The British Museum

Lending at Scale: balancing demand, resources and partnerships at the British Museum



David Packer
Head of Collection Documentation & Registration

What is the Demand?

British Museum has been able explicitly to lend from the Collection since 1963 (British Museum Act).

Covers:

- ‘Reactive’ loans out
- National Programme loans
- Long-term loans
- International Touring Exhibitions
- Research loans



And any other scenario where Collection objects leave the BM temporarily…

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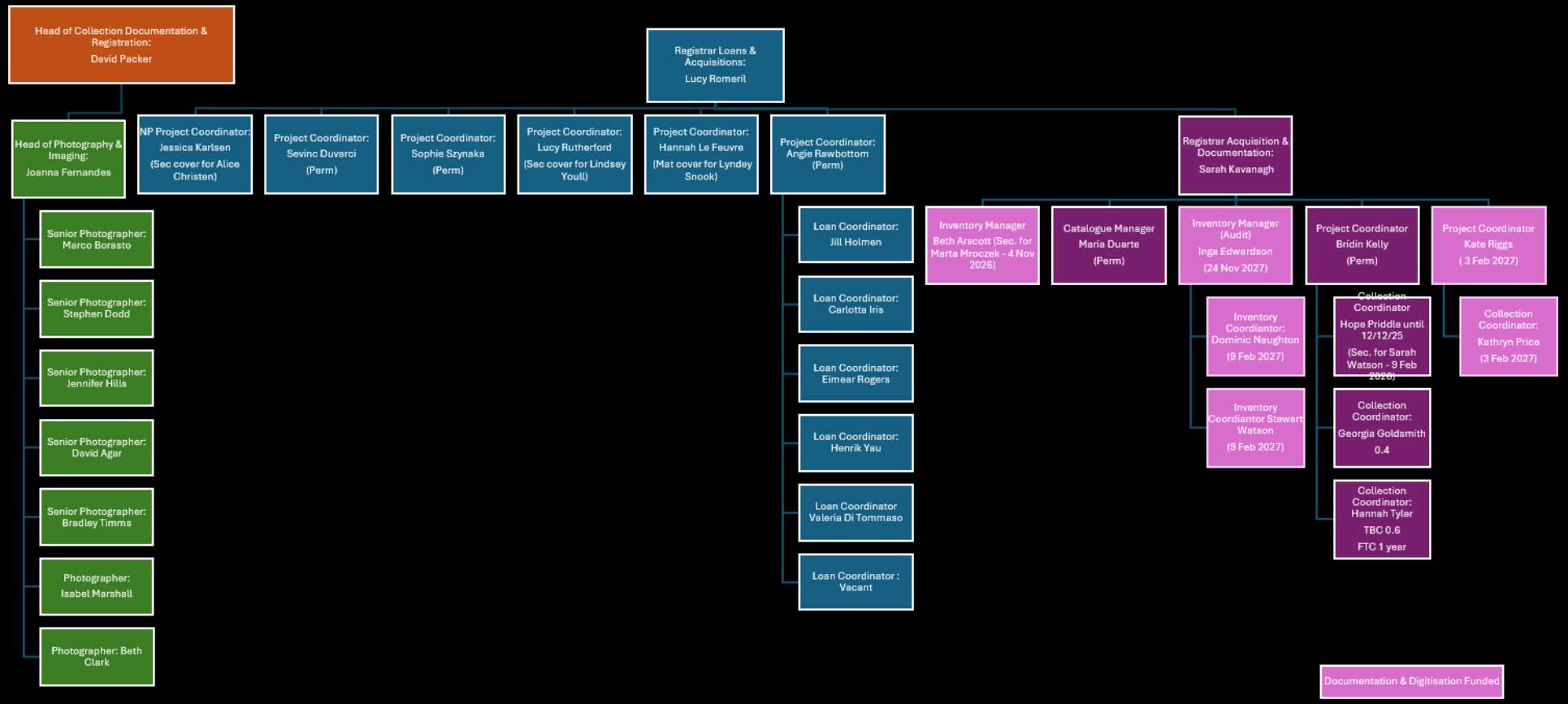
In 2025: 168 new requests for 1,028 objects – not counting ITEs

In most years we will have around 3,500 objects out

What are the resources?



