

SYDNEY INTERNATIONAL ART SERIES

MEDIA RELEASE

# THE FIRST EMPEROR

CHINA'S  
ENTOMBED  
WARRIORS

始皇帝

SYDNEY ONLY  
2 DECEMBER 2010 –  
13 MARCH 2011

ART  
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始皇帝

Come face to face with the guardian warriors of China's First Emperor, entombed for over 2000 years.



'You think that the China of 2000 years ago is long dead and buried? Far from it. Every day, as the archaeologists toil away around the burial mound of one of the most remarkable figures in the history of China – The First Emperor – new finds and moments of the wealth of China's ancient past are revealed. This is an epic story that has begun but is far from fully told.'

Edmund Capon

*The First Emperor: China's entombed warriors* brings to Sydney one of the greatest archaeological discoveries of our time. Australia was the first country outside China to see these figures in the exhibition *Qin Shihuang: Terracotta warriors and horses* in Sydney in early 1983. It is therefore fitting that the Art Gallery of New South Wales should organise their return in an exhibition presenting over 120 objects, with 10 of the world-renowned warriors and horses, and significant recent finds from the First Emperor's mausoleum located in the province of Xi'an, central China.

This exhibition explores the period of Chinese history preceding the Qin dynasty of the First Emperor, and then establishes his considerable achievements. Through a display that evokes the actual pits of the entombed warriors, visitors are given an unprecedented opportunity to examine up close the intricacies of these wondrous life-size figures. The final section of the exhibition adds to the evolving story with a number of recently discovered objects.

*The First Emperor: China's entombed warriors* is curated by the Gallery's director, Edmund Capon, a renowned authority on Chinese art and archaeology, and Dr Liu Yang, senior curator of Chinese Art. Edmund Capon was one of the first westerners to see the initial find in 1974. The exhibition is designed by Richard Johnson, architect of the Gallery's superb Asian gallery and its acclaimed exhibitions *The arts of Islam* (2007) and *The lost Buddhas* (2008).

The exhibition is drawn from institutions including the Museum of Terracotta Warriors and Horses, the Shaanxi Provincial Archaeological Institute and the Shaanxi History Museum.



What is so remarkable about the First Emperor's buried army is not only its immense scale but its authenticity and realism. For here ... [are] images of the scale, presence and detail of real people that is totally without precedent.

Edmund Capon

There is no other individual who has so impressed himself on the unfolding drama of the history of the Middle Kingdom. From the moment Qin Shihuang (259–206 BCE) ascended to the throne of the Qin State at the tender age of 13 he began to plan his burial – one man's quest for immortality has created such universal fascination and an enduring a legacy.

Qin Shihuang is an almost mythical figure from Chinese's ancient past, variously described as a cruel and brutal ruler, and a hero and revolutionary. Above all he is renowned as the founder of a united China. Born at a time of turmoil in China's history, known as the Warring States period (475–221 BCE), Qin Shihuang was the founder of the short-lived Qin dynasty (221–210 BCE). He transformed the seven warring states into one nation and himself from stately king to First Emperor.

The rulers of the State of Qin played their indispensable parts over centuries as they gradually expanded their domain of neighbouring states with unerring military determination, culminating in the ultimate victory of uniting a once divided empire. Qin Shihuang was the ruler to accomplish this task. The exhibition presents carefully selected objects including bronze ritual and jade artefacts, gold and silver ornaments, and palatial architectural components that illustrate the emergence of the Qin State.

The First Emperor is remembered not only as a tyrant, but also for abolishing the old system of feudal investiture and establishing a new hierarchical system of administration throughout the country. He unified the code of laws; standardised the script, measures and currency; initiated gigantic projects such as the final construction of the Great Wall; built highways to facilitate communication; and, of course constructed his final testament to his own immortality – this overwhelming burial.

The Terracotta Army was discovered in 1974 approximately 1km from the Emperor's tomb. Local farmers were drilling a well and discovered fragments of terracotta figures. Shortly after, Chinese archaeologists excavated three pits containing what is estimated to be more than 7000 terracotta warriors of different ranks together with horses and chariots all designed to protect the Emperor in his afterlife. These figures, created 2200 years ago, are a triumph of realism. They each have a wondrous, animated, realistic style, a radical departure from the symbolic bronzes of earlier dynasties.

