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Queen Nefertari's Egypt



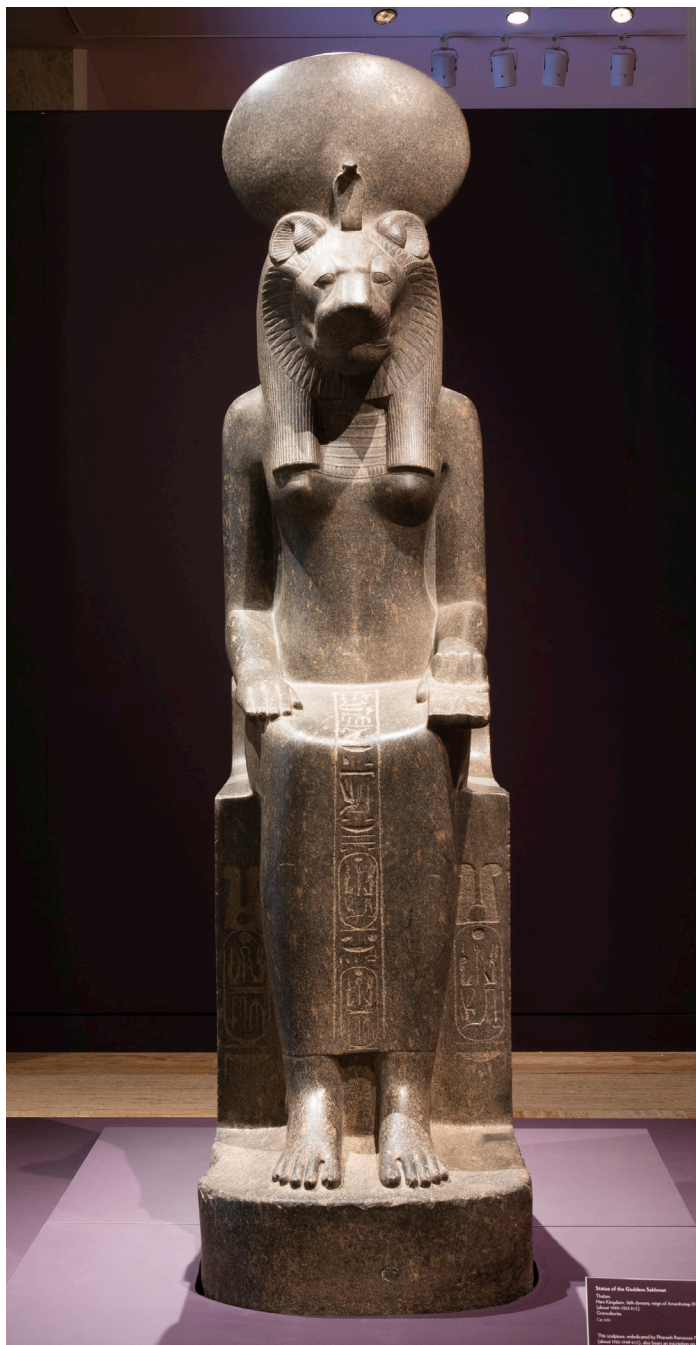
VIEWING GUIDE & PROMPTS

This guide includes suggestions to spark deeper looking, thinking, and conversation in the special exhibition *Queen Nefertari's Egypt*, on view October 16, 2021 – January 16, 2022, at the Portland Art Museum.

GODDESSES AND QUEENS

Queen Nefertari's Egypt features many representations of goddesses—from the large sculptures of Sekhmet and Mut in the introductory gallery to small amulets and mirrors decorated with the face of the goddess Hathor. Sometimes ancient Egyptian queens took on the status of goddesses after their deaths, as in the case of Queen Ahmose-Nefertari, the mother of Pharaoh Amenhotep I, who was worshipped by the village of Deir el-Medina. As you move through the exhibition, notice the powers attributed to each goddess.

- How are the goddesses' powers symbolized by their animal features, headdresses, and costumes?
- What do these deities tell us about the qualities that ancient Egyptians valued in women? What do they tell us about the forms of power available to women in ancient Egypt?
- How do the powers attributed to goddesses correspond—or not—to the roles and representations of actual women in ancient Egyptian society?
- Do these ancient representations of queens and goddesses resonate with ways that women are represented in art and popular culture today?



Statue of the Goddess Sekhmet

Thebes

New Kingdom, 18th dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III
(about 1390–1353 BCE)

Granodiorite

Cat. 0251

LOCATED IN THE INTRODUCTORY GALLERY

Sekhmet, “the Powerful One,” is the goddess of divine wrath and plague, and the fiercest hunter of the Egyptian pantheon. Daughter of the sun god Ra, she personified the sun’s rays that give life or take it away. Sekhmet appears here as a woman with the head of a lioness. Her headdress represents the solar disc and the *uraeus*, a sacred serpent that is an emblem of supreme power. She holds the hieroglyph of life (*ankh*) and the papyrus (*wadj*), a symbol of rebirth.

