

# Viewpoints, Outlook

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LETTERS

## She's old and she's unique

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Regarding the Chronicle's July 11 article "Lucy's' visit here turns political / Ethiopians in area oppose plans to exhibit the famed fossil," it is important to note that museums are neutral institutions that exist purely to present priceless treasures for public enlightenment. These items of art and culture are the things that make the world a richer place and, as such, they belong to all of the world's people.

The Houston Museum of Natural Science's "Lucy's Legacy: The Hidden Treasures of Ethiopia" will be opening on Aug. 31 and Houstonians and visitors from across the country will have the extraordinary opportunity to be the first in the world outside of Ethiopia to see this most famous fossil. They will also discover how Lucy continues to profoundly influence our understanding of human origins.

At 3.2 million years old and with 40 percent of her skeleton intact, Lucy has provided the world with extraordinary scientific knowledge of the human family tree.

Clearly, Lucy is one of a kind and ensuring her security throughout the tour of this exhibition is of paramount importance. Museums around the world loan unique, rare and priceless artifacts to one another on a regular and ongoing basis. Museums are committed to conserving, preserving and displaying objects for the benefit of all; this is both our responsibility and privilege.

The display of original artifacts is crucial to the educational impact of museum exhibitions; the experience of standing before an authentic historical artifact in a museum setting allows for reflection and conversation; it calls to us to discover more about the world and maybe even a little more about ourselves.

Lucy, in particular, evokes a strong response from everyone who sees her.

Lucy has been evaluated by first-rate conservators and museum professionals, who have certified that she is in robust condition and that she is safe for travel. Also, it is important to note that proceeds from the exhibition will specifically benefit museums in Ethiopia.

An important purpose of this exhibition is to introduce visitors to the rich cultural heritage that has flourished in Ethiopia over the course of the last 3,000 years. It is our hope that the community of Ethiopians who reside in our city and around the country will join the museum in sharing the amazing story of their homeland.

**JOEL A. BARTSCH**

*president, Houston Museum of Natural Science, Houston*

**Melodie Francis**

**Assistant Director of Public Relations**

[mfrancis@hmns.org](mailto:mfrancis@hmns.org) (713) 639-4743 Fax: (713) 639-4740

*the***HoustonMuseum***ofnaturalscience*

**One Hermann Circle Drive, Houston, TX 77030**