

## MEDIA RELEASE

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 00:01am on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2024

The first major UK exhibition on the unicorn, Scotland's ancient symbol, is announced as Perth Museum's opening exhibition this Easter.

Images available on this link <https://we.tl/t-zt0cWvBrcD>

Today, Perth Museum announces that *Unicorn* will be the first exhibition when the doors of the new museum open to the public on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> March 2024, Easter Weekend. Tickets are now on sale.

Funded by £10m UK Government investment through the Tay Cities Deal and by Perth and Kinross Council, Perth Museum is a £27m transformation of the former City Hall.

*Unicorn* is the first major UK exhibition to explore the cultural history of Scotland's national animal from antiquity to the present day. Through the material culture of this mythical beast the exhibition will explore themes such as Scottish Royalty and national symbolism that also relate to the objects and stories on display in the new permanent galleries, including the Stone of Destiny.

From Pliny to Pride, the unicorn has been an enduring yet enigmatic symbol throughout the ages; a component of medieval medicine, an emblem of Scottish royalty, a beloved children's character, and icon of the LGBTQI+ community. The exhibition will feature spectacular objects including manuscripts, illustrations, paintings, coins, sculpture, tapestry and shop signs.

Star loans include the magical 'Danny Jewel', an English Elizabethan pendant jewel of narwhal horn and enamelled gold, usually on display at the Victoria and Albert

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Museum (V&A) in London. Renaissance pendants were sometimes made as amulets for protection against danger. People once believed that the tusk of the dolphin-like narwhal, found in Arctic waters, came from unicorns. The V&A is also lending an intricately carved narwhal tusk from the early 12<sup>th</sup> century. It is one of only two known medieval examples with carved decoration of foliage, human figures and serpent-tailed dragons.

The stunning oil painting, *Lady and the Unicorn* by the late-Renaissance Italian artist, Luca Longhi (1507-1580), will be shown in the UK for the first time, on loan from the Museo Nazionale di Castel Sant'Angelo, highlighting the enduring symbolism of the unicorn through the Middle Ages and beyond.

A regal silver unicorn features atop the 19<sup>th</sup> century ceremonial rod or wand, part of the regalia of the Usher of the White Rod. Made around the time of King George IV's coronation and visit to Scotland, this rod also featured as part of the Coronation of King Charles III last year. This represents a tradition that dates back to the inauguration of Gaelic kings and the rod was the primary symbol of a rulers' legitimate authority. Although the Usher of the White Rod has not held duties since Scotland's union with England in 1707, it is the counterpart to the role of the Usher of the Black Rod, now a senior officer in the House of Lords.

Alongside spectacular and historical loans from prestigious UK and international collections, there will also be objects and stories of personal significance from the local community. From ornaments and images to memorabilia and toys, the display will highlight the enduring power of the unicorn in contemporary culture. There is still time to submit an object for this project at Perth Art Gallery or one of the participating libraries across Perth & Kinross.

UK Government Minister for Scotland Malcolm Offord said, "The unicorn is an enduring symbol of Scotland's enchanting history, culture and landscape, so it is fitting that Perth Museum has chosen this as the theme of its first exhibition.

## CULTURE PERTH & KINROSS

Culture Perth & Kinross Ltd is a Scottish Charity (SC046353)  
and a company limited by guarantee (SC518247)

## PERTH MUSEUM

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“The UK Government has invested £10 million in Perth Museum as part of our £150 million support for the Tay Cities Region Deal. In total we are investing more than £2.9 billion to level up across Scotland.”

**JP Reid, Senior New Projects Officer, Culture Perth & Kinross said,** “From medieval tapestries and oil paintings, to toys, videogames and movies, the figure of the unicorn has been a familiar but shifting cultural icon for over 2,000 years. We are thrilled to be able to display a stunning selection of artworks and artefacts, including a series of newly commissioned sculptures. With a long, complex, and often contradictory history, the unicorn has been a popular subject for contemporary artists, writers, musicians, filmmakers, and activists. It is a symbol through which ideas like authenticity, belief, gender, and nationalism can be explored.”

The final section of the exhibition features six newly commissioned artworks exploring the ongoing struggles faced by the LGBTQI+ community worldwide. The artworks transform blank, life-sized horse heads into artworks that symbolise the theme of “Unicorn Hunting in 2023”. The featured artists are Alex Hayward, Ciaran Cannon, David Hutchison, GainAgain, Francis Macleod and Kathryn Hanna.

