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PRESS RELEASE
Thursday, June 13, 2024

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Brooklyn Museum Announces Solid Gold, an Expansive Exhibition Exploring Gold through Six Thousand Years of History

Commemorating the Brooklyn Museum's 200th Anniversary, the exhibition will feature over 400 gold objects ranging from fashion, jewelry, and luxury objects to painting, sculpture, and film.



Greek. Wreath (details), 3rd–2nd century B.C.E. Gold. Brooklyn Museum; Gift of George D. Pratt, 26.763. Creative Commons-BY
(Photo: Brooklyn Museum)

As a material and a color, gold has symbolized beauty, honor, joy, ritual, spirituality, success, and wealth for all of human history. The alluring metal has been transformed into myriad forms—from millennia-old depictions of an idealized world to thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italian altarpieces, from Japanese screens to haute couture fashions, one-of-a-kind jewelry, and contemporary sculptures. Marking the occasion of its 200th anniversary, sponsored by Bank of America, the Brooklyn Museum will mount the immersive exhibition *Solid Gold*, which is dedicated to the element that has inspired countless works of art, fashion, film, music, and design. On view from November 16, 2024, through July 6, 2025, the exhibition is curated by Matthew Yokobosky, Senior Curator of Fashion and Material Culture, with Catherine Futter, Director of Curatorial Affairs and Senior Curator of Decorative Arts, and Lisa Small, Senior Curator, European Art.

“Solid Gold will transport visitors through the many worlds of gold, its joyful, though at times heartbreaking, histories, and its innumerable luminous expressions across cultures past and present.” says Yokobosky. “As a museum dedicated to bridging art and people in shared experiences, audiences will find inspiration, opening them to unexplored realms of beauty in their world.”

“Bank of America struck gold over a decade ago when our relationship with the Brooklyn Museum began,” said José Tavarez, president, Bank of America New York City. “Over the years, together we have celebrated the vibrancy of New York City’s arts and culture, conserved significant works of art and engaged the Brooklyn community—and beyond. We are now honored to stand beside the Museum to commemorate its 200th anniversary.”

Organized in eight sections, *Solid Gold* will present historical objects in visual juxtaposition and “collisions” with contemporary works and fashions, sparking dynamic conversations across time and space. The opening galleries present manifestations of ancient gold, pairing antiquities from the Museum’s collection with iconic twentieth- and twenty-first-century objects. Highlights include a large sarcophagus from Dynasty 22 (945–740 B.C.E.), which will be on display to the public for the first time in over a century. The coffin is decorated with images and inscriptions painted with yellow pigments to imitate gold inlays. An extraordinary “horde” of over 170 gold pieces from the Hellenistic period, along with a selection of ancient jewelry and chain mail that span three millennia of creation across Egypt, the Mediterranean coast, and the pre-Hispanic Americas, illustrate the ancient world’s fascination with the metal.

Contemporary pieces evoke the allure of ancient Egypt, including the prototype of a fly necklace made for legendary actress Elizabeth Taylor for the film *Cleopatra* (1963); couture gowns by edgy New York-based fashion house The Blonds, drawn from their *Egypt Meets Disco* collection (2016); and theatrical gowns from Christian Dior (2004; John Galliano, creative director) that blend elements of Egyptian history and Dior's then-controversial "H-Line" from 1954. A 1989 dress by Azzedine Alaïa for Tina Turner exemplifies modern applications of draped chain mail. Also on view are modern interpretations of gold chains, such as the "dookie rope" and "Cuban links," whose popularity in hip-hop culture from the 1980s onward is celebrated in the show.

The exhibition also includes a look at golden smiles. Gold disks and facial jewelry made in ancient Panama around the first millennium are presented alongside modern-day grillz (also known as fronts or golds). For practical and aesthetic reasons, such gold smiles have persisted across time and cultures.

"The Real Gold" explores the origins of gold—unearthed from diverse corners of the globe, from Nubia and South Africa to Colombia, Brazil, and beyond—tells a global story of ecological transformation, environmental impact, and the human repercussions that result from the search for this precious metal. A number of artworks, including William Kentridge's film *Mine* (1991), expound on the process and impact of gold mining. Another display features an array of gold coins from the American Numismatic Society and takes a closer look at both the minting process and the role of coins in disseminating propaganda images of important figures long before newspapers and social media. Rounding out this gallery is Zadik Zadikian's *Path to Nine* (2024), which juxtaposes the material histories of plastic and gold. Unlike plastic, which retains artifacts of its past when reused, gold can be melted down and re-formed without a trace. Zadikian's monumental sculpture illuminates the invisible histories of gold with the unerasable pasts of plastic.

