

HOA HAKANANAI'A

Moai (Hoa Hakananai'a) — Baltic ancestor figure
AD 100-1200 Rapa Nui/Easter Island, Chili

—Located in —

The British Museum

Bloomsbury, London, United Kingdom

Room 24: The Wellcome Trust Gallery — *Living and Dying*



***“A colossal figure
from a lost
civilization”***

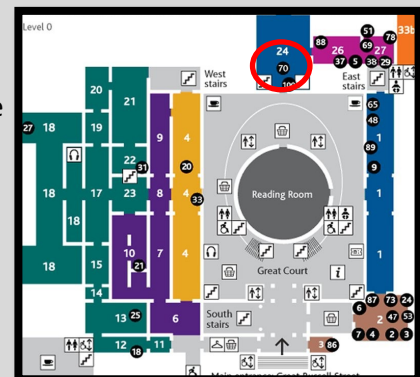
***-The British
Museum***

MUSEUM EXHIBITION & LOCATION

The location and presentation of Hoa Hakananai'a within the British Museum is representative of the Museum's perception and value of the Moai. Hoa Hakananai'a is a figure regularly featured as a “don't miss” attraction on the museum-made top-ten lists. The Moai of Easter Island is portrayed as a valued prize and testament to the strength and reach of the British throughout history.

The moai is featured as a focal point upon entering Room 24: The Wellcome Trust Gallery—see red circle below. Life and death are the current themes of the gallery. The Moai is presented on a white pedestal in a room of gleaming glass and stone; a stark contrast to its original environment. The light stone and cases of glass reflect the moai's presence as By describing it as a figure from a lost civilization and displaying it in a western museum environment, the British Museum is, in essence, claiming the Moai as their own in the name of rightful preservation. Therefore, the museum is attempting to convey a tale of rescue; a tale of a shard of a lost civilization left to ruin until it was saved by the British and transported to England where all could view and appreciate it.

In summary, the British Museum greatly values Hoa Hakananai'a and proudly features it as a standalone object despite the glass gallery around it. In a depiction contradictory of the moai's origins, the British Museum portrays themselves as selfless preservers of history, highlighting their self description: The British Museum—“A Museum of the World, for the World.”

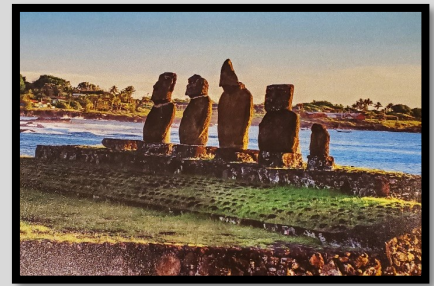


Above Top: A close up of Hoa Hakananai'a
Above Bottom: The back of Hoa Hakananai'a
Right: The Location of Hoa Hakananai'a in TBM

THE ORIGIN OF HOA HAKANANAI'A

WHAT IS HOA HAKANANAI'A?

Hoa Hakananai'a is an ancestral statue, moai, from Rapa Nui (Easter Island). It is a statue carved from basalt that the Polynesian people of Rapa Nui carved within approximately AD 1000-1200. Moai were carved in reverence of important people, ancestors and chieftains who had died. The name Hoa Hakananai'a means "lost or hidden friend".



HOW DID HOA HAKANANAI'A GET TO THE BRITISH MUSEUM?

Hoa Hakananai'a was taken by Commodore Richard Powell aboard the HMS Topaze in 1868 upon visiting the island of Rapa Nui. Powell and his crew had the large moai removed from the ceremonial center of Orongo where he had resided, buried up to its shoulders, within a house. Hoa Hakananai'a was gifted to the admiralty who, in turn, gifted it to Queen Victoria; Queen Victoria gifted it to the British Museum in 1869. Hoa Hakananai'a is currently displayed in The British Museum as a standalone figure upon entering Room 24: The Wellcome Trust Gallery—this gallery is currently showing objects concerning life and death. The moai relates to death as it is a statue depicting one's ancestors; it also acts as a potential vessel/housing for an ancestral spirit.

WHY IS HOA HAKANANAI'A SIGNIFICANT?

Hoa Hakananai'a differs from his other moai brethren in three featured ways:

1. Composition. Hoa Hakananai'a was carved from Basalt rather than the volcanic rock typical of other moai statues.
2. Detail. As seen on the first page, the back of Hoa Hakananai'a depicts carvings reminiscent of Rapa Nui culture, specifically the bird ceremonial traditions.
3. Longevity. As the native islanders toppled their moai, it is believed that Hoa Hakananai'a was one of the last to play a role in ritual practice.

Today, Hoa Hakananai'a is one of Rapa Nui's most spiritually significant moai.

HOA HAKANANAI'A IN THE NEWS

In 2018, it was requested by the people of Rapa Nui that Hoa Hakananai'a be returned to the island. A delegation from Rapa Nui travelled to the British Museum to provide the offerings present in front of the moai—as seen on the first page. The British Museum and the people of Rapa Nui are still in correspondence.

