

# BRITISH MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS 2005-2006

(major exhibitions highlighted in bold)

Please note that exhibition titles and dates are subject to change and should be checked before going to press. Please discard any previous list. For information on Africa 05 or British Museum touring exhibitions, in the UK and abroad, please contact the press office ( see details at the end of the release )

## **FORTHCOMING EXHIBITIONS:**

### The Wealth of Africa, 4,000 years of money and trade

20 January – 26 June 2005

G69a, Admission free

This exhibition examines the continent of Africa through its currency, from raffia cloth to cowrie shells from copper ingots to coins. Beginning with the use of weighed metal in ancient Egypt, and Africa's earliest coins in Cyrenaica (modern-day Libya) in the sixth century BC, the exhibition reveals Africa's power and influence before the arrival of European colonisers and slave traders. Links between money and identity are explored through changes to the coinage during the spread of Christianity and Islam, and the designing of currencies in the twentieth century for newly-independent African countries.

### Ferdinand Columbus: Renaissance collector

9 February – 5 June 2005

G90, Admission free

Ferdinand (son of Christopher) Columbus, assembled the earliest and largest Renaissance print collection known in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The prints themselves were dispersed long ago, but an inventory preserved in Seville describes 3200 engravings, woodcuts and maps. The exhibition presents a partial reconstruction of this extraordinary collection using 120 works from the British Museum's Department of Prints and Drawings. All the most important Renaissance printmakers are included: Antonio Pollaiuolo; Albrecht Dürer; Hans Baldung; Lucas van Leyden; Jost de Negker. Many of the works are large format prints which are rarely exhibited, a highlight of the exhibition is a stencil coloured genealogical tree of the House of Charles V by Robert Peril that is 7.3 metres long.

### Mountains and Water

9 February - 28 August 2005

G91, Admission free

Shanshui, the Chinese word for landscape, means mountains and water. Landscape was the most important subject for painters in China, who often had escaped from official life, to live as hermits and develop austere scholarly tastes. To the western eye, Chinese landscapes can be difficult to interpret. This exhibition will show how the silk, paper, ink and brushstrokes used in China are fundamentally different from the western tradition of applying brightly coloured oil paints to canvas or wood. A particular feature of Chinese painting is the importance attached to copying earlier painters and practising their techniques. Many paintings are therefore painted 'in the style of' or 'after' earlier famous painters.

### **Kabuki Heroes on the Osaka Stage (1780 – 1830 )**

**30 June – 11 September 2005 ( closed 8 August )**

**G92-94, Admission free**

**The creation of celebrity and fame is a topic easily understandable in today's world of reality TV and pop idols. This exhibition focuses on a similar phenomenon in 19<sup>th</sup> century Japan. Urban Osaka and Tokyo between 1780 and 1830 witnessed the creation of superstar actors, cult heroes whose popularity became a stimulus for theatre, visual art and poetry. The core of the exhibition will focus on the fierce rivalry between the**

**two Osaka Kabuki actors Arashi Kichisaburô II and Nakamura Utaemon III. Books, surimono, single sheet actor prints, albums and paintings will highlight the different ways in which actors and performances were represented, and the complex strategies behind the creation of celebrity for artists, actors and poets.**

Sasanian coins: religion and propaganda in Ancient Iran

30 June 2005 – 8 January 2006

G69a, Admission free

Sasanian coins present on a miniature scale the beliefs and aspirations of the Sasanian emperors of Iran (3rd - 7th centuries AD). These emperors were Zoroastrians and are portrayed under the protection of specific Zoroastrian divinities, their power is expressed through representations of the sacred fire, which is central to Zoroastrian practice.

Painting towards the light: the watercolours of David Milne

7 July - 25 September 2005

G90, Admission free

David Milne (1882-1953) has long been recognised as one of Canada's most original and visionary painters. Watercolour was central to his practice, this exhibition shows around eighty of his finest watercolours and some of the colour drypoints for which he was also renowned. The British Museum is one of the few public collections outside Canada to own any of Milne's work. The remainder of the material will come from Canadian collections. A substantial loan from the National Gallery of Canada includes the striking compositions that Milne produced as a Canadian War artist in army camps in Wales and Yorkshire in 1918, followed by the battle-scarred landscape of Belgium and northern France.

**Forgotten Empire: the world of Ancient Persia**

**8 September 2005 – 10 January 2006**

**G5, Admission charge**

**Ancient Persia was the largest and wealthiest state in the Ancient Near East, eclipsing Assyria and Babylonia and overshadowing Greece in the west. This exhibition reveals the splendour of this vast empire (550BC to 330BC) through the art and archaeology of its rulers. The impact of its capital cities, such as Susa, Pasargadae and Persepolis and the legacy of its kings - Cyrus, Darius and Xerxes - will be assessed through its sumptuous material culture and magnificent architecture. The display will include some of the finest pieces from the collections of The National Museum of Iran, many of which have not been seen outside Tehran before, as well as key pieces from the Louvre in Paris, the Vorderasiatisches (Ancient Near East Antiquities) Museum in Berlin and the British Museum's own significant collections.**