In the "Working with Gold" section, the exhibition examines the wide array of techniques used by artists, craftspeople, and fashion designers when working with gold as a material and as decoration. With the invention of gold coinage in ancient Lydia (present-day Turkey) in the sixth century B.C.E., gold became an increasingly democratized material. Access to and use of gold was no longer restricted to royalty or for ritual purposes. Following centuries of alchemical experiments to replicate gold and the discovery of finds like pyrite (or "fool's gold"), the twentieth century saw technological innovations that introduced new forms of golden sparkle. New materials like laminated Lurex thread and plasticized sequins made it possible to add a twinkle to fabrics at an affordable price.

Genuine gold, however, remains coveted in fine art and haute couture fashion for both its aesthetic impact and monetary value. At Dior, Marc Bohan's celebrated Aladin ensemble from 1962 was made from a fabric woven with 56% gold on a black ground, amplifying its opulence. Conceptual artist Yves Klein and glass artist Howard Ben Tré utilized traditional gold leaf to explore gold's luminance in their works. Esteemed jewelers and designers such as Suzanne Belperron, Alexander Calder, Charles Loloma, Art Smith, and Elsa Schiaparelli drew on gold for its malleability, color, and shimmering glimmer that amplifies the gemstones it's set with. The exhibition also showcases the cultural significance and exquisite craftsmanship displayed in South and Southeast Asian bridal fashion. Works on view include elegant accessories such as a Nepalese dowry necklace, crafted by hammering sheets of gold over a lightweight core, and an Indian bridal veil made of gold-wrapped silk.

Other exhibition highlights are gold fashions and artworks from the 1920s and 1930s, such as the 1934 gold- and silver-leaf panel by designer Jean Dupas from the short-lived ocean liner Normandie. Such pieces are set alongside important Art Deco timepieces by French jeweler Cartier. Another highlight is the Museum's Lunar Moth baby grand piano, restored and on public view for the first time since its creation in 1928. Designed by famed photographer Edward Steichen, this piano is one of only two known to exist. The remarkable instrument is constructed of mahogany inlaid with gilded bands and mirrored tesserae.

The 1970s would bring about resplendent moments of gold in fashion and culture. Driven by the opulent designs of Halston, Norman Norell, and Yves Saint Laurent, the disco era celebrated abundant sequins, pavé beading, and rhinestones. Dazzling film clips from *A Chorus Line* (1985), which saw performers donning gold glitter tuxedos, and *The Wiz* (1974), featuring the parachute designs of Norma Kamali, epitomize the era. This section culminates with the premiere episode of the 1980 television series *Solid Gold*, featuring Irene Cara and the Solid Gold dancers bedecked in gilded ensembles delivering a rendition of her signature song "Fame." Fashions continue into the 1980s and 1990s with couture works by Pierre Cardin and Hubert de Givenchy, "luxury sportswear" from Gianfranco Ferré, and more recent "edgy" designs by Garth Pugh, Walter van Bierendonck, and Demna, artistic director of Balenciaga.

The final section celebrates gold as the universal symbol of achievement: a gold crown, a gold medal, a gold record, an Oscar, or a gold star on a report card. An ancient Greek gold laurel wreath dating to the third to second century B.C.E. (one of only four wholly extant wreaths in the world, and a gem from the Museum's collection) is displayed alongside modern-day crowns, such as a spectacular gold, platinum, and diamond tiara designed by Fulco di Verdura. Some gold awards are more symbolic, such as the gold-

star flags given to the mothers of military personnel who did not return from service, as documented by photographer Charles “Teenie” Harris. Many of the most coveted gold awards today are connected to performance, such as the Grammy Awards and other accolades awarded to Brooklyn-born songwriter Paul Jabara for his anthemic “Last Dance” (1978). Near the end of the exhibition, Rashaad Newsome’s KNOT (2014) is a performance-based video shown within a golden-jeweled environment; all the performers vogue in Christian Louboutin heels and would definitely receive “10s.” To close out the exhibition, visitors will walk upon the gleaming animated gold waves by international art collective teamLab, an immersive digital experience that emphasizes the fact that like the inexhaustible waves of our oceans, gold is truly eternal.

Solid Gold is organized by Matthew Yokobosky, Senior Curator of Fashion and Material Culture; Catherine Futter, Director of Curatorial Affairs and Senior Curator of Decorative Arts; and Lisa Small, Senior Curator, European Art; with Imani Williford, Curatorial Assistant, Photography, Fashion, and Material Culture.

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ABOUT THE BROOKLYN MUSEUM

For 200 years, the Brooklyn Museum has been recognized as a trailblazer. Through a vast array of exhibitions, public programs, and community-centered initiatives, it continues to broaden the narratives of art, uplift a multitude of voices, and center creative expression within important dialogues of the day. Housed in a landmark building in the heart of Brooklyn, the Museum is home to an astounding encyclopedic collection of more than 140,000 objects representing cultures worldwide and over 6,000 years of history—from ancient Egyptian masterpieces to significant American works, to groundbreaking installations presented in the only feminist art center of its kind. As one of the oldest and largest art museums in the country, the Brooklyn Museum remains committed to innovation, creating compelling experiences for its communities and celebrating the power of art to inspire awe, conversation, and joy.

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