



INSIDE THE GALLERY PODCAST – SERIES 5 EPISODE 10 (Nov 2023)

RAMSES & THE GOLD OF THE PHARAOHS

Tim Stackpool:

In this edition of the podcast, Ramses and the Gold of the Pharaohs. At the Australian Museum, this astonishing exhibition of more than 180 antique Egyptian objects, some of which date back more than 3000 years, tells the story of Egypt's greatest pharaoh through the collection of finely crafted jewellery, spectacular royal masks, stone and wood carvings, and other ornate golden treasures from the tomb, showcasing the superb workmanship of ancient Egyptian artisans. I'm Tim Stackpool, and this is Inside The Gallery.

Hello, and thanks for taking the time to listen to the podcast once again, as we acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land upon which this podcast is produced and downloaded, and we acknowledge their elders past, present, and emerging. And of course, you can read a transcript of this edition via the link at this episode's description at [www.insidethegallery.com.au](http://www.insidethegallery.com.au), and that's thanks to the contribution made by the Australian Arts Channel, which is available to view for free at [www.australianartschannel.com.au](http://www.australianartschannel.com.au).

We're invited by the Australian Museum to transport ourselves back 3,300 years. Across the sands of the Sahara Desert to reach the heartbeat of ancient Egypt, ruled by the most celebrated Pharaoh in the country's storied history. This is the opportunity to experience one of the greatest collections of its kind in an Australian first exhibition, Ramses and the Gold of the Pharaohs. This all new multi-sensory museum experience provides visitors with a window into the life and accomplishments of Ramses II, more commonly known as Ramses the Great, who ruled Egypt for 67 years, the second-longest reign for any pharaoh, living an astonishing 92 years. It's exclusive to Sydney, and features 182 priceless artifacts, including the sarcophagus of Ramses II, one of the most impressive royal coffins from ancient Egypt ever to be discovered. And there are other treasures too, and one of a kind relics, some of which have actually never left Egypt before. The sarcophagus has only ever been exhibited in Egypt and France, making Sydney a unique destination in the history of what is a standout piece within the exhibition.

The show itself is conceived and toured by World Heritage Exhibitions, part of the NEON group, but of course is undertaken with significant collaboration by antiquity authorities in Egypt, some of whom have been in Sydney for the exhibition launch, at which Kim McKay, director and CEO of the Australian Museum, said that collaboration was significant.

Kim McKay:

I'm very proud to bring this extraordinary exhibition to Sydney. It's been a global collaboration from Egypt to Australia and the United States, and I've worked closely with my colleague and friend, Dr. Zahi Hawass, who is the curator of Ramses and the Gold of the Pharaohs, and Dr. Mostafa Waziry, who is Egypt's Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, as well as our partners at NEON Global, the World Heritage Exhibitions team, and a traveling team around the globe. We've immersed ourselves in creating an innovative experience you'll be able to sink into with all your senses.

Now, Ramses and the Gold of the Pharaohs marks a new chapter in the way we share culture with our visitors to the Australian Museum, and we know you'll experience that same awe and wonder that we have felt crafting this once in a lifetime blockbuster exhibition. All of the 182 objects in Ramses and the Gold of the Pharaohs are drawn from Egypt's finest museums and historical sites, and bring to life the rich culture of ancient Egypt. The Australian Museum is truly honoured, and extremely grateful to the Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities for the support and generosity to loan these precious objects for this exhibition.

Tim Stackpool:

Director and CEO of the Australian Museum, Kim McKay, there at the launch of the exhibition. Kim is no stranger to history and archaeology, having previously worked in the USA in senior roles in non-fiction television for Discovery Channel and National Geographic. She did mention there the curator of the exhibition, quite a renowned archaeologist himself, Dr. Zahi Hawass, who also spoke from Cairo at the launch.

Zahi Hawass:

Actually, I'm really happy that the exhibit is in Australia now, because Kim, the director of the museum, was a good friend of mine since she was working in the National Geographic. I promised her, always, that a great exhibit will come to Sydney. I want to say, I have seen many exhibits, even King Tut. Ramses II exhibit in Australia now is really going to be the best thing that the people will see. I'm very impressed with the design of the objects. Each object can tell us a story about this great king, and also, at the same time, the golden era, the tombs of Dynasty 21st, 22nd, the gold of the pharaohs, and the animal mummies. It's really a great exhibit that everyone will enjoy.

And you know what's good about this exhibit? The organiser, Cityneon, art and exhibitions are really paying for the conservation of the tomb of Ramses II, means that some of the money that people pay for the ticket, it will go for the conservation of this great tomb of Ramses II, that we found out it's the largest tomb in the Valley of the Kings. But you will enjoy the thrill and the magic of Ramses II. I am sure that this exhibit will educate children. They will know about this great king who ruled for more than sixty years, he had more than 100 children, he was married to eight queens. His favourite was Nefertari. He built for her a beautiful tomb and a temple. He was a peacemaker and a warrior. He was really a great king. The king of the kings. Enjoy the exhibit.

