

Displaying the British Museum: Past, Present, Future (London, 20–21 Feb 25)

The British Museum, Feb 20–21, 2025

Deadline: Aug 30, 2024

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We are pleased to issue a call for papers for an academic conference, scheduled to take place at the British Museum on 20th and 21st February 2025, on the theme of 'Displaying the British Museum: Past, Present, Future'.

Over the coming decades the Museum will be embarking on a radical transformation of its permanent galleries at Bloomsbury, the largest redisplay project since the Museum was rebuilt in the nineteenth century. As we look towards the future this is also a moment to critically evaluate the rich history of display and audience engagement at the Museum.

Over the course of almost three hundred years the galleries have continuously changed; as the collection has grown, as scholarship has transformed public understanding of the material on display and in storage, and as the internet, digitisation and other new technologies have offered dynamic formats through which objects can be shared worldwide. Since it first opened in the 1750s, the Museum's buildings and its urban context have also been transformed. Its original home, the ducal mansion Montague House, gave way to Robert Smirke's Greek Revival masterpiece which expanded to include the Round Reading Room, the Edward VII building, the New Wing and more recently the Great Court.

We welcome proposals for papers that offer critical perspectives on any aspect of the conference theme, dealing with either case studies or broader methodological questions. We are keen also to include papers that look beyond Bloomsbury, to engage with the history of the Museum's displays and exhibitions comparatively, and from a global perspective.

Please send your title and an abstract of 250 words, with a short 100-word biography to displayingthebm@britishmuseum.org. The deadline for submissions is 30th August 2024.

Topics for consideration

Enlightenment values: Montagu House and the earliest displays; Mapping the changing displays of the British Museum 1753 to present; Greek revival architecture and its legacies; Using archives to explore the history of display; The British Library at the British Museum; The Natural History Museum at the British Museum; The British Museum in the context of the British Empire; Imperial legacies and contested histories; The British Museum in wartime: displays during and after WWI and WWII; The galleries as inspiration for artists, art and design/interior design, e.g., what did Rodin see when he visited the British Museum?; The British Museum and contemporary art, includ-

ing collaborations with contemporary artists; The galleries and literature; 'Ethnographic' displays, including the Museum of Mankind at Burlington Gardens; Exhibitions: past, present and future – e.g., how Tutankhamun, the first British Museum 'blockbuster' shaped the exhibition programme; The history of interpretation at the Museum; Visiting the Museum: the visitor experience, tours, guidebooks and decorum; The role of security and visitor services staff; Collaborative approaches to display; Testing and evaluating new approaches to display (visitor research, evaluation, visitor studies); Displaying human remains; Displaying intangible heritage; Displaying replicas, casts and copies; The galleries as a space for debate and protest; Decolonising the British Museum; The galleries as spaces for performance (music, dance etc.); Galleries as sacred space; The Museum as a space for addressing marginalised or underrepresented histories and perspectives; Sustainability and display; Use of AV and other sensory engagement; The role of virtual display; Technology, AI and the future of museum displays

Reference:

CFP: Displaying the British Museum: Past, Present, Future (London, 20-21 Feb 25). In: ArtHist.net, Jun 28, 2024 (accessed Jun 2, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/42238>>.