



Ramses the Great, ancient Egypt's most powerful king, reigns at the de Young

By [Shoshi Parks](#) Aug 19, 2022

Ramses the Great was the most powerful, most celebrated pharaoh of ancient Egypt.

A talented military leader, he ushered in a golden era of security and prosperity and built a never-before-seen number of monuments, temples, and colossal statues (mostly dedicated to himself) across his kingdom. By the time of his death 67 years after assuming the throne, there were few in Egypt who'd ever known another ruler.

Three thousand years later, Ramses the Great's legacy still looms large, and the artifacts associated with his reign are among Egypt's most treasured heritage. On Friday, August 19th, 181 of them make their debut in San Francisco for the first time in the de Young Museum's new exhibition, *Ramses the Great and the Gold of the Pharaohs*.



Installation view of "Ramses the Great and the Gold of the Pharaohs."
(Courtesy of World Heritage Exhibitions)

The exhibition, however, is more than just a set of beautiful objects. Using virtual reality and multimedia, it brings to life the most important events and places of Ramses' rule.

"This is a once in a lifetime opportunity," says Thomas P. Campbell, director and CEO of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. "It's truly an immersive experience that engages all the senses with muscle."

The artifacts on display in *Ramses the Great* range from stone cartouches and life-sized statues to delicate jewelry and exquisitely detailed coffins. In one room, an unusual collection of animal mummies that were recently discovered in the ancient city of Memphis—cats, lion cubs, mongoose, crocodiles, and scarab beetles—appear for the first time ever. In another, they recreate the crypt of Sennedjem, a royal artist and the builder of Ramses' own tomb, surrounding his real, lavishly painted coffin with images of the afterlife projected on the walls and ceiling; these images are the same as those that were found painted in the actual tomb.



The silver coffin and coffinettes of Sheshonq II.
(Courtesy of World Heritage Exhibitions)

Elsewhere, a multi-platform presentation illuminates what ancient scholars consider the largest, most chaotic battle ever fought, the Battle of Kadesh, which Ramses the Great won in 1274 B.C. just a few years after assuming the throne. The epic assault takes place across three screens that combine cinematic views of the combat with shifting imagery of the battlefield.

But the most exciting multimedia element of *Ramses the Great* is the 10-minute virtual reality component, *Ramses & Nefertari: Journey to Osiris*, installed in the Piazzoni Mural Rooms upstairs. With noise-canceling headphones, VR goggles, and a spinning, tilting, rumbling chair, visitors follow Ramses' first wife Nefertari on a tour of her husband's most impressive monuments, Abu Simbel and Nefertari's Tomb. The temple and crypt appear like they would have at the time of their construction, immensely detailed and convincingly real. The makers even threw in a bit of extra drama to keep things interesting.



Installation view of "Ramses the Great and the Gold of the Pharaohs."
(Courtesy of World Heritage Exhibitions)

"The temples [Ramses] erected, statues he commissioned, and monuments he inscribed throughout Egypt and Nubia, and funerary temple and royal tomb he built, were reminders of his earthly power and closeness to the gods," says Renee Dreyfus, George and Judy Marcus Distinguished Curator and curator in charge of ancient art at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. With VR, visitors get the chance to experience what moving through those spaces was like thousands of years in the past.

// Both Ramses the Great and the Gold of the Pharaohs and Ramses & Nefertari: Journey to Osiris will be on exhibition from August 20th through February 12th, 2023. Timed entry tickets can be purchased in advance and there is an extra charge, \$18/person, for the VR experience; De Young Museum, 50 Hagiwara Tea Garden Dr. (Golden Gate Park), deyoung.famsf.org.



The VR experience "Ramses and Nefertari: Journey to Osiris."
(Courtesy of World Heritage Exhibitions)

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