*Unicorn* will also feature a rich events and activities programme both within the exhibition and throughout Perth and Kinross for families, young people, and adults, thanks to generous support from the Northwood Charitable Trust.

Perth Museum is the new home for one of the oldest public collections in Scotland. Through Nationally-Recognised museum collections it will tell the story of Perth’s place in ancient and modern Scotland, as the nation’s first capital. The building has been designed by award-winning architects Mecanoo.

Perth Museum is free to enter. Tickets for *Unicorn* cost £10/£8 and are available to book now online; members of the Culture Perth and Kinross Supporters Scheme receive free entry.

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[perthmuseum.co.uk/unicorn](http://perthmuseum.co.uk/unicorn)

### Notes to editors

For further media information, contact Culture Perth and Kinross at [marketing@culturepk.org.uk](mailto:marketing@culturepk.org.uk)

Or contact Olivia Rickman at [olivia@oliviarickman.com](mailto:olivia@oliviarickman.com)

*Unicorn*, 30 March – 22 September

Tickets £10/£8

Free to members of Culture Perth and Kinross Supporters Scheme

Opening hours 10am – 5pm

[perthmuseum.co.uk/unicorn](http://perthmuseum.co.uk/unicorn)

### About Perth Museum

The new Perth Museum will open its doors on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> March 2024 after a £27 million development project. This world-class cultural and heritage attraction will highlight the fascinating objects and stories that put Perth and Kinross at the centre of Scotland's story.

At its heart will sit the Stone of Destiny, also known as the Stone of Scone, one of Scotland and the UK's most significant historical objects. Returning to Perthshire for the first time in over 700 years, the Stone will be the centrepiece of the new Museum and will be free for all to view.

Alongside the stone, the Museum will display Perth & Kinross's Recognised Collections of National Significance as well as iconic loans and exhibitions from the UK and abroad.

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The Museum is housed in a heritage Edwardian building that once served as a gathering place hosting everything from markets and concerts to political conferences and wrestling matches. This historic venue has been transformed into a major visitor attraction by award-winning architects Mecanoo. The Museum will also feature a café, shop, learning and event spaces, and a major exhibition programme throughout the year.

Members of Culture Perth and Kinross Supporters Scheme receive free entry to the exhibition programme. The scheme enables supporters to buy memberships whilst contributing to the preservation and celebration of the objects and stories housed within Perth Museum for generations to come.

Perth Museum is managed in partnership between Perth and Kinross Council and Culture Perth and Kinross, and is supported by £10 million from the UK Government as part of the Tay Cities Region Deal.

[perthmuseum.co.uk](http://perthmuseum.co.uk)

### About the Tay Cities Region Deal

The Tay Cities Region Deal is a partnership between local, Scottish and UK governments and the private, academic and voluntary sectors which seeks to create a smarter and fairer Angus, Dundee, Fife and Perth & Kinross under the headings Inclusive Tay; Innovative Tay; International Tay; Connected Tay and An Empowered Tay.

The Scottish Government and UK Government will each invest up to £150 million in the Tay Cities Region Deal over 10 years, subject to final approval of robust business cases.

As of 30th September 2022, over £74m of Government investment has been released and almost 700 jobs have been created.

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This central investment from both Governments has the potential to lever in £400m of investment over 15 years, of which more than £123m has been secured by Projects.

Full and further information on the progress the Deal has made to date on securing investment and jobs, can be found within the Annual Performance Report located on the Tay Cities Region Deal website [www.taycities.co.uk/publications](http://www.taycities.co.uk/publications).

### About Culture Perth and Kinross

Culture Perth and Kinross is a charitable Trust responsible for the delivery and development of the archive, library, museum and galleries, and creative learning in Perth and Kinross.

As a charity, Culture Perth and Kinross fundraises on an ongoing basis, and donations made are directly reinvested back into the trust. By donating via [www.culturepk.org.uk/donate](http://www.culturepk.org.uk/donate), you would be directly supporting your local libraries, museums and archives in a meaningful way that allows us to do more.

Culture Perth and Kinross operates Perth Art Gallery, Alyth Museum, and the new Perth Museum opening in 2024, as well as libraries and archives across Perth and Kinross. Our vision is to be at the heart of a cultural community that connects people, ideas, knowledge, and collections. Our mission is to develop and deliver a range of sector-leading services, public programmes and partnerships which engage a wide and diverse audience in the best of local, national, and international culture.

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