Mechanism

Loan decisions are delegated from the Board of Trustees (they reserve some…):

“The British Museum may lend for public exhibition (whether in the United Kingdom or elsewhere) any object comprised in the collections of the Museum: provided that in deciding whether or not to lend any such object, and in determining the time for which, and the conditions subject to which, any such object is to be lent, the British Museum shall have regard to the interests of students and other persons visiting the Museum, to the physical condition and degree of rarity of the object in question, and to any risks to which it is likely to be exposed.” [British Museum Act, 1963]

Note:
Conditional
Collection and access focused
Dynamic

Mechanism

Stakeholders:

Keepers - Intellectual/Impact/Relevance
Conservation – suitable to travel
Registrar & Technical - resource

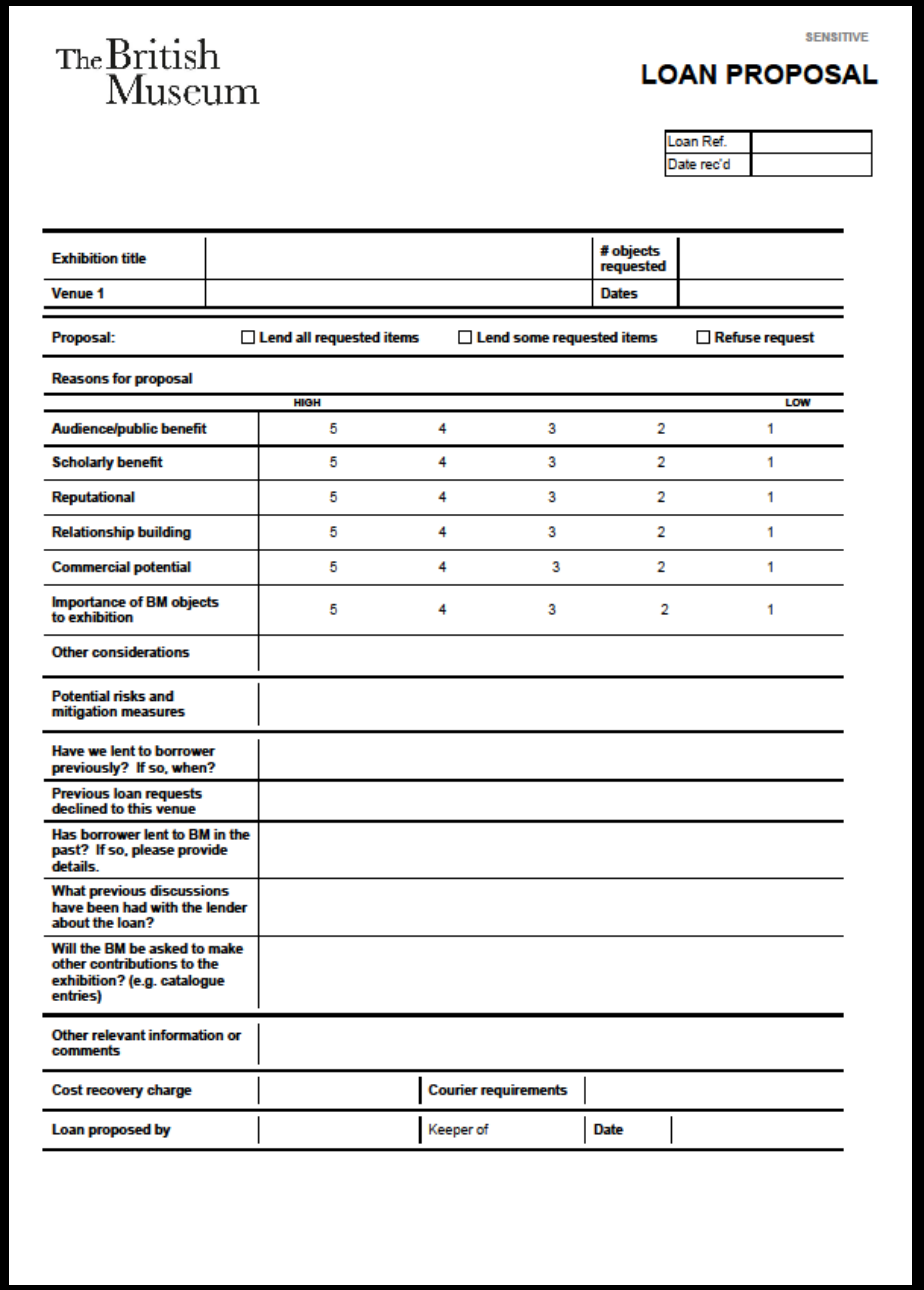
Loans Committee:

Programme – external
Programme - Bloomsbury
Partnerships
Commercial
Strategic
Resource

Director:

Overview

Mechanism



The British Museum

SENSITIVE

LOAN PROPOSAL

Loan Ref.	
Date rec'd	

Exhibition title		# objects requested	
Venue 1		Dates	

Proposal: ☐ Lend all requested items ☐ Lend some requested items ☐ Refuse request

Reasons for proposal

	HIGH				LOW
Audience/public benefit	5	4	3	2	1
Scholarly benefit	5	4	3	2	1
Reputational	5	4	3	2	1
Relationship building	5	4	3	2	1
Commercial potential	5	4	3	2	1
Importance of BM objects to exhibition	5	4	3	2	1
Other considerations					
Potential risks and mitigation measures					
Have we lent to borrower previously? If so, when?					
Previous loan requests declined to this venue					
Has borrower lent to BM in the past? If so, please provide details.					
What previous discussions have been had with the lender about the loan?					
Will the BM be asked to make other contributions to the exhibition? (e.g. catalogue entries)					
Other relevant information or comments					

Cost recovery charge		Courier requirements		
Loan proposed by		Keeper of	Date	

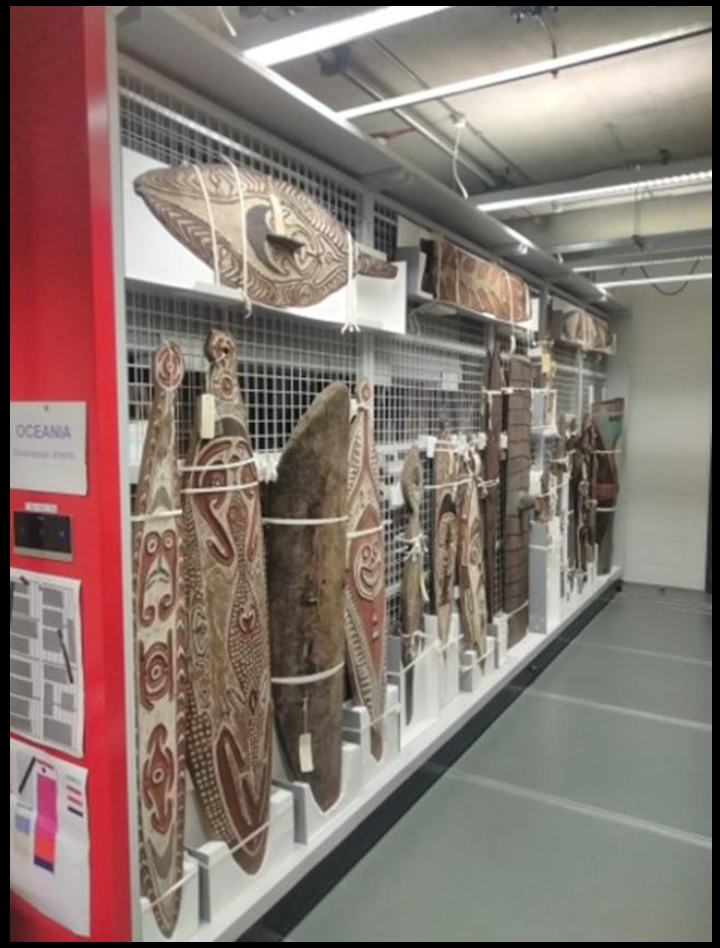
Mechanism


nm
dc
oans Between Nat
nd Non-national
lew Standards
nd Practical Guidelines
SMARTER
LOANS
MUSEUMS
ASSOCIATION
Effective
Collections
February 2012
Principles for lending and
borrowing from UK museums
ERC26
Conference
Venues
Registration
Program
Sponsors/Exhibitors
ERC
EUROPEAN
REGISTRARS
CONFERENCE 26
04–06 NOVEMBER | BERLIN
Program
The 14th European Registrars Conference will
take place in Berlin, Germany from 4th to 6th
November 2026.
REGISTRARS
DEUTSCHLAND

Future: where will loans go from here?

- Resources – funding and staff
- Masterplan – building upgrades
- Reducing carbon output across all activities
- Redefining core values and mission

- Response to restitution. What is our relationship with the communities, faiths and peoples represented in our collection?



Future: where will loans go from here?

