FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a mummy?
A mummy is the dead body of an animal or a human that has been preserved after death so that it does not decompose. To be considered a mummy and not just a skeleton, the body must keep some of its soft tissue, such as hair, skin or muscles.

What is mummification and how do mummies happen?
Mummification takes place when the process of decay is blocked, generally from a lack of moisture or oxygen. This can happen as an intentional process, which sometimes referred to as intentional or artificial mummification, or as a natural process, which is sometimes referred to as natural or accidental mummification.

Some cultures, like the Egyptians, practiced intentional or artificial mummification, removing the internal organs and treating the corpses with some type of resin or chemical (often called embalming), and then bandaging or wrapping them. Natural mummification often occurs as a result of an environment where temperature, humidity or other conditions have preserved the remains. This may have happened accidentally, when people either died in locations where environmental conditions preserved the bodies, or when people were purposely placed in locations that would mummify the body, such as a dry, cool cave, a bog or crypt.

Are the mummies in this exhibition real people and where do they come from?
The human and animal mummies in Mummies of the World were once real living people and animals and represent the wide variety of mummies that have been found in different regions of the earth. All of the mummies in this exhibition were assembled from the collections of various museums and institutions in Europe and were originally acquired at a time when it was common for people to collect human specimens. Every mummy in Mummies of the World is treated with dignity and respect.

Why study mummies and what can they teach us?
Mummies provide a window to the past, teaching us about the lives, history and cultures of every region of the world. By studying mummies, we can learn more about the times and places in which they lived. Through modern science, their bodies tell us scientific facts; how tall people were, how long they lived, what kinds of food they ate and the diseases and injuries they suffered from. Clothing, jewelry and other personal artifacts placed on or with a mummy can tell us about the person’s status and lifestyle, as well as the values, beliefs, and attitudes of the culture in which they lived. By knowing how people lived long ago, we can better understand how differently people live today. This allows us to observe how cultures change over time and give us insight into how our own culture may change in the future.

Where are mummies found?
Not all mummies come from Egypt and are wrapped. In fact, mummies come from all over the world and have been found on every continent. Mummies of the World features mummies from South America, Europe, Asia and Oceania, as well as Egypt. They include mummies that have been intentionally preserved and mummies that have been naturally preserved and found in places as varied as deserts, caves, salt, sand, cellars, crypts and bogs.

How did the exhibition come about?
The exhibition *Mummies of the World* began with a mysterious and rare find of 20 human mummies hidden in the basement of the Reiss-Engelhorn Museums in Mannheim, Germany in 2004. The mummies, which once belonged to artist Gabriel von Max (1840–1915) were thought to have been destroyed or lost during World War II. This startling discovery prompted the most important research project ever undertaken with regard to mummies. Without documentation explaining who they were, where they were from or why they were collected, an international team of scientists from many disciplines studied the mummies. Their studies and research, known as the German Mummy Project, is the largest mummy research project in the world. The results of their research and studies are presented in the *Mummies of the World* exhibition, made possible through the collaboration of 21 world-renowned museums, organizations and collections from seven countries.