**Samuel Palmer**

**10 November 2005 - 12 February 2006**

**G90, Admission charge**

**This exhibition will be the first major retrospective of Samuel Palmer since 1926, when many artists were captivated by Palmer's poetic vision rooted in a desire to reclaim the spiritual element in landscape composition. The deliberate 'primitivism' of his early work, associated with his famous 'Valley of Vision' at Shoreham in Kent, owed much to the inspiration of William Blake, the Bible, Milton and Bunyan, and to his study of the sixteenth-century engravings of Dürer and Lucas van Leyden. From the mid-1860s Palmer's poetic intensity revived in response to a commission from John Ruskin's solicitor for a series of watercolours arising from 'his inner sympathies'. Through the watercolours and etchings based on the minor poems of Milton and the Epilogues of Virgil, among others, Palmer's work became known to a new generation of artists and writers including W.B. Yeats.**

**Michelangelo Drawings: Closer to the master**

**March – June 2006 ( dates tbc )**

**G5, Admission charge**

**The exhibition consists of around 90 drawings by Michelangelo selected from the**

unrivalled collections of the British Museum, the Ashmolean in Oxford and the Teylers Museum in Haarlem. Autograph letters, wax models, and paintings from the National Gallery based on designs by the artist will also go on display. Through these works it will be possible to trace the course of Michelangelo's long and eventful career, and the creation of some of the greatest masterpieces of Italian Renaissance art, such as his two frescoes in the Sistine chapel. The sensuousness and immediacy of Michelangelo's studies, particularly those dedicated to the male nude, demonstrate why he has always been regarded as one of the greatest draughtsmen of the Italian Renaissance.

#### **ONGOING EXHIBITIONS:**

##### Cutting Edge: Japanese Swords in the British Museum

30 September 2004 – 27 February 2005

G92-94, Admission free

The Japanese sword is probably the most deadly cutting weapon ever developed by man, razor-sharp and almost unbreakable. But apart from its efficacy as a weapon, in Japan, the sword has always been imbued with a spiritual essence according to both Shinto and Buddhist thought. This exhibition features one hundred blades and mountings from the Museum's extensive collection, alongside prints and screen paintings which depict samurai and their weapons. All of the swords on display have been recently polished and conserved by a team of specialists in Japan, thanks to the support of the Peter Moores Foundation.

##### **Sudan: Ancient Treasures. An exhibition of recent discoveries**

**9 September 2004 - 9 January 2005**

**G5, Admission free (but a donation to Oxfam & Save the Children is suggested)**

**Sudan has long been eclipsed by its northern neighbour, Egypt. This exhibition, focussing on recent archaeological discoveries, highlights the extremely rich and diverse cultures which flourished in Sudan for millennia and made it not only Egypt's trading partner but its rival on the Nile. All the objects in the exhibition have been loaned by the Sudan National Museum, few have been seen outside Sudan before and many are new discoveries. The exhibition includes some of the finest Sudanese objects produced during all phases of human settlement from the Palaeolithic through to the Islamic period (from 200,000 years ago to AD 1885).**

**This exhibition will tour to the Bowes Museum, Co Durham in March 2005.**

##### Matisse to Freud: A Critic's Choice, The Alexander Walker Bequest

15 June 2004 – 9 January 2005

G90, Admission free

The renowned film critic and author, Alexander Walker (1930-2003), who reviewed for the *Evening Standard* for over forty years, left his extraordinary collection of more than 200 twentieth-century prints and drawings to the British Museum. Artists represented include Jasper Johns, Lucian Freud, Philip Guston, Bridget Riley, Rachel Whiteread, David Hockney as well as Picasso, Matisse and Miró. Walker was a highly discerning collector of modern art, with an eye for works which showed a new direction or turning point. His collection represents the largest and most significant bequest of modern works that the Department of Prints and Drawings has received in the past fifty years.

**This exhibition will tour later in the year**

##### **Mummy: the inside story**

**1 July 2004 – March 2005 (exhibition dates extended due to popular demand )**

**G35, Admission charge**

**Using cutting-edge computer graphics and the latest scientific and medical research, this ground-breaking new exhibition allows the visitor to view a 'virtual unwrapping' and autopsy, of a 2800 year old Egyptian mummy using computer images of astonishing clarity. Visitors sit in a state-of-the-art immersive theatre and are equipped with 3D glasses in order to explore every aspect of the mummy's body and scrutinise the objects inside the wrappings.**

**For images or further information please call the Press Office on 020 7323 8583/8522 or email [communications@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk](mailto:communications@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk).  
Communications Department Contacts:**

Joanna Mackle, Head of Communications: 020 7323 8345  
[jmackle@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk](mailto:jmackle@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk)

Hannah Boulton, Communications Manager: 020 7323 8522  
[hboulton@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk](mailto:hboulton@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk)

Ellen Mara De Wachter, Press Assistant: 020 7323 8583  
[emdewachter@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk](mailto:emdewachter@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk)

**British Museum - Gallery Opening Hours**

Saturday – Wednesday: 10.00 – 17.30

Thursday – Friday: 10.00 – 20.30 ( selected galleries only for late opening )

General Information: 020 7323 8299

Website: [www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk](http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk)