

**“THE MOST BEAUTIFUL” EGYPTIAN QUEEN USHERS IN EXTRAORDINARY COLLECTION OF  
ANCIENT ART AND OBJECTS**



[Queen Nefertari's Egypt](#)  
[December 6, 2020–March 14, 2021](#)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

October 7, 2020

Fort Worth, TX— The Kimbell Art Museum presents a sweeping showcase of female power and influence during the height of ancient Egyptian civilization in the upcoming exhibition *Queen Nefertari's Egypt*, on view from December 6, 2020, through March 14, 2021.

At the heart of the exhibition is Queen Nefertari, who was renowned for her beauty and prominence. Called “the one for whom the sun shines,” Nefertari was the favorite wife of pharaoh Ramesses II. She and other women of ancient Egypt are brought to life through 230 objects from temples, tombs, palaces and the artisan village of Deir el-Medina, presenting the richness of Egyptian culture some 3,000 years ago.

Drawn from the Museo Egizio in Turin, Italy, one of the most important and extensive collections of ancient Egyptian works in the world, these exceptional objects highlight the role of women—goddesses, queens and artisans—in Egypt’s New Kingdom period (c. 1539–1075 B.C.). Visitors can expect to see majestic statues, exquisite jewelry, decorated vases, papyrus manuscripts,

carved steles, splendid stone sarcophagi and intricately painted wooden coffins, as well as tools and items of daily life from the craftsmen who built the royal tombs.

“Ancient Egypt has long fascinated the modern world,” said Eric M. Lee, director of the Kimbell Art Museum, “and we are thrilled to present this remarkable exhibition that is altogether alluring, grand, exotic and captivating. We are especially grateful to the Museo Egizio for lending us this extraordinary collection of objects.”

### **Queen Nefertari: “The One for Whom the Sun Shines”**

Nefertari is one of the most celebrated queens of ancient Egypt alongside Hatshepsut, Nefertiti and Cleopatra. She was the Great Royal Wife, the favorite of pharaoh Ramesses II (reigned from 1279 to 1213 B.C.)—builder of grand monuments, vast tombs and monumental temples.

Although few details are known about Nefertari, archaeological records reveal that she was highly regarded and educated and could read and write hieroglyphs. Using these skills, she aided the pharaoh in his diplomatic work.

Until the early 1900s, Nefertari was known only through a few finds, such as sculptures, tomb paintings and hieroglyphs related to Ramesses II. In 1904, Italian archaeologist and then director of the Museo Egizio, Ernesto Schiaparelli, uncovered Nefertari’s tomb in the Valley of the Queens, located near the ancient capital of Thebes.

When the tomb was opened, he discovered brilliantly painted scenes depicting the perilous and challenging journey Nefertari had to make to appease the gods on her path to immortality. While the tomb itself proved to be extraordinary, he found that robbers had looted nearly all of its contents soon after it was sealed. The objects that were recovered, however, hint at what must have been a magnificent treasure trove of furniture, precious oils and other provisions for the afterlife. Objects found inside the tomb, presumed to belong to Queen Nefertari, are included in the exhibition.

### **The pharaoh, goddesses and the temple**

In ancient Egypt, the pharaoh served as the empire’s spiritual, judicial and political leader. While living, he was considered the incarnation of Horus, son of the sun god Ra, temporarily living among mortals. Death would transform the pharaoh into a full god, Ra, but while on Earth, the pharaoh was charged with maintaining justice, truth, order and cosmic balance.

The exhibition opens with a monumental granite sculpture of Nefertari’s husband, the great pharaoh Ramesses II, seated between the sun god Amun and his wife, the goddess Mut—the two patron deities of Thebes.

One of the most frightening Egyptian deities was the lion-headed Sekhmet, goddess of divine wrath. During the reign of Amenhotep III (c. 1390–1353 B.C.), hundreds of statues depicting Sekhmet were produced, including the four imposing sculptures displayed in the exhibition. Worshippers made offerings to Sekhmet daily to ask for her protection and ensure she remained in her gentle, domesticated form: the cat goddess, Bastet.