Risks – always dynamic

- Geopolitical instability
- Cost fluctuations
- Emerging criminal risk – price of gold!
- Training pipeline - expertise





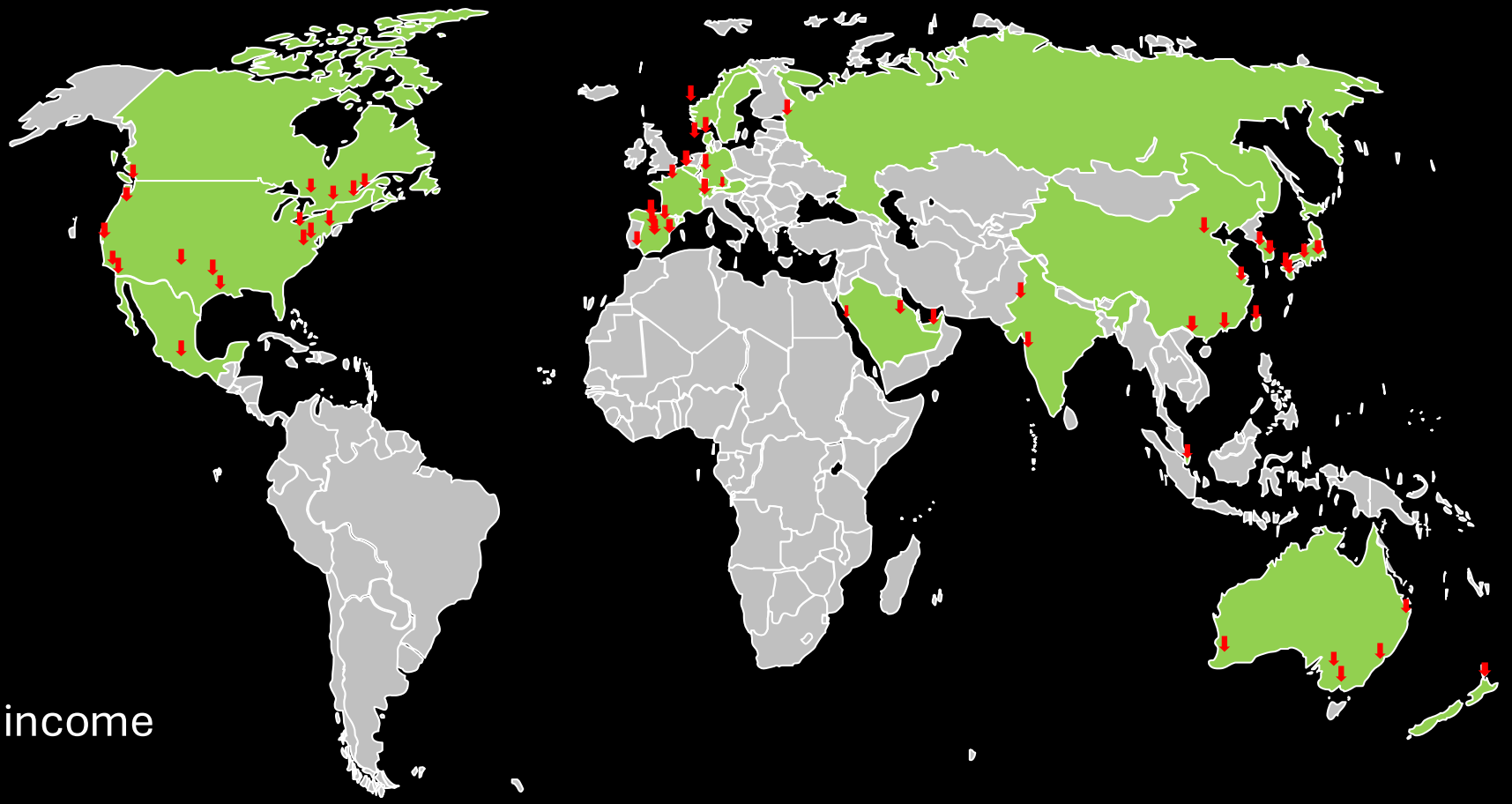




International touring exhibitions

Over the past 25 years...