The more recent discoveries in the exhibition include three exquisite bronze birds that, together with other animals and acrobats, were designed to entertain the Emperor in the afterlife. Found 900 metres from the outside wall of the tomb were 46 life-sized birds all lining the banks of an artificial watercourse, believed to be a scene of court musicians training birds in the royal park. A number of suites of armour recovered from the pit nearest the tomb are also included in the exhibition.

It is important to note that the actual tomb of Qin Shihuang remains an unopened burial mound. This, perhaps, will be the greatest discovery for the next generation. But Qin Shihuang's ideas about life after death are reflected by what we find around his tomb, a great underground palace complex – a complete departure from previous tombs. His intention was nothing less than never-ending rule over the universe. He wanted to live forever and now, more than 2000 years later, some may say he has succeeded!

## BACKGROUND NOTES

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THE  
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ENTOMBED  
WARRIORS



**BO BELL**  
Spring and Autumn period  
Duke Wu's reign (r697–678 BCE)  
bronze, height 69.6cm  
excavated at Taigongmiao village,  
Yangjiagou in Baoji, Shaanxi, 1978  
Baoji Bronze Museum IAS.4

### First Emperor

The First Emperor, Qin Shihuang, (born 259 BCE; reigned as First Emperor 221–210 BCE) is a crucial figure in China's history. Within 10 years of his reign as king of the State of Qin (pronounced 'chin') he had unified all seven of the Warring States to create the Qin dynasty. He presided over the standardisation of currency, weights, measures and script and consolidated and extended the construction of the Great Wall.

### Qin Shihuang's tomb

Qin Shihuang planned his tomb as an elaborate subterranean palace, a parallel world that would provide for him and perpetuate his rule in the afterlife. Work began on the tomb as soon as he became emperor and it is believed it took more than 700 000 people and 38 years to build. The complex plan and symbolic content of the tomb are far beyond anyone's imagination. It has become one of the most famous archaeological sites in the world, and the most important ongoing excavation in China. Only a small portion of it has been excavated and remarkable discoveries continue to be made with the Emperor's yet to be uncovered tomb. Included in this exhibition are some of the most recent discoveries of the last 10 years, including bronze birds and suits of stone armour. When the First Emperor's body was laid to rest (a year after he died, since he died in a remote part of the empire) a very large number of workers and craftsmen were still at work on the burial and were entombed alive in the mausoleum.

### The Terracotta Army

Farmers digging a well unearthed the head, hands and body of a life-size terracotta warrior. They discovered the first soldier in what is now known to be an army more than 7000 strong created to protect the tomb of the First Emperor. To date, approximately 25% of the army has been excavated. Armoured generals, armoured and light infantrymen, cavalrymen, standing and kneeling archers, charioteers and chariot horses form the vast underground army protecting the Emperor's eternal sleep and ensuring his grand vision of never-ending rule.

The army's location and orientation about 1km east of the tomb suggest that their function was to guard and protect the entrance to the spirit road leading to the burial. The terracotta figures were placed in the pits in precise military formation according to rank and duty. Their uniforms and hairstyles vary depending on rank. The sheer scale of this buried army aside, what makes this vast discovery so extraordinary is the quest for a prosaic reality, with the meticulous attention to detail of the soldiers' hairstyles, laces, armour, facial features and pigmentation; some were even equipped with actual weapons, as the many finds of bronze swords, spears, crossbow mechanisms and arrowheads attest.

Four pits were dug to hold the Terracotta Army, although only three were filled by the time construction finished. The pits have brick floors and a sequence of rammed-earth partitions and tunnels. The tunnel floors were covered with mats, on which the figures were placed, covered with wood and then finally covered with earth.

## SPECIAL EVENTS & PROGRAMS

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### Symposium

Saturday 4 & Sunday 5 December 2010

#### Innovation and creativity in Ancient Qin

The world's top scholars in the art and archaeology of ancient China gather at a symposium organised in partnership with the University of Sydney and the support of the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation and the Australia China Council. Some of the noted speakers include Jessica Rawson of Merton College Oxford, Dr Albert Dien from Stanford University, Dr Jeffrey Riegel from the University of Sydney and Dr Jay Xu, director of the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, as well as our own director Edmund Capon and curator of Chinese art Dr Liu Yang.

