PRESS RELEASE

‘Egypt’s Sunken Cities’ at the Minneapolis Institute of Art showcases more than 250 antiquities from one of history’s most significant underwater archaeological finds

The exhibition unearths the rich history of two cities that were submerged in the Mediterranean Sea for more than 1,000 years

MINNEAPOLIS—August 14, 2018—This fall, the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) will show an exhibition of antiquities from one of the greatest finds in the history of underwater archaeology. “Egypt’s Sunken Cities,” presented by U.S. Bank, will feature colossal, 16-foot-tall sculptures and precious artifacts from the long-lost cities of Thonis-Heracleion and Canopus. The exhibition will focus on the discoveries made during more than 20 years of underwater excavation by French archaeologist Franck Goddio and the European Institute for Underwater Archaeology.

The exhibition opens November 4, 2018, and is on view for an extended six-month run through April 14, 2019. It was recently shown at the Museum Rietberg in Zurich, the British Museum in London, the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris, and the Saint Louis Art Museum.

"Mia is thrilled to bring this exciting exhibition to the Twin Cities," said Jan-Lodewijk Grootaers, curator of African art and head of Mia’s Department of Arts of Africa and the Americas. "These finds have deep scholarly significance, giving us a greater understanding of the intermingling of Egyptian and Greek politics, religion, and aesthetics, and groundbreaking insights on ancient secret rituals. Discovered and removed from the depths of the Mediterranean Sea, these objects transport the viewer to another world and time with their grandeur, scale, sheer beauty, and the rich history they represent."

The ancient city of Thonis-Heracleion—a major port and Egypt’s premier center for trade with the Greek world—and neighboring community Canopus once stood on Egypt’s north coast. But by 800 C.E., soil liquefaction, natural disasters, and the rising tides of the Mediterranean Sea caused them to submerge.

The ruins remained underwater for more than 1,000 years, until 2000, when Goddio—a pioneer of modern maritime archaeology, director of excavations, and founder of the European Institute for Underwater Archaeology—discovered them while exploring Aboukir Bay near the city of Alexandria. Along with a team of archaeologists, Egyptologists, historians, geologists, geophysicists, and computer engineers, Goddio uncovered monumental statues, religious images carved in stone, exquisite jewelry, and delicate ceramics.
“Archaeology is the combination of science and precision—the process and methodology of excavation—with ambiguity and imagination,” said Kaywin Feldman, Nivin and Duncan MacMillan Director and President of Mia. “Indeed, ‘Egypt’s Sunken Cities’ offers us both a scientific exploration of a watery underworld excavation of a civilization destroyed long ago, while also revealing a mysterious and wondrous world filled with marvels.”

Goddio’s research also revealed this area as a significant site of religious pilgrimage. The excavation helped scholars understand the Mysteries of Osiris, an ancient ritual commemorating one of Egypt’s most important myths: the murder and resurrection of Osiris, god of the afterlife. The annual ceremony unfolded over 20 days. It involved the making of Osiris effigies crafted from highly symbolic ingredients, such as soil from the Nile River, and ended in a water procession along the canals between Thonis-Heracleion and Canopus. The Mysteries of Osiris were believed essential to ensure the balance of the cosmos, to safeguard the dynastic continuity of the pharaohs, and to guarantee the annual floodwaters that regenerated Egyptian daily life.

More than 250 works of art—including three monumental sculptures, each weighing more than 8,000 lbs.—discovered by Goddio’s team will be shown in “Egypt’s Sunken Cities.” In addition, complementary artifacts from museums in Cairo and Alexandria will be on view.

Exhibition tickets go on sale August 20.
The Store at Mia will organize an “Egypt’s Sunken Cities” satellite store featuring exhibition-related items in the museum’s lobby.

For more information on programming, visit new.artsmia.org/egypts-sunken-cities.

Support
The presenting sponsor of the exhibition in Minneapolis is U.S. Bank, with lead support from the Nivin and Duncan MacMillan Foundation, Mary Ruth Weisel, John and Nancy Lindahl, Campbell Foundation/Carmen and Jim Campbell, Thomson Reuters, The Crosby Family Fund for Exhibitions, Best Buy Co., Inc., and Fredrikson & Byron, P.A. Major sponsors are Delta Air Lines and the Mary Ingebrand-Pohlad Charitable Foundation. The Star Tribune is the media partner.

About Franck Goddio
Wanderlust and a passion for the sea runs in Franck Goddio’s veins. He is the grandson of Éric de Bisschop, a navigator and writer who invented the modern catamaran while studying ancient navigational routes in the South Pacific. Goddio dedicated himself to underwater archaeology in the early 1980s and founded the European Institute for Underwater Archaeology, of which he currently serves as president. He is a visiting professor of Oxford University and the co-founder of The Oxford Centre for Maritime Archaeology.

Goddio initiated several shipwreck excavations, including of seven junks dating from the 11th to 16th centuries, two Spanish galleons, and two trading vessels of the British East India Company. Goddio’s most significant project began in 1992, when his team started its investigation of a portion of Egypt’s Bay of Alexandria, where he discovered, mapped, and started excavation of the ancient Great Port of Alexandria. In 1996 he launched a research mission in Aboukir Bay off the coast of Alexandria, and in 2000 discovered the submerged ancient city of Thonis-Heracleion and parts of the city of Canopus. Goddio’s excavations, conservation, and scientific studies have been supported by the Hilti Foundation for more than 20 years.

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About The Minneapolis Institute Of Art

Home to more than 90,000 works of art representing 5,000 years of world history, the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) inspires wonder, spurs creativity, and nourishes the imagination. With extraordinary exhibitions and one of the finest wide-ranging art collections in the country—Rembrandt to van Gogh, Monet to Matisse, Asian to African—Mia links the past to the present, enables global conversations, and offers an exceptional setting for inspiration.

General admission to Mia is always free. Some special exhibitions have a nominal admission fee.

Museum Hours

Tuesday, Wednesday, Saturday 10am–5pm
Thursday, Friday 10am–9pm
Sunday 11am–5pm
Monday Closed
For more information, call + 1 612 870 3000 or visit artsmia.org