What is BCE?

Throughout this exhibition, you will see dates given as BCE (Before Common Era), also designated in some settings as BC (Before Christ). Both terms reference the common resetting of Western timekeeping approximately 2,000 years ago.



Stela with the Face of the Goddess Hathor

Excavation site unknown

New Kingdom, 19th dynasty (about 1292–1190 BCE)

Painted limestone

Cat. 1656

LOCATED IN THE FIRST RED GALLERY

The popular goddess **Hathor** was associated with rebirth in the afterlife, as well as love, sensuality, maternity, joy, and music. Hathor was often depicted with a woman's face, cow's ears, and a curled headdress. The goddess is also symbolized by a solar disc resting between a pair of curved cow horns topped with two falcon feathers.

For a contrast to the feminine virtues symbolized by the goddess Hathor, take time to examine "**The Harem Conspiracy Papyrus**" located in the case opposite this stela. The pharaohs of ancient Egypt had multiple wives who lived together, along with other female relatives and children, in the royal women's palace, also known as the harem. The primary purpose of the harem was to produce a royal heir. But succession was not always a simple matter, as this papyrus shows. Queen Tiye, a secondary wife of Ramesses III, led a coup, attempting to murder her husband and install her son as pharaoh. The coup failed, and this papyrus documents the court proceedings and punishments inflicted on the conspirators.

Statuette of Ahmose-Nefertari

Deir el-Medina

New Kingdom, 18th dynasty (about 1539–1292 BCE)

Wood

Cat. 1389

LOCATED IN THE SECOND RED GALLERY

Queen Ahmose-Nefertari lived 300 years before Queen Nefertari. The first queen of the New Kingdom, she was arguably the most venerated woman in Egyptian history. After her death, she was made a goddess and was worshipped as a protector of the worker's village of Deir el-Medina. She was often depicted with black skin associated with the rich Nile mud that was important to life in the Nile Valley and represented fertility and rebirth.



BEAUTY AND ADORNMENT

Egyptian men and women paid great attention to beauty and fashion, and the wealthy delighted in sporting the latest clothing, wigs, jewelry, and makeup styles. The exhibition contains a wonderful collection of personal objects—necklaces, handheld mirrors, cosmetic spoons and boxes. This container held kohl, which was ground from the black mineral stibnite and applied around the eyes not only to make the wearer beautiful but also to provide protection from bacteria and the harsh rays of the sun. Think of the materials that you use every day. What would researchers 3,000 years from now learn from them?

Kohl Pot of Queen Tiye

Excavation site unknown

New Kingdom, 18th dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III
(about 1390–1353 BCE)

Faience

Cat. 6236

LOCATED IN THE SECOND RED GALLERY



ART AND THE AFTERLIFE

Ancient Egyptians believed that life continued after death in the afterlife. To ensure that they reached spiritual paradise, they developed an extensive set of funerary practices, including preserving the body through mummification and constructing elaborate tombs. The spirit of the deceased embarked on a journey through the underworld, a dangerous realm overseen by Osiris, its lord and ruler. The artwork found in tombs aided the soul on this journey. The extraordinary murals on Queen Nefertari's tomb walls and the numerous stela, or decorated slabs, from artisans' tombs portray the deceased as they wished to remain forever and create a visual narrative of their passage through the underworld. Funerary texts, like the *Book of the Dead*, supplied spells or utterances that would help the deceased negate threats and overcome obstacles on the journey.

As you move through the exhibition, take the time to read the stories presented by these objects.

First, pause for a moment in front of one of the narrative works, such as a stela, mural, or papyrus. What do you notice about ancient Egyptian artists' visual style? Because many of us grow up seeing reproductions of ancient Egyptian art in popular culture, it's easy to forget to stop and look closely.

Think of five words you would use to describe the image you see. What details do you notice? What makes this art and its visual language different from art created by other cultures?

Now, trace the narrative. How does a soul journey through the afterlife? What actions do we see the deceased perform? Whom does the soul encounter along the way? How do these figures contribute to or thwart the soul's passage?



