

INTRODUCTION

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The 2019–20 academic year was the most singular year in the Oriental Institute’s long, one-hundred-year history. We ushered in the year with a flood of enthusiasm to celebrate our centennial. May of 2019 marked the one-hundredth anniversary of the OI, commencing celebrations that continued throughout the year until the global health crisis instigated by the COVID-19 pandemic brought all in-person university activities and field projects to an immediate halt in March.

The OI Centennial Gala was held on September 14 on the University of Chicago campus. Attendees were treated to the first preview of the reinstalled OI Museum galleries during a cocktail reception, followed by dinner and dancing in tents on the Main Quadrangle. The reinstallation of the OI Museum galleries was made possible through the generosity of a donor who initially wished to remain anonymous. Affectionately referred to as “Gilgamesh,” we were able to reveal the identity of the principal Gallery Enhancement Project donor at the Centennial Gala: Howard E. Hallengren, benefactor and life member of the OI Advisory Council, who was awarded the 2019 James Henry Breasted Medallion for his generosity and for more than four decades of philanthropic support and volunteer service. At the Centennial Gala, it was also my distinct honor to announce Professor Robert Ritner as the inaugural Rowe Professor of Egyptology. I congratulate Robert on this well-deserved distinction and recognition of his contribution to the OI, the university, and the field of Egyptology.

The OI Museum staff worked with its characteristic industriousness to complete the gallery reinstallation, a project that began in 2016. In addition to new display cases, lighting, and graphics, some five hundred additional artifacts from our collections that had never before been on permanent display were added to the galleries. Most notable is the return of our monumental relief of a lion and bull in combat from Persepolis—which was on long-term loan to Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, since the time of excavation in 1937, and is now installed in the Robert and Deborah Aliber Persian Gallery. New spaces included the Larissa Inga Liventals Islamic Collections Exhibit and the Robert Parrillo City of Babylon Exhibit. Finally, the new displays drew upon original documentation and photography to highlight one hundred years of OI research. The reinstallation was commemorated by the publication of *100 Highlights of the Collections of the Oriental Institute Museum. The OI at its centennial* was also memorialized by the publication of *Discovering New Pasts: The OI at 100*, edited by Professor Theo van den Hout. *Discovering New Pasts* does not purport to be a comprehensive or definitive history of the OI. Rather, it is a snapshot of the OI today and a reflection on the past by those of us who had the privilege of being part of the OI at this special moment in its history.

The celebration of our centennial was complemented by a robust engagement with contemporary arts. The world-renowned artist Ann Hamilton spent a week in residency at the OI Museum, working with staff to make images of our artifacts using early generation scanners. The result was a stunning new installation titled *aeon* (September 18–December 15), in which Ann affixed her ethereal images to the elliptical glass dome of the Grand Reading Room in the Joe and Rika Mansueto Library. The project *aeon* also included a book and a limited edition portfolio of prints. The Iraqi-American artist Michael Rakowitz created a site-specific installation (September 13–present) in the Dr. Norman Solhkhah Family Assyrian Empire Gallery that included a fragmentary relief in our collection from the Northwest Palace at Nimrud depicting the head of the Assyrian ruler Ashurnasirpal. And the

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Syrian artist and architect Mohamad Hafez, who was our first ever interpreter-in-residence at the OI, exhibited *Lamentation* in the Edgar and Deborah Jannotta Mesopotamian Gallery (September 13–present) and developed public programming to connect our collections with contemporary issues in the Middle East. Finally, the OI partnered with Court Theatre for a site-specific performance in the OI Museum of *An Iliad by Lisa Peterson and Denis O'Hare and performed by Timothy Edward Kane*. *Opening with a promenade through the museum*, the play concluded with a seated portion performed in the Robert and Deborah Aliber Persian Gallery.

The year was also notable for its unprecedented marketing and rebranding campaign. The centennial presented us with a golden, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to raise the visibility, profile, and reach of the OI nationally and internationally—and to promote engagement across campus, extend our outreach, and attract new audiences. The one-hundredth anniversary of the OI was an ideal time to accomplish these things, to reintroduce ourselves with more compelling and sophisticated messaging. We created a forward-looking and dynamic identity for the OI, which included new logos and evocative messaging that speak to the current relevance of our work, with a distinct aesthetic that captures the OI's illustrious past and the romance of archaeological discovery within the framework of a clean, contemporary design. This was the first time the OI engaged in print, digital, and social media marketing campaigns on this scale and included digital billboards on the Dan Ryan and bus kiosks strategically placed throughout downtown.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic presented all of us with unprecedented challenges, uncertainty, and disruptions. In March, most of us shifted to working remotely. Fieldwork was suspended, and the remaining Chicago House staff were evacuated by emergency charter. On March 13, the OI Museum closed on account of the pandemic and did not reopen until the 2020–21 academic year. However, the essential work of the OI Museum continued even though the building was closed, and a small team of OI Museum staff continued collections checks and maintenance alongside the OI security staff.

As of this writing, we are still working primarily from home, looking forward to a time when we can resume our regular schedules at the OI. Nevertheless, the OI remains committed to pursuing pioneering research and providing outreach and educational programs to the general public. While certainly none of us would have chosen to be in this situation, the pandemic has compelled us to be our most creative and innovative as we seek new ways to interact with the public. We are continuing to celebrate our centennial this year, recalibrating our efforts to the new online reality. We have found innovative ways of offering our content virtually to both established and emerging audiences—locally, nationally, and globally. We increased our social media efforts, offering new content on our website, Twitter and Instagram accounts, Facebook page, and YouTube channel. We are also offering new Encurate and Google Arts & Culture tours, which allow for remote theme-based explorations of our collections.

A bright moment this past spring was that, through Howard Hallengren's continuing generosity, we established the Howard E. Hallengren Professorship in Arabian Peninsula and Gulf States Archaeology. Never before in its history has the OI sustained long-term fieldwork in that region. With the Hallengren Professorship the OI will expand its research portfolio and enter an exciting and expanding field of scholarship that ties together a vast area from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean.

Finally, we were deeply saddened by the loss of members of our OI community, including long-time volunteers Gabriella Cohen and Carole Yoshida, and Taj Mali, assistant field director of the OI's cultural heritage projects in Afghanistan, who passed away from COVID-19 complications in Kabul in July. Each will be sorely missed.

I want to conclude with another new development at the OI as we look to our next century—namely, that we have committed to changing our name. As many of us have experienced firsthand, “Oriental” in “Oriental Institute” has become an unwelcome distraction, increasingly so in the wake of the social and racial reckoning the country has been experiencing since this spring. Naturally, we use the term “Oriental” in the geographical sense—a century ago, the Middle East was known as the Orient—the East—a meaning, however, that has largely fallen out of the vernacular. It is a term now freighted with baggage—of exotic, negative, and foreign racial stereotypes at worst, and regarded as quaint and old fashioned at best. Our centennial is an excellent time to revisit our name and the image we want to project for our next century. You can expect us to announce a new name by the next academic year.

With the distribution of a vaccine now on the horizon, we look forward to documenting our return to normalcy in the introduction to next year’s Annual Report. In the meantime, I wish good health and safety for all members of our OI community. The contributions that follow detail the extraordinary scope of projects and programs supported by the OI. As you read our report, I hope you will share my appreciation and pride for these impressive efforts undertaken by our faculty, researchers, and staff, and for their steadfast commitment to advancing our mission during these most extraordinary times.