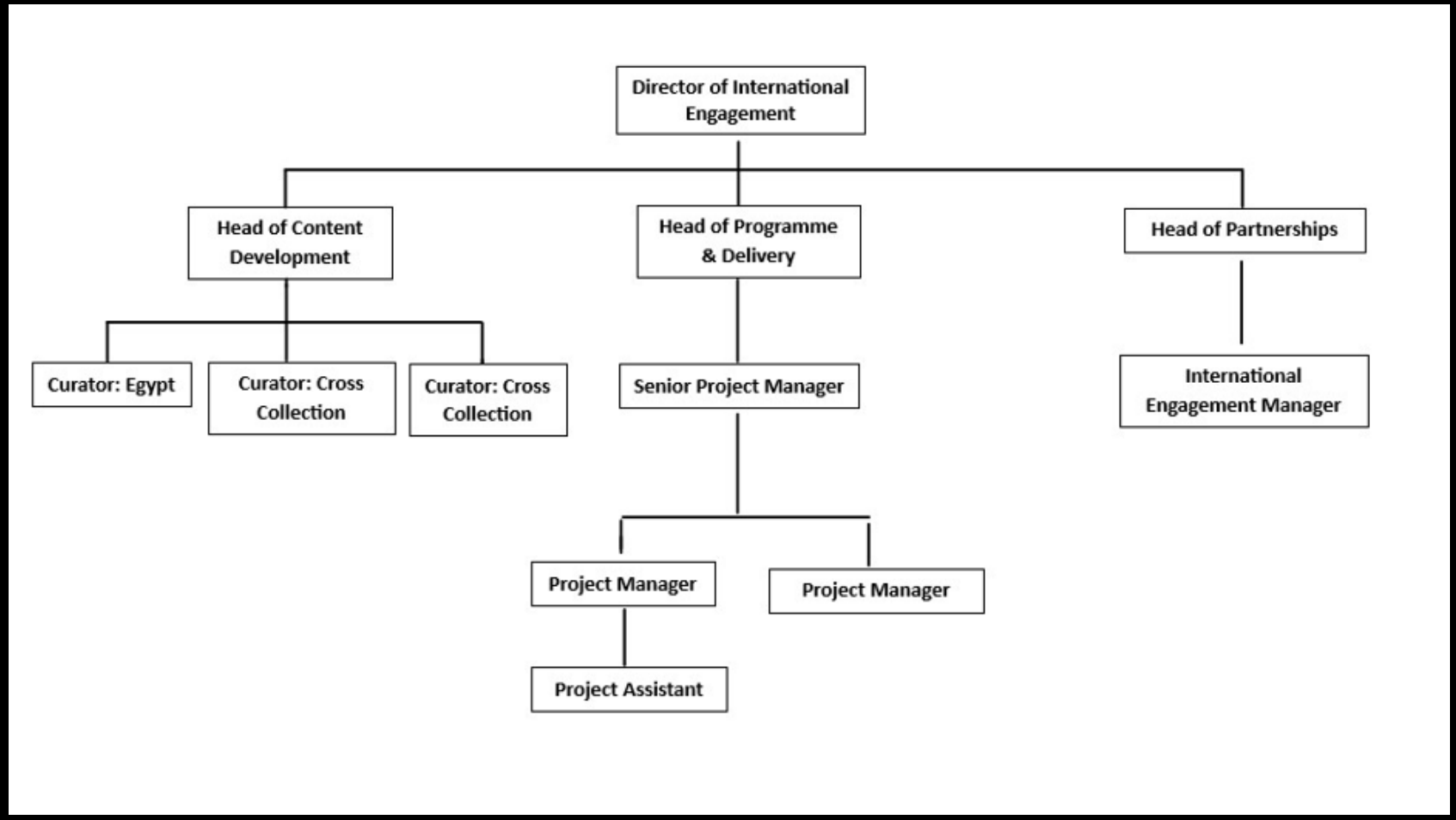
- 217 exhibition displays
- 27 countries
- 96 cities and towns
- Over 33 million visitors
- Generating unrestricted income



How international touring exhibitions benefit the British Museum

- Sharing the collection on a global scale
- International partnerships
- Income generation

Organigram


Director of International Engagement
Head of Content Development
Head of Programme & Delivery
Head of Partnerships
Curator: Egypt
Curator: Cross Collection
Curator: Cross Collection
Senior Project Manager
International Engagement Manager
Project Manager
Project Manager
Project Assistant

Touring exhibition models



CaixaForum Barcelona, Spain
(June – September 2018)



