8-foot-long wooden model of a pharaoh's river ship that used to sail on the Nile, painted with scenes of the god Montu smiting the enemies of Egypt; the sandstone *Head of Thutmose I* (18th Dynasty), derived from one of the standing colossal statues of the king; numerous gold and jeweled items from the royal tombs at Tanis (21st and 22nd Dynasties), acclaimed as the most significant royal burial site since the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb in 1922; the *Canopic chest of Queen Nedjmet* (late 20th Dynasty) that was made to hold her internal organs; the *Sarcophagus of Khonsu* from the 19th Dynasty painted with beautiful scenes of the afterlife (shown only in Washington, D.C.); and the sculpture of the god Osiris (26th Dynasty), wrapped as a mummy with a gold and electrum headdress shown lying on his stomach with his head lifted, in the process of resurrecting.

The last room of the exhibition is a reconstruction of the tomb of Thutmose III, ruler of Egypt in the 15th century BC. On the walls is the earliest known complete copy of the

Amduat, the great text describing the sun god's journey through the afterworld during the 12 hours of night when the sun god defeats his enemies in the netherworld and achieves rebirth at the eastern horizon to rise again in the morning sky. The king joins the sun god and the populace of Egypt follows along to share in the triumphant cycle of death and rebirth. The red granite lid of the massive sarcophagus of Nitocris, daughter of Psamtik I (26th Dynasty), is installed in the room.

A film, *The Quest for Immortality in Ancient Egypt*, was produced by the National Gallery of Art and made possible by the HRH Foundation. A ten-minute version will be shown continuously in a theater within the exhibition. A 30-minute version will be shown at scheduled times in the East Building large and small auditoriums. The film contains new footage of the temple of Karnak, tombs in the Valley of the Kings and other sites on the West Bank of the Nile, as well as interviews with eminent Egyptologists who help unravel the intricacies of the ancient Egyptians' view of the afterlife.

### **Exhibition Curators, Catalogue, Programs, and Resources**

The exhibition was conceived by Erik Hornung, professor emeritus of Egyptology at the University of Basel, Switzerland. Betsy M. Bryan, Alexander Badawy Professor of Egyptian Art and Archaeology and chair of the department of Near Eastern Studies, The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, is the guest curator for the exhibition.

The 256-page exhibition catalogue, copublished by the National Gallery of Art and Prestel, is richly illustrated with some 190 color photographs, including multiple details of many objects. The catalogue, which was co-edited by Hornung and Bryan, contains essays by them and Fayza Haikal, professor of Egyptology at the American University in Cairo; entries on each object; a selected guide to the gods; a chronology; a glossary; and a bibliography. It will be available for \$30 in softcover and \$65 in hardcover in the Gallery Shops during the exhibition, on the Gallery Web site at [www.nga.gov/shop/shop.htm](http://www.nga.gov/shop/shop.htm) (<http://www.nga.gov/shop/shop.htm>), or by calling 1 (800) 697-9350.

An exhibition brochure, also available in a large-type version, in addition to a guide for children and family groups, will be available free of charge to all visitors. An audio tour

featuring Gallery director Powell, guest curator Bryan, and David O'Connor, professor of ancient Egyptian art and archaeology, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, will be available for \$6, \$5 for students with ID, groups of ten or more, and senior citizens.

Information regarding tours, lectures, special programs for the public and schoolchildren, and educational materials related to *The Quest for Immortality* will be posted on the Gallery's Web site, [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov) (<http://www.nga.gov/home.htm>), which will also have an on-line virtual tour shortly after the exhibition opens.

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## General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit [www.nga.gov/renovation](http://www.nga.gov/renovation) (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) and on Twitter at [twitter.com/ngadc](http://twitter.com/ngadc).

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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