Although temple ceremonies were traditionally carried out by men, women also served the gods. Egypt’s queens played an important role in religious processions and celebrations, representing the female aspect of the divine on Earth. The goddess Mut—whose name means “mother”—embodied the ideal Egyptian woman. She was a supportive and dutiful wife, a powerful queen and an honored goddess. This blend of qualities made her a role model for women in all spheres of Egyptian society. Nefertari was also known as Nefertari Meritmut, which means “Beloved of [the goddess] Mut.”

### **Women in ancient Egypt**

Women were active participants in all spheres of ancient Egyptian society, from the fields and the courtroom to temples and palaces. Men and women were treated as equals in the eyes of the law. All women had the right to own property, run businesses and bring cases before the courts. Despite their unusual legal equality, women were primarily tasked with raising children and running the household.

The exhibition explores women’s roles in religion, life in the palace and their beauty and adornment rituals. Musical instruments, bronze mirrors, boxes and jars for cosmetic powders and ointments and precious jewelry offer a glimpse of women’s life and notions of beautification.

### **Daily life in the artisan village of Deir el-Medina**

Schiaparelli also made significant discoveries in the village of Deir el-Medina—located on the west bank of the Nile near Thebes and home to artisans working on royal tombs—that give us a remarkable understanding of what daily life would have been like for the builders and craftsmen who constructed Nefertari’s tomb, as well as their families.

Visitors will see household items, tools such as brushes and draftsmen’s sticks, pickaxes and chisels, ostraca (limestone or pottery sketchpads of ancient Egyptian scribes and artists) and funerary votive statues that provide a sense of the way people lived, worked and practiced religion more than 3,000 years ago.

### **Nefertari’s tomb**

Built by the artisans from Deir el-Medina, Nefertari’s tomb was constructed around 1250 B.C. and consists of two parts—the upper antechambers and the lower burial chamber, connected by descending staircases. The structure evoked a convoluted path that the deceased had to follow to reach the afterlife. Sometimes called “the Sistine Chapel of Egypt,” the tomb’s elaborately painted walls feature Nefertari and an array of gods and goddesses, animals and insects and hieroglyphic magic spells, illustrating the intricate process of passing through the underworld to eternal life.

A historic wooden model, complete with paintings to scale, was built following the discovery of the tomb in the Valley of the Queens and provides context for the objects on display. The model, which is on view in the exhibition, was so accurate that it helped in the conservation of the tomb in the 1980s.

Objects found inside the tomb, including fragments of Nefertari’s massive pink granite sarcophagus lid, wooden *shabtis* (small figures who could perform manual labor in the afterlife), a beautiful gold and faience amulet in the shape of a *djed*-pillar (a symbol of stability) and a pair of woven palm-leaf sandals (U.S. women’s size 9), are part of the exhibition. Visitors can also see a pair of mummified knees that may be the queen’s only surviving mortal remains.

While excavating in the Valley of the Queens, Schiaparelli discovered the tombs of two sons of Ramesses III (1187–1157 B.C.). Their tombs were constructed in the 20th dynasty (c. 1189–1077 B.C.) but reused about five centuries later. The exhibition closes with a number of beautifully decorated human-form coffins from these tombs, sculpted or painted with the eyes shown open as if the deceased were still alive.

“I hope visitors will appreciate the high level of artisanship in these works,” said Jennifer Casler Price, curator of Asian, African and Ancient American art, “whether it is a majestic carved stone sculpture, an exquisite piece of jewelry, a precious perfume jar, a beautifully painted piece of

domestic pottery, a humble painter's brush, delicately painted papyri, intricately painted coffins or even a queen's pair of unassuming palm sandals."

### **Egypt's legacy**

During its nearly 50-year history, the Kimbell Art Museum has presented several significant exhibitions of Egyptian art, including *Egypt's Dazzling Sun: Amenhotep II and His World* (1992), *Gifts of the Nile: Ancient Egyptian Faience* (1998), *Quest for Immortality: Treasures of Ancient Egypt* (2002) and *Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh* (2006), which focused on one of the most enigmatic rulers in Egyptian history. Among the Kimbell's collection are three superb examples of ancient Egyptian statuary, including [Portrait Statue of Amenhotep II](#), which was recarved for Ramesses II, Nefertari's husband, around 1250 B.C. and acquired in 1982.