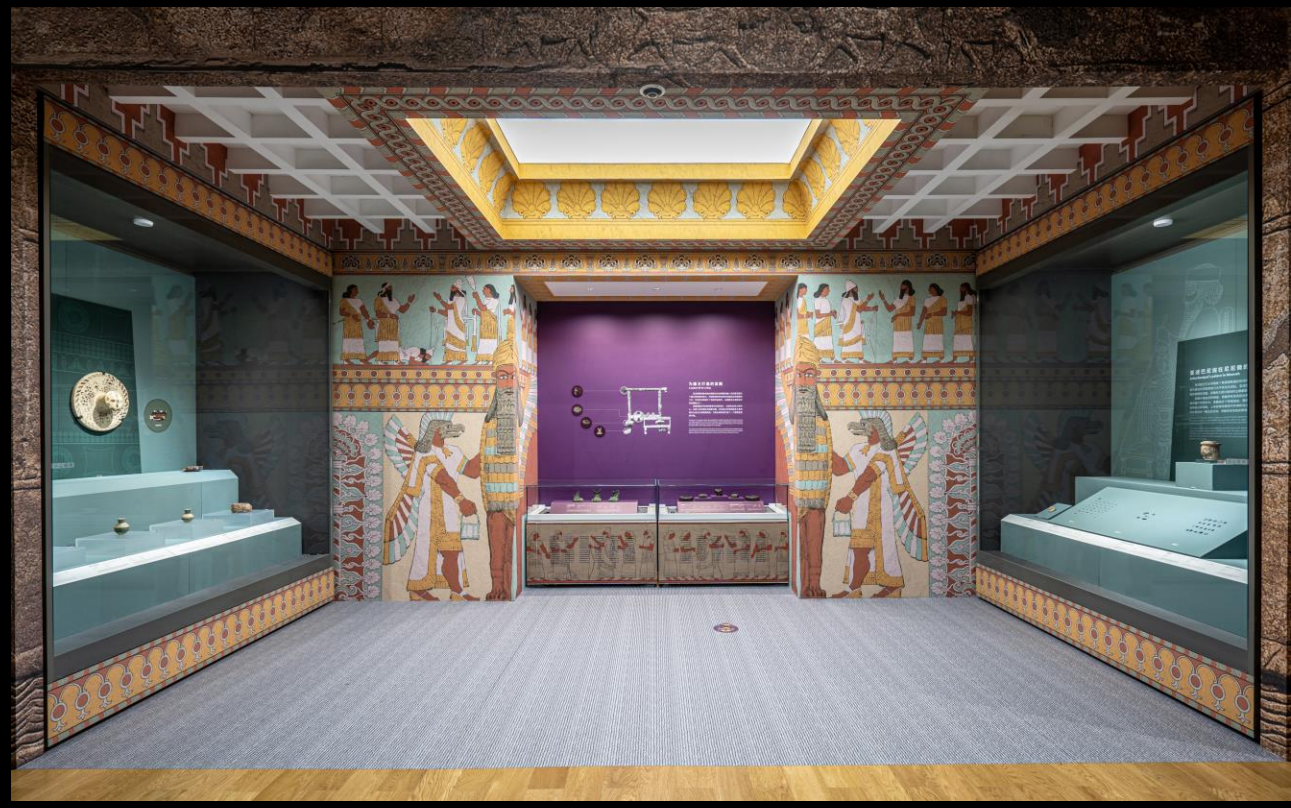
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
(June – October 2024)



Chimei Museum, Taiwan
(January 2026 – January 2027)



Feared and Revered: Feminine Power in World Belief, National Museum of Australia, Canberra (December 2022 – August 2023)



I am Ashurbanipal: King of the world, King of Assyria, Suzhou Museum, China (April 2024 – 4 August 2025)

Long-term international partnerships

- **10** CaixaForum venues across Spain
- Extra partner venue
- **13** touring exhibition titles
- **74** exhibition displays to date
- **3.8+** million visitors
- More exhibition displays to come, including Western Range











Hapag-Lloyd
HLXU 638439 45G1
HLXU 650864 45G1
TGHU 804774 45G1
GESU 564294 45G1
CAXU 914631 45G1
CLHU 826857 45G1
AMFU 859600 45G1
HLXU 653294 45G1
GATU 849966 45G1
HLXU 653944 45G1
FSCU 972482 45G1
CLHU 875 0744 45G1
HLXU 801634 45G1
FSCU 661609 45G1
TGHU 765741 45G1
CAUTION 96" HIGH
MAX. GROSS
TARE
MAX. PAYLOAD
CUBE
MAX. WT.

Delivery of International Touring Exhibitions



Courier team for 'Pharaoh: King of Egypt' install at National Gallery of Victoria, 2024



Mannequins being prepared for 'Islanders' exhibition, 2024