Tim Stackpool:

The curator of the exhibition, Dr. Zahi Hawass, who is expected to visit Australia next year in April, and will undertake a lecture or two at that time on the current excavations underway in Egypt, as well as giving an insight into the exhibition at the Australian Museum. Now, this is a touring exhibition. It has visited a number of sites in the US already, as well as visiting France. Visitation has been high, as you would expect, but the expectation in Australia for the six months of the show is even higher, as indicated by Egypt's Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, Egyptologist and archaeologist, Dr. Mostafa Waziry.

Mostafa Waziry:

How about the story of the King Ramses the Great and the Gold of the Pharaoh's exhibition? It started November 2021. Where? In Houston Museum for six months. Only couple of 100,000 people. I believe 400,000. 400,000 people visited the exhibition in Houston. I was not that happy. And then, after six months they said, "No, no, no. Wait a minute, San Francisco will be, wow." After six months, there were 450,000 people there. No. How about France? I know that the French people are well-educated people, and they like exhibitions. For five months, only five months, 817,000 tourists in five months.

When I came here for the first time in my history in Sydney, when I start looking at Australians, they are really well-educated people. What did I say to Andy and organisers? I said, "I believe in the six months we will reach the number 1 million in six months, and it will be a record, by the way." So he said, "No, I doubt." "No." I said, "No. It's one life trip, by the way. 1 million. This is the average number for the Australian to visit this exhibition in six months." "Okay."

182 pieces, the best pieces of the King Ramses the Great and the gold of the pharaohs. How about this coffin? Since the coffin was discovered in Egypt, in the cache in the Valley of the Kings, it stayed there in

Egypt, and then to Cairo Museum, then to the Civilization Museum, and we decided to leave it there. I don't know how come that those lovely organizers, they could convince me to give them the chance to have this coffin of the King Ramses the Great to be in France and then to Sydney. I don't know if I'm going to allow more cities or not. This is the end. I don't know.

Once again, ladies and gentlemen, Mostafa, I'm an archaeologist. I'm an Egyptologist. I spent almost all of my life to dig and to reveal. That's it. I cannot do anything in my life, except digging, revealing, discovering. And I spent 25 years digging in Luxor. Then I got promoted to be the Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities in 2017. So we came to Cairo. Excavations, it's like something running in my blood. I couldn't stop it. I hate, to be honest, to have a suit and a tie and a cigar and working like this, walking like an Egyptian. No, no, no, no, this not me. I'm a jeans guy, excavation guy. This is what I like the most, this is my life. So when we came here, I had to ask his excellency in the Ministry of Antiquities, "I would like to keep digging." But Luxor is very far away from Cairo.

So we started our excavations again in Saqqara, an area nobody did touch. So I do recommend for the Australians, especially the missions, that we have couple of missions only from Australia working in Egypt in excavations. I do recommend Saqqara. It's a very virgin area. We went there April 2018, couple of months taking the debris out, and then we found a cache of animal mummies. We found 500 mummified cats. You're going to see some of them. Then, couple of days later, we found a mummy of a lion cub, baby lion, eight up to 10 months old. We found five. You're going to see one of them there. We did continue our excavations. We found three mongoose mummies. Then a little box of limestone. When we did open it, we found the mummy of a scarab. We got crazy, as Egyptologists. Why is that? Because we never heard, in all of our life, that Egyptians in ancient time mummified the scarabs, or mummified the lion cubs, or mummified the mongoose, or, or, or... Those were just new discovers. We were very happy.

Back to the King Ramses the Great. He died at the age of 90 years old. I don't know, how can I call him? Was he a great warrior or great peace guy? He's both; a warrior and asking for peace. He was the first one who did ask for or did sign peace treaty. It's located in Karnak. Karnak, Timsah, and Luxor. My recommendation, ladies and gentlemen, to all of you, come and visit Egypt. Visit Luxor.

Ramses II drove me crazy. Why? If we're going to talk about King Cheops, where is he? In Cairo. If we're going to talk about Egyptian history, we can talk about Old Kingdom, Middle Kingdom, New Kingdom, Late Period, Greek, Roman, Copt, Islamic, then nowadays. Okay? If we're going to talk about the King Djoser? Saqqara. King Cheops? Pyramids. I mean lower part of Egypt. How about Tutankhamen? Upper part of Egypt, Luxor. How about Thutmose III? In Luxor. Amenhotep III? In Luxor.

