

Hartwig Fischer introduces the Annual Review 2017/18 and sets out the Museum's future plans

The British Museum today announces the publication of its 2017/18 Annual Review. The Museum received 5.8 million visitors in 17/18 making it the UK's leading visitor attraction for the 11th year running. 61.3 million people have visited the Museum in the past decade.

Highlights 17/18

International

The British Museum lent **2,200 objects to 81 venues outside the UK from Toledo, Ohio to Hobart, Australia**. In November, *India and the World, a history in nine stories* opened at CSMVS in Mumbai. Supported by the Getty Foundation and Tata Trusts, this is the first exhibition of its kind, a collaborative partnership between CSMVS, the National Museum of Delhi and the British Museum. Indian objects were selected from collections across India and the British Museum provided global objects to show the interconnectivity of India to the world throughout the centuries. The exhibition received over **200,000 visitors** in Mumbai and has recently opened in Delhi.

The Museum's successful Iraq Heritage Rescue Scheme (funded through the Cultural Protection Fund) continued this year with two cohorts of all-female participants training at the Museum. Later in the year the groups will work at two important sites in Iraq: Tello and Darband-i-Rania. Additional funds have been secured (from the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport) to support conservation work at the site of the world's oldest surviving bridge, near to the site of Tello.

25 new fellows from 18 countries from Armenia to Zimbabwe attended the International Training Programme (ITP). The programme includes practical training and research in the fellows specialist fields undertaken at the Museum and partner museums across the UK. The scheme is now in its 12th year **with a network of over 250 alumni from 39 countries** working at museums across the world.

The Museum remains committed to assisting our international colleagues in the battle against illicit trade. The recently launched *Circulating artefacts* scheme unites the British Museum, the governments of Egypt and Sudan, dealers and Scotland Yard to tackle the looting of pharaonic antiquities. The scheme will create a publicly available database of **80,000 objects** that have been identified as having passed through the trade or have been in private collections since 1970, the year of the UNESCO convention on cultural property. The scheme is being funded with a £1m grant from the British government's Cultural Protection Fund, administered by the British Council.

London

320,000 students booked school visits to the Bloomsbury site, with many more arriving on informal teacher-lead trips. **22,388** schools and families visited the Samsung Digital Discovery Centre in 17/18. The centre offers the largest digital learning programme in any UK museum.

Over **360,000 visitors** attended special exhibitions at the Museum in the past year. *Hokusai: Beyond the Great Wave*, supported by Mitsubishi Corporation, was a huge success with tickets selling out mid-run. The BP exhibition *Scythians: warriors of ancient Siberia* opened up an unknown culture and featured stunning loans from the State Hermitage Museum. *Living with gods: peoples, places and worlds beyond*, supported by the Genesis Foundation -with grateful thanks to John Studzinski CBE was accompanied by a BBC Radio 4 series which received an average listenership of **3.5million per week**, with 1.2million downloads of the podcasts worldwide. *Rodin and the art of ancient Greece*, sponsored by Bank of America Merrill Lynch runs until 29th July.

The Museum embarked on a different kind of public programme in April with *Europe and the world: a symphony of cultures*, a two-week music festival supported by the German Federal Foreign Office. Hundreds of visitors were able to experience music in the galleries and in the Reading Room, creating a dialogue between works of classical and contemporary music and the British Museum's extraordinary collection.

The Museum has added to its collections throughout the year through acquisition and donation. The year's outstanding gift was the donation of **556 objects** from The Sir Victor Sassoon Chinese Ivories Trust, along with funds for its ongoing preservation. The ivories were collected between 1915-1927 and created for the Chinese domestic market and for export. The gift includes stunning private devotional figurines associated with Buddhism and Daoism and 'scholar's objects' such as brush pots, wrist rests and table screens. Some examples are on public display in the Sir Joseph Hotung Gallery of China and South Asia.

The UK

The Museum lent more than **2,500 objects to 126 UK venues in 2017/18**, including a spotlight tour of a sculpture of the Hindu god Ganesha (which has been seen by more than 620,000 people), and new touring exhibition *Viking: rediscover the legend* in York, Nottingham and Southport. UK activity is supported by the Dorset Foundation in memory of Harry M Weinrebe. Gallery partnerships include a new medieval gallery at Norwich Castle and a gallery in the new Faith Museum at Auckland Castle in County Durham. The Museum is also partnering with Manchester Museum on a long-term loan of 230 objects for the new South Asia gallery which opens in 2020.

Object journeys, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, encourages partner museums to work with local communities to rethink aspects of their collections. The British Museum has worked with local Somali residents, and most recently with members of the Kiribati community on a display of materials from the Pacific island in the Wellcome Trust Gallery. UK partners included New Walk Museum and Art Gallery in Leicester and Brighton Museum and Gallery.

Research

This year the BM has collaborated with colleagues in Australia to re-examine Australian material in British collections with support from the Australian Research Council.