*Queen Nefertari's Egypt* adds an exciting new show to the Kimbell's special exhibition repertoire and casts light on royal life in the palace, the roles of women in ancient Egypt, the everyday life of artisans and the powerful belief system and ritual practices around death and the afterlife.

"I hope that these incredible objects give our visitors a sense of stepping back in time and into the footsteps of ancient Egyptians, both royal and commoner," Casler Price said. "We're thrilled to bring the best of ancient Egypt back to Fort Worth."

### **Dates**

Kimbell Art Museum, December 6, 2020–March 14, 2021

*Subject to change*

### **Exhibition credits**

The exhibition is organized by the Museo Egizio, Turin, and StArt, in collaboration with the Kimbell Art Museum. It is supported by the Texas Commission on the Arts, the Fort Worth Tourism Public Improvement District and the Consulate General of Italy in Houston. Promotional support is provided by American Airlines, NBC 5 and PaperCity.



The organizing curator at the Kimbell Art Museum is Jennifer Casler Price, curator of Asian, African and Ancient American art.

### **Tickets**

Admission to *Queen Nefertari's Egypt* is \$18 for adults, \$16 for seniors and students, \$14 for ages 6–11, and free for children under 6. Admission is half-price all day on Tuesdays and after 5 p.m. on Fridays. Admission is always FREE to view the museum's permanent collection.

### **Inaugural lecture**

*Museo Egizio, Its Collections and Current Research*

Christian Greco, director, Museo Egizio, Turin, Italy

YouTube premiere: Saturday, December 5, 10 a.m.

In this online talk, Dr. Greco will explore the history of the most important collection of Egyptian material outside Cairo, with a focus on scientific research. These investigations are an important part of archaeology and Egyptology, resulting in better understanding and preservation of collections—including those featured in *Queen Nefertari's Egypt*.

### **About the Kimbell Art Museum**

The [Kimbell Art Museum](http://kimbellart.org), owned and operated by the Kimbell Art Foundation, is internationally renowned for both its collections and its architecture. The Kimbell's collections range in period from antiquity to the 20th century and include European masterpieces by artists such as Fra Angelico, Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Bernini, Velázquez, Monet, Cézanne, Picasso and Matisse; important collections of Egyptian and classical antiquities; and the art of Asia, Africa and the Ancient Americas.

The museum's 1972 building, designed by the American architect Louis I. Kahn, is widely regarded as one of the outstanding architectural achievements of the modern era. A second building, designed by world-renowned Italian architect Renzo Piano, opened in 2013 and now provides space for special exhibitions, dedicated classrooms and a 289-seat auditorium with excellent acoustics for music. For more information, visit [kimbellart.org](http://kimbellart.org).

### **About Museo Egizio**

The Museo Egizio—founded in Turin, Italy, in 1824—is the oldest museum dedicated to Egyptian antiquities and represents the second most important collection, outside of Egypt, of art and artifacts from this fascinating civilization that developed on the banks of the Nile. In its almost 200-year history, the museum has continually transformed, renewed and altered in an effort to join together the need for scientific research with the needs of visitors to the museum.

The permanent exhibition presents the history of the museum and its collections and the archaeological contexts of the objects on display, as well as the stories behind the expeditions, their organization and their discoveries. The exhibition space consists of around 10,000 square meters and 15 rooms filled with 3,300 artifacts distributed on five floors, as well as a 600-square-

meter area dedicated to temporary exhibitions.

###

**PRESS IMAGES**

Download press images [here](#).

**FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Katherine Polenz  
Head of Marketing and Public Relations  
Kimbell Art Museum  
817-332-8451, ext. 241  
[pr@kimbellmuseum.org](mailto:pr@kimbellmuseum.org)

Taylor Jensen  
Public Relations Coordinator  
Kimbell Art Museum  
817-332-8451, ext. 218  
[pr@kimbellmuseum.org](mailto:pr@kimbellmuseum.org)