Ramses II? Wait a minute! Ramses II, different story. Wherever you go in Egypt, you can find something for the King Ramses II. If you start digging in Abu Simbel, the south of Egypt, in the border between Egypt and Sudan, Abu Simbel? Ramses II. No, no, forget Abu Simbel. Let's talk about Luxor. Ramses II. Forget Luxor. Let's talk about Middle Egypt. Ramses II. Okay, then we'll go to Lower Egypt to avoid the story of Ramses II, who is chasing us wherever we go. So we went to Lower Egypt, next to the third pyramid, Mykerinos. While we were doing excavations, taking only sand, rubble, debris out, we found, unfinished, the statue of the King Ramses II. Even there! Even there.

Let's talk about, forget Upper part of Egypt, forget Middle Egypt, forget Lower part of Egypt. Let's talk about 150 kilometres to the northeast of Cairo, away from anywhere. San el-Hagar. When we went there, we found that this was the first capital of the Ramsesmuseum. Ramses II. Oh no. Ladies and gentlemen, we would like to reconstruct some obelisks, and to decorate most of our famous squares with obelisks. Let's go to San el-Hagar. We found 11 broken obelisks, all of them over there. So when we start reading the cartouches, [Ancient Egyptian words]. Ramses II. [Ancient Egyptian words]. We did

reconstruct four obelisks there, and couple of obelisks somewhere else, all over Egypt. And we have the one in the Grand Egyptian Museum.

For whom they have been in Egypt before, I'm sure that you have to come back to Egypt. "Mostafa, why do we have to come back to Egypt?" For a lot of reasons. One of them, to visit the Grand Egyptian Museum. What is so special in the Grand Egyptian Museum? The Grand Egyptian Museum, it will be the most famous gifts from Egypt to the entire world in the century number 21. What is so special in this Grand Egyptian Museum? One, the biggest museum all over the world. How big? Half million square metres. What? Half million square meters. Tell me something more about the Grand Egyptian Museum. Okay, 57,000 pieces already moved to the Grand Egyptian Museum till yesterday. Yeah, tell me something more about the Grand Egyptian Museum. Okay, for the first time, you're going to find those 5,398 pieces of the collection of Tutankhamen in one museum. How about before that? We had 122 pieces in Luxor Museum, couple of hundred in Cairo Museum, couple of thousand in basement. But now, for the first time, you'll see those 5,398 pieces of the Tutankhamen in one museum.

Tell me something more about Grand Egypt Museum. Okay. For the first time, you're going to find the biggest organic piece inside the Grand Egypt Museum. What do you mean? Inside the Grand Egyptian Museum, we are building, now, another museum. It's not that big, it's only 6,000 square meters. What? For the boat of the King Cheops, which is the longest, 43 meters long. For whom they have been in Egypt before, I think you still remember that this boat was, really, in a very bad location, behind the pyramids somewhere, inside a very ugly building since the '60s, last century. No. Now we are building new museum at the best museum.

Tell me something more about the Grand Egyptian Museum. I'll tell you. For the first time, you're going to see all the recent discoveries in Egypt that we discovered in the last couple of years, the last four, five years, on this plane, the Grand Egyptian Museum. Assasif cache. Saqqara cachet. The cache of the mummies, you're going to see, I think, 300 animal mummies, or something like this, inside the Grand Egyptian Museum. You'll see thousands of golden, silver, whatever coins in the Grand Egyptian Museum.

Tell me something more about the Grand Egyptian. Now, I kept talking about the unique stuff in the Grand Egyptian Museum, we have to keep talking about it for a couple of hours. So, my recommendation is then, gentlemen, please come to Egypt, even for whom they were in Egypt couple of years ago. You got to come back to visit the Grand Egyptian Museum, and to visit all the sites that we discovered a couple of months and couple of years ago. Anyhow, back again to this exhibition. Without saying lovely words from my mouth, I've seen it in Houston, I've seen it, the same one, in San Francisco, I've seen it in Paris. But here is the best one. Why, Mostafa, is that the best one?

Look at the old pictures. The coffin of the King Ramses II, it was lying down in the show on display. It was like this, everywhere in the cities. Here, for the first time, we're going to see it standing, like this. So we are facing the coffin of the King Ramses II, and I think it was great idea. I don't know who did create this idea that you can see the coffin of the King Ramses II standing like this, which is something really very creative idea. I like it. The pieces here, you can enjoy piece by piece. So, for whom they're going to visit exhibition, I'm sure that you will enjoy the best of it.

And my recommendation, again, in Egypt, we have 250 foreign missions working in Egypt in excavations from 25 countries. We have only couple of Australian missions working in Egypt. So I'm asking you to increase the missions from Australia, to work in more sites, especially in Saqqara diversion area. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, I wish you all the best, and have a lovely day. Thank you. Thank you.