### VisAsia Hing Yiu Mok

#### Mandarin language lecture

Sunday 5 December 11am

#### The design concept of the Qin Shihuang Mausoleum

Duan Qingbo, professor, department of archaeology, Northwest University, Xi'an. Delivered in Chinese without translation  
FREE

### Holiday fun for kids

The Gallery's own Chinese tomb guardian comes to life for performance tours on Sundays and daily weekdays during the January school holidays.

### Art After Hours

Open Wednesdays until 9pm

A program of celebrity talks and performance highlighting both ancient and contemporary Chinese arts from archeology and architecture to statecraft and cuisine. January late nights have a martial arts focus, with taichi, kungfu and qigong demonstrations at 6.30pm followed by Chinese music in the Artbar from 7.30pm.

### Film series

#### Adventures in ancient China

8 December 2010 – 6 March 2011

FREE

A series of epic, cinematic adventures set in ancient China. From the ritual of life in the Forbidden City, to the political upheaval, war and social change occurring in the rest of the country during centuries of turmoil, this cycle of films offers adventure, romance and spectacle, an insight into daily life over 2000 years of Chinese history. Highlights include *Hero* (dir. Zhang Yimou 2002), *Red cliff* (dir. John Woo 2009), *The Emperor and the assassin* (dir. Chen Kaige 2000), *House of flying daggers* (dir. Zhang Yimou 2004), *Curse of the golden flower* (dir. Zhang Yimou 2007) and *Crouching tiger, hidden dragon* (dir. Ang Lee 2000).

### Chinese New Year celebration

Saturday 5 & Sunday 6 February 2011

The Gallery welcomes in the Year of the Rabbit with a weekend of free activities for the whole family. This weekend celebration is part of the City of Sydney's Chinese New Year Festival.

### Education

Early access between 9–10am for school visits will be available from the start of the 2011 school year.

from top:

#### Pushou ring-holder

Warring States period (475–221 BCE)  
gold and jade, length 2.8cm  
excavated at Qianhe in Baoji, 1972  
Chengang District Museum 364

#### Tiger

Warring States period (475–221 BCE)  
silver, length 14cm  
excavated from the tomb of

a Xiongnu aristocrat at Gaotu village in Shenmu, Shaanxi, 1957  
Shenmu County Administration for Cultural Relics 080-5

#### Sword blade with inlaid openwork hilt

Spring and Autumn period (770–476 BCE)  
iron and gold with inlaid turquoise, length 37.8cm  
excavated from Tomb 2 at Yimen village in Baoji, Shaanxi, 1992  
Baoji Municipal Archaeological Institute BYM2:1

# EXHIBITION DETAILS

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## Message from the Premier of New South Wales, Kristina Keneally

Visitors to *The First Emperor: China's entombed warriors* will be captivated by the scale, authenticity and realism of the warriors and will experience the rare opportunity of viewing a display that evokes the actual site where these majestic figures were discovered.

The NSW Government through Events NSW is proud to support this spectacular exhibition. *The First Emperor: China's entombed warriors* is an exciting addition to the 2010/11 NSW Master Events Calendar which features a range of world class arts events and exhibitions exclusive to Sydney.

Major sponsor



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## MEDIA INFORMATION

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## SYDNEY ONLY 2 December 2010 – 13 March 2011

Art Gallery of New South Wales  
Art Gallery Road, Sydney NSW 2000

**Hours**  
10am–5pm every day  
(closed Christmas Day)  
Art After Hours until 9pm Wednesdays

**Admission**  
\$20 adults, \$15 concession, family \$55

Advance ticket bookings available online:  
[www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au](http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au)

## TRAVEL PACKAGES

There are a range of holiday packages available for visitors to Sydney this summer, including early morning access to the exhibition before we open to the public.

**Qantas Holidays** have ticket and accommodation packages available. Combine with a Qantas or Jetstar airfare. Bookings: 131415  
On sale from October 14

**CountryLink** is offering packages including return travel to Sydney on their train and coach network, with accommodation options (on sale date TBC).

**Official hotel partner:**  
**Sofitel Sydney Wentworth**  
Book via Country Link or Qantas Holidays or visit [www.sofitelsydney.com.au](http://www.sofitelsydney.com.au)

cover & page 2:  
**Armoured kneeling archer**,  
height 125cm  
excavated from Pit 2, Qin  
Shihuang tomb complex, 1977  
**Charioteer**, height 194cm  
excavated from Pit 1, Qin  
Shihuang tomb complex, 1983  
Terracotta Warriors and Horses  
Museum 002815 & 02530