The African Rock Art Image Project, supported by Arcadia - a charitable fund of Peter Baldwin and Lisbet Rausing – was completed with **24,000 images** added to

africanrockart.britishmuseum.org. The website has been designed to be easy to use in areas of low bandwidth and on mobile platforms. The Museum currently has active projects in Ghana, Nigeria, Rwanda and Uganda

The Museum's work to digitise and share the ancient Maya collection of Alfred Maudslay, a 19th century explorer who brought the stories of the Maya to the world continued with a focus on his research in Mexico, the results will be made available towards the end of 2018.

Plans for 2018/19

British Museum Archaeological Research Collection (BM_ARC)

The Museum is, subject to planning, hoping to build a bespoke storage and research facility in Shinfield, in partnership with the University of Reading. The single-storey facility would house a portion of the British Museum's study collection, including world-renowned archaeological collections of ancient sculpture, mosaics, archaeological assemblages and historic cast collections. Many of the objects would be moved from Blythe House in London, which is due to close in 2023. Study rooms would give university students, academics and members of the public access to the collection (by appointment). The Museum hopes to work closely with local schools, communities and museums on loans and other projects. The Museum will submit the project for planning permission in summer 2018, if permission is granted work is expected to start in 2019.

The building

The decision regarding the storage of the collection enables the Museum to start to focus on the Museum building in Bloomsbury. Much needs to be done to improve visitor facilities, collection management and the permanent galleries to make the building fit for purpose in the 21st century. A detailed brief for infrastructure projects will be developed and costed over the course of the next year.

New Galleries

The Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic World opens to the public on 18 October 2018. A major re-display of the British Museum's world-class Islamic collection, the new gallery will be a comprehensive presentation of the Islamic world through art and material culture. Situated within a new suite of rooms on the upper floor, it will underscore global connections across a vast region of the world from West Africa to Southeast Asia and reflect links between the ancient, medieval and modern worlds. The new gallery will feature objects that give an overview of cultural exchange in an area stretching from Nigeria to Indonesia and from the 7th century to the present day. From cooking pots to golden vessels, and from 20th-century dress to contemporary art, the objects displayed will demonstrate the extraordinary richness of global encounters. The place and role of other faiths and communities including Christians, Jews and Hindus - will be reflected throughout the gallery, showing their significant contributions to the social, economic and cultural life of the Islamic world. The creation of the Albukhary Foundation Gallery provides an extraordinary opportunity to display the collection in new ways that showcase the peoples and cultures of the Islamic world, as well as the ideas, technologies and interactions that inspired their visual culture.

The Mitsubishi Corporation Japanese Galleries open on 27th September 2018. The galleries have been refurbished with improvements to design and infrastructure to allow regular gallery rotations and showcase a vast range of rare and light-sensitive works from the collection. The galleries include art objects, antiquities, ethnographic and historical items

dating from ancient prehistory to the present day. The centrepiece of the refurbished galleries will be a newly-acquired Edo period set of Samurai armour with a surcoat bearing the *mon* (family crest) of the Mori clan. The armour has been acquired with the support of the JTI Japanese Acquisition Fund. These objects can tell many of the significant stories in the unfolding of Japan's past, encouraging us to enjoy a deeper engagement with its present and future.

Exhibitions

In September the Museum opens an exhibition on stories of dissent, subversion and satire hidden within the vast collections of the British Museum, guest-curated by historian and broadcaster Ian Hislop. The Citi exhibition ***I object: Ian Hislop's search for dissent*** showcases over 100 objects that challenge the official version of events and defy established narratives.

In November, the BP exhibition ***I am Ashurbanipal: king of the world, king of Assyria*** focuses on an unknown but hugely significant king of the ancient world. Ashurbanipal ruled ancient Iraq in the 7th century BC and became the most powerful person on earth. From his capital at Nineveh, he ruled a vast and diverse empire, shaping the lives of peoples from the shores of the eastern Mediterranean to the mountains of western Iran. Over 200 extraordinary objects from all corners of the empire reveal how one of the greatest Assyrian monarchs stamped an indelible mark on the history of the world. Logistics partner is IAG Cargo.

2019 will see exhibitions on the print works of Edvard Munch, a major show examining the historical origins and enduring power of Manga and the myth and reality of ancient Troy.

Director Hartwig Fischer said: 'Culture is for everyone, this has been at the heart of the British Museum's ethos throughout its long history. We live this every day by actively reaching out to audiences near and far. This is an exciting moment for the Museum as we are planning to renew our displays, develop our narratives and renovate the building. We want to share the collection as widely as possible, by collaborating with communities and colleagues. We want to live up to our ambition to be a local, national and international museum for all, and make sure the British Museum truly belongs to everyone.'

Sir Richard Lambert, Chair of the Trustees, said: 'The British Museum is approaching an important moment in its long history, with some big strategic decisions to be made. The Trustees' overriding priorities are to preserve and enhance the collection for the benefit of future generations in London, the UK and the world. This is an exciting time and we look forward to supporting Hartwig his staff as they look to transform the Museum for the 21st century'.

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Further information

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