Tim Stackpool:

Dr. Mostafa Waziry there, Egypt's Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, urging us there not only to visit the exhibition at the Australian Museum, but to also use that as motivation to put

Egypt on our travel bucket list. Now, of course, getting access to the artifacts takes a lot of negotiation, a lot of trust, too, I suspect, as well as design work, travel, and travel logistics. And as you heard earlier, this is undertaken, in this instance, by World Heritage Exhibitions and the executive VP of WHE, a member of the NEON Group, is Troy Collins.

Troy Collins:

As you can imagine, I've wandered the galleries of this exhibition many, many times. But once you go in, I'm just going to ask that you think and ponder a little bit. You're going to see these objects, but contemplate that some of these are over 3000 years old. 3000 years old. Try and think of that in your own lifetime, your family's lifetime, your lineage. It's an incredible age. Some are utilitarian, some are ceremonial, from sarcophagi and jewellery to bowls and sandals, just stunning pieces, especially when you consider how long ago they were created. Representing the sophistication, artistry, craftsmanship of ancient history's greatest civilization, Egypt. Pioneers in almost everything, construction, architecture, communication, social programs, economics.

And Ramses II exhibition tells this story, of a Pharaoh who lived for over 90 years. Quite a feat back then. Fathered over a hundred children, ruled for almost 67 years, and built a society, an economic infrastructure, that, when you really start to compare things, is not too dissimilar to our own. We are honoured and humbled to be entrusted with touring these priceless objects by our friends at the Ministry of Antiquities in Egypt. Not a day goes by that we don't acknowledge amongst ourselves how privileged we are. And we thank Dr. Mostafa Waziry, the entire Ministry, and the entire delegation for this privilege. Thank you for that opportunity and thank you for coming today.

So, late in 2019, I went from Philadelphia to Los Angeles, and I asked Kim McKay to meet me in the middle. Not quite the middle, so thank you for coming those few extra miles. But there we sat in an office, and we hammered out an agreement to bring King Tut to the Australian Museum. But little did we know that COVID was going to shut down the world just a few months later. So, when we started designing and building the Ramses exhibition, there was no doubt that we had a debt to fill. We needed to make good to the Australian Museum, to the people of Sydney, to all of Australia. And now, look, here we are. With Sydney, as everyone mentioned, to only be the second city to display the coffin of Ramses II.

In addition to Ramses, NEON is producing Jurassic World here in Olympic Park. We like very old things, 3000 years here, 60 million years down the road. And we hope that now, with that physical presence here in Australia, we're going to be bringing many, many more projects to this country. At NEON and World Heritage, we're storytellers, and we love to share history and popular culture, and love to do it in a way that immerses our audiences in sight and sound. From Ramses to Harry Potter, Pompeii to Jurassic World, NEON is leading the world in immersive experiences, and helping you, your families, and your friends get closer. So, on behalf of NEON Chairman Ron Tan, and World Exhibitions Heritage President John Norman, thank you for welcoming us to Sydney. We relish in the creative process, and we can't wait to get your reactions. Welcome to Ramses and the Gold of the Pharaohs, and please enjoy.

Tim Stackpool:

Troy Collins there with World Heritage Exhibitions, responsible for bringing Ramses and the Gold of the Pharaohs to Sydney, along with the Australian Museum and Egypt's Ministry of Antiquities and Tourism. All in all, it's actually amazing to get so close to so many aged and historic items in the actual exhibition, and to see the level of detail on display is extraordinary, particularly when you consider the tools and the techniques used over 3000 years ago. Those artists, they truly were talented and tenacious, and also very gifted, I expect.

Now, apart from the actual presentation of the artifacts at the exhibition, there's also a virtual reality experience. As a visitor, you sit in a kind of enclosed pod chair, wear a VR headset and some headphones, and take an adventure, touring Ramses' tomb, led by one of his wives. It's a four-dimensional experience, as the pods actually turn and tilt, not aggressively, though, as you're guided through the experience. I'm not wanting to reveal any spoilers, but there is a bit of drama included in the VR presentation, a bit of a jump scare, and a pursuit, which adds to the thrill of the entire visit. The museum indicates that the virtual reality experience is recommended for ages eight and over, and requires a separate ticket.

Tickets are available online, please book. Kim McKay said at the launch that 100,000 tickets were pre-sold before the exhibition opened. So, that's an indication of the show's popularity. It runs through until May 2024. That is the podcast for now. Tickets and links to the museum can be found in the description of this episode at our website, [www.insidethegallery.com.au](http://www.insidethegallery.com.au). You'll also find the transcript there, thanks to the Australian Arts Channel, and links to our Facebook, Instagram, and newsletter alerts as well. Thanks to you for taking a listen, and until next time, I'm Tim Stackpool. Bye-bye for now.