



מוזיאון ישראל, ירושלים
the israel museum, jerusalem
متحف إسرائيل، أورشليم القدس

History of Humankind Illustrated Through 14 Objects Drawn from Israel Museum's Encyclopedic Collections

Special Exhibition Honors Museum's 50th Anniversary in 2015



Zadok Ben-David, *Evolution and Theory*, 1998

Jerusalem (April 30, 2015) – In celebration of its 50th Anniversary in May, the Israel Museum opens a major exhibition offering a brief history of humankind, as told through 14 pivotal objects from its holdings that illustrate the unfolding of civilization from prehistory to modern times. On view May 1 through January 2, 2016, *A Brief History of Humankind* showcases the rich and diverse holdings of the Museum, which span a timeline of hundreds of thousands of years from the dawn of human civilization to contemporary life. Among the objects on view are: remains of the first use of fire in a communal setting; the first tools used by humankind; rare examples of the co-existence of *Homo sapiens* and Neanderthals; the earliest evidence of writing and numerals; the first coins; ancient written evidence of the Ten Commandments; and the invention of electricity, concluding with the manuscript of Albert Einstein's *Special Theory of Relativity*.

“This exhibition is representative of the foundational narrative of the Israel Museum's encyclopedic holdings, which is why it is especially fitting that we reflect on such universal themes during the Museum's 50th Anniversary year,” said James S. Snyder, the Museum's Anne and Jerome Fisher Director. “The Museum's location atop the ancient Jerusalem landscape—where much of the world's shared history originated—provides us with an incredible platform to tell the story of human civilization from its origins to the present. And, while global society's evolution from ancient times is explored in-depth in this exhibition, it also reverberates throughout all of our galleries as an undercurrent that connects the breadth of our Museum's scope to this broader story worldwide.”

The narrative framework of the exhibition highlights three main revolutionary moments:

- **The Cognitive Revolution**, when the development of language and communication enabled *Homo sapiens* to survive and form complex societies. Among the objects on view include a 60,000-year-old hyoid bone, the small U-shaped bone found in the muscles of the human neck that gives us the ability to speak. This evolutionary development provided human beings with the capacity to tell a story and to narrate their own history.

- **The Agricultural Revolution**, which witnessed the first steps toward the evolution of settled civilization, the basis of modern society. The world's oldest complete sickle, at 9,000 years old, represents a major innovation that helped define society.
- **The Industrial Revolution**, the era of industrial development that eventually led to the scientific revolution and the underpinnings of socioeconomic life in our times. The accelerated sophistication of modern civilization is explored in this section, encompassing the emergence of scientific theories and developments and the impact of globalization, among other trends.

Within each section, the objects forming the exhibition's central narrative are amplified by works of contemporary art that connect these artifacts of our past to our present in resonant ways. Artists such as Mirosław Balka, Bruce Connor, Marc Dion, Douglas Gordon, Aernout Mik, Efrat Natan, Adrian Paci, Paul Pfeiffer, Charles Ray, Yinka Shonibari, Doron Solomons, Haim Steinback, Mark Wallinger, and Stefanos Zivopoulos are represented. All together, these works also underscore the universal character of the Museum's collections, demonstrating how they can also prompt questions on such overarching themes as survival and extinction, the conventions of modern society, and what the future holds for humankind.

A Brief History of Humankind is curated by Tania Coen-Uzzielli, Head of Curatorial Affairs; and Efrat Klein, Associate Curator.

50th Anniversary Exhibition Program Sponsorship

The Israel Museum's 2015 anniversary exhibition season is generously supported by the donors to the Museum's 50th Anniversary Exhibition Fund: Herta and Paul Amir, Los Angeles; Foundation Albert Amon, Lausanne, Switzerland; Ellen Bronfman Hauptman and Andrew Hauptman, Los Angeles and Stephen and Claudine Bronfman, Montreal, in honor of three generations of Bronfman family support for the Museum; Claudia Davidoff, Cambridge, Massachusetts, in memory of Ruth and Leon Davidoff; The Gottesman Family, Tel Aviv and New York, in memory of Dov Gottesman and in honor of Rachel Gottesman; The Hassenfeld Family Foundation, Providence, Rhode Island, in honor of Sylvia Hassenfeld; Alice and Nahum Lainer, Los Angeles; The Nash Family Foundation, New York; and Yad Hanadiv, the Rothschild Foundation in Israel.

About The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

The Israel Museum is the largest cultural institution in the State of Israel and is ranked among the leading art and archaeology museums in the world. Founded in 1965, the Museum houses encyclopedic collections ranging from prehistory through contemporary art and includes the most extensive holdings of Biblical and Holy Land archaeology in the world, among them the Dead Sea Scrolls. Over its first 50 years, the Museum has built a far-ranging collection of nearly 500,000 objects through an unparalleled legacy of gifts and support from its circle of patrons worldwide.

The Museum's 20-acre campus, which underwent comprehensive renewal in 2010 designed by James Carpenter Design Associates and Efrat-Kowalsky Architects, features the Billy Rose Art Garden, the Shrine of the Book, and more than 225,000 square feet of collection gallery and temporary exhibition space. The Museum also organizes programming at its off-site locations in Jerusalem at the Rockefeller Archaeological Museum, where it presents archaeological artifacts from the ancient Land of Israel; and at its historic Ticho House, a venue for exhibitions of contemporary Israeli art.

The Museum is celebrating its 50th anniversary throughout 2015, with a year-long program devoted to an exploration of Israel's aesthetic culture in the fifty years before and after its founding.

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