Stela of Nakhi

Probably from Deir el-Medina
 New Kingdom, late 18th dynasty (about 1300 BCE)
 Painted sandstone
 Cat. 1586

LOCATED IN THE FIRST GOLD GALLERY

Stelae, such as this one, are organized according to different registers—separated by horizontal lines—that depict different scenes. The top register of this stela shows the deceased, a craftsman named Nakhi, making an offering to the two main deities of the afterlife: Osiris, the god of the underworld, and the jackal-faced Anubis, the god of the dead, who guides the deceased in the afterlife. Both gods symbolize rebirth; Osiris' green skin evokes earth and fertility as well as death and resurrection. The middle register depicts Nakhi and his wife receiving offerings of food and drink, seen on the table in front of them, from their children. Their son is dressed in a panther skin, indicating that he is a priest. The bottom register illustrates Nakhi's other children holding lotus blossoms, symbols of resurrection.



Papyrus from the Book of the Dead illustrating the weight of the heart, Thebes, 1275 BCE © World History Archive / Alamy Stock Photo

Book of the Dead of Hor

Thebes
 Ptolemaic Period (332–30 BCE)
 Papyrus with ink
 Cat. 1803

LOCATED IN THE BLUE GALLERY

The gods Horus (falcon head) and Anubis (jackal head) weigh the heart of the deceased against Maat's feather, while the god of the underworld, Osiris, and forty-two judges look on. Should the heart be heavier than the feather (and thus judged to be not pure), the beast Ammit waits in readiness to devour the sinner. The god Thoth (ibis head) records the result of the trial.



Nefertari's Tomb

The final gallery of the exhibition allows visitors to imagine what it would have been like to enter Queen Nefertari's tomb soon after it was built (circa 1213 BCE). This gallery includes a three-dimensional model of the tomb as well as recreations of the brilliant murals that decorate the tomb's walls. The murals depict Nefertari's path to immortality as she pays homage to Osiris, god of the underworld, and Thoth, the Ibis-headed god of scribes and learning. She also makes offerings of food. The hieroglyphic texts are copied from the *Book of the Dead*. Nefertari's name appears in hieroglyphs in the cartouche, or gold oval, on each panel. The vulture is the symbol of Upper Egypt and considered a protector of the pharaohs.



MAKE CONNECTIONS TO ANCIENT ART AND CULTURES AROUND THE WORLD.

The Portland Art Museum's permanent collection includes ancient art found in China, Syria, and the Northwest United States. These works were created 1,000 – 2,000 years after the works in *Queen Nefertari's Egypt*, during the first centuries of the Common Era—still quite a long time ago! What similarities and differences do you notice in the styles and functions of ancient artwork across cultures? What do these works tell us about the beliefs of ancient people in these different regions and how they commemorated the dead?

Han Dynasty Tomb Objects

LOCATED IN THE EARLY CHINESE GALLERIES NEAR THE PARK AVENUE ENTRANCE TO THE MUSEUM.



China, probably Shaanxi province; or China, Henan province, *Ritual Orchestra*, 2nd century BCE/1st century BCE, earthenware with traces of pigment, The Arlene and Harold Schnitzer Collection of Early Chinese Art, public domain, 2004.114.7A-PP

Early Chinese tombs include functional implements used by the living together with *mingqi*—artifacts made specifically for burial. This Han Dynasty orchestral group depicts three musicians, a drum, and sets of stone chimes and bronze bells. It represents the kind of musical ensemble that would have been maintained by rulers and great nobles for use exclusively in court ceremonies or important religious rituals.

Greek and Roman Antiquities

LOCATED ON THE SECOND FLOOR OF THE MAIN MUSEUM, TO THE FAR RIGHT AS YOU ENTER THE EUROPEAN GALLERIES.



Unknown Palmyrene artist (Palmyra, Syria), **Funerary Portrait: Yarkhai son of Ogga and Balya his Daughter**, 150/200 CE
Limestone, Gift of Mr. Aziz E. Atiyeh, Public domain, 54.3

This funerary relief was created when Palmyra was part of the Roman Empire and a major outpost for trade caravans in the Syrian Desert. The form of this work—with side-by-side figures posed frontally—was inspired by traditional Roman tomb monuments. Couples usually depict a husband and wife, but the inscription in the Palmyrene dialect of Aramaic identifies these figures as a father and daughter.

Northwest Native American Art

LOCATED ON THE SECOND FLOOR OF THE MAIN MUSEUM.

Columbia River artist (Columbia River), **Anthropomorphic Figure**, pre-contact, basalt, 55 1/2 in x 17 in x 6 1/2 in, Museum Purchase: Funds provided by auction proceeds. Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon, 1999.58

This 4-1/2 foot tall anthropomorphic, or ancestral, figure carved from basalt is the largest stone sculpture ever found in North America that was created by Indigenous people before the arrival of Europeans. An ancestor figure, it was probably a symbol of fertility, strength, and renewal. This sculpture has not been scientifically dated. However, there is archaeological evidence of people living along the Columbia River from at least 12,000 years ago.

