



RUBIN  
MUSEUM  
OF ART

***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***  
**July 2011**

***FIRST ANNUAL ART ROTATION OF RUBIN MUSEUM'S INTRODUCTORY  
EXHIBITION***

***NEARLY TWENTY WORKS ADD NEW PERSPECTIVES***

New York—For one year the Rubin Museum of Art has illuminated the fundamentals of Himalayan art—largely unfamiliar to many visitors—through its introductory exhibition, *Gateway to Himalayan Art*. On August 10, 2011 the exhibition will reopen after the first in a series of yearly art rotations, providing visitors with a starting point for contextualizing and enjoying the rich artistic traditions presented throughout the museum.

This first rotation will replace nearly twenty works of art with comparable objects—intricately-detailed *thangka* paintings, manuscript pages, and textiles—in order to maintain conservation standards and add new dimensions and contexts to the exhibition. A greater emphasis will be placed on Hindu works in particular, with beautiful examples from Kashmir and Nepal ranging from 12<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In each iteration *Gateway* acquaints new and long-time visitors with the principal concepts of Himalayan art and its cultural contexts. The exhibition begins with a large multimedia map which orients visitors to the geographic scope and diversity of the Himalayan region, including Tibet, Nepal, and Bhutan, as well as adjacent cultural areas that comprise the greater Himalayan cultural sphere, including parts of India, China, and Mongolia.

From there, visitors are invited to explore four main sections: Figures and Symbols, Materials and Techniques, Purpose and Function, and Tibetan Art in Context.

At the conclusion of *Gateway to Himalayan Art*, visitors are equipped with the tools to understand, appreciate, and contextualize many of the works of art throughout the museum's six floors of galleries.

### **SECTION 1: FIGURES AND SYMBOLS**

This first section explains the symbolism and iconography central to understanding the content in most Himalayan paintings and sculptures, such as distinguishing characteristics of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and peaceful and wrathful deities. Alongside works of art are large format graphic panels illustrating the figures' hand gestures, implements, and other identifying attributes. A "Looking Guide," filled with tips for easy recognition of the Buddhist figures and symbols in this and other exhibitions throughout the museum, is available as a take-home brochure.

The key figures in Himalayan art are each represented by both a two-dimensional painting and a three-dimensional sculpture, such as a 13<sup>th</sup> century gilt copper sculpture of the Buddha alongside an 18<sup>th</sup> century painting of the same subject. Among presented objects are also bodhisattvas, deities, and humans, such as Arhats (legendary disciples of the Buddha), Mahasiddhas (great adepts of Tantric practices), and teachers. This *Gateway* rotation introduces the shared visual language of Himalayan Hindu and Buddhist traditions, as well as some distinct symbolic meanings of the artistic depictions of Hindu gods and goddesses.

### **SECTION 2: MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES**

This section demonstrates the materials and techniques with which paintings and sculptures are traditionally created. The important Nepalese lost wax technique is detailed in a three-dimensional installation that presents each of the process's six labor-intensive stages. Methods of *thangka* painting with ground mineral pigments and iconometry (guidelines for proportions) are explained with grid drawings alongside an actual painting of the same subject. Works of art in other media such as clay, stone, and wood sculpture, painting on paper, and textile are also represented.

Compositional elements and structure common to Himalayan paintings are explored in another large wall graphic, illustrating such identifying clues as the hierarchical relationship between figures that can be determined by their sizes, positions, and sequence.

### **SECTION 3: PURPOSE AND FUNCTION**

The third section of *Gateway* addresses the purposes and functions behind the commissioning and use of Himalayan works of art. Broadly grouped, they include secular concerns such as long life and wealth, the accumulation of merit, and spiritual gains that would be attained by patrons, and fulfilled through ritual use of these objects.

A 14<sup>th</sup>-century metalwork reliquary stupa, a richly painted 19<sup>th</sup>-century Nepalese wood and metal prayer wheel, and a beautiful copper gilt sculpture of Guhyasamaja, a Buddhist deity with three faces and six instrument-wielding hands, are examples of objects commissioned for spiritual and meritorious gains. The worship of sacred images common to Hinduism and Buddhism is illustrated by comparable sculptures of the symbolic material form of the Hindu goddess Shiva (linga), and Buddhist deity Tara.

### **SECTION 4: TIBETAN ART IN CONTEXT**

A spectacular Buddhist shrine room features nearly 170 works of art created between the 13th and 19th centuries from the Tibetan Plateau, China, and Mongolia. On long-term loan from the Alice S. Kandell Collection and organized by the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution, the Shrine Room opened October 2010 and will remain on view for two and a half years. Rubin Museum curators' assemblage of the Shrine Room's sculptures, paintings, furniture, and textiles demonstrates the religious context in which the sacred objects found throughout *Gateway* and much of the museum would be used in a private Tibetan shrine. The Shrine Room objects are complemented by recordings of monks chanting softly, simulated flickering butter lamps, and an extensive audio tour.

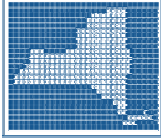
### **MULTIMEDIA**

Multimedia and interactive components throughout the exhibition encourage close examination of art works and allow visitors to delve deeper into topics of interest. "Decode It" interactive touch screen stations provide in-depth explorations of narrative, figural, and landscape painting compositions and content. A mandala palace and its protector deities that are normally hidden from view in a schematic two-dimensional mandala is brought to life through a computer-

generated three-dimensional representation. A comprehensive audio tour features more than 15 topics and some 20 minutes of additional commentary from curators and educators.

### **Support**

State of the Arts



**NYSCA**

*Gateway to Himalayan Art* is made possible with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency.

### **About the Rubin Museum of Art**

RMA holds one of the world's most important collections of Himalayan art. Paintings, pictorial textiles, and sculpture are drawn from cultures that touch upon the arc of mountains that extends from Afghanistan in the northwest to Myanmar (Burma) in the southeast and includes Tibet, Nepal, Mongolia, and Bhutan. The larger Himalayan cultural sphere, determined by significant cultural exchange over millennia, includes Iran, India, China, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia. This rich cultural legacy, largely unfamiliar to Western viewers, offers an uncommon opportunity for visual adventure and aesthetic discovery.

Admission to RMA is \$10 for adults; \$5 for seniors; \$5 for students (with ID); free for seniors the first Monday of every month; and free for children under 12 and for museum members. Gallery admission is free to all on Fridays between 6pm and 10pm.

Open Monday 11 am to 5 pm, Wednesday 11 am to 7 pm, Thursday 11 am to 5 pm, Friday 11 am to 10 pm, Saturday and Sunday from 11 am to 6 pm; closed on Tuesday. To reach the museum by subway, visitors may take the A, C or E to 14th Street; the 1 to 18th Street; 1, 2, 3 to 14th Street; F and M to 14th Street; N, R, Q, 4, 5 and 6 to 14th or the L to 6th Avenue. By bus, visitors may take the B20 to the corner of 7th Avenue and 17th Street.

### **For further information or images, please contact:**

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