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A Collector's Passion: South Asian Selections from the Nalin Collection

Physician and Humanitarian Helped Preserve South Asian Culture

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Dr. David Nalin first visited Asia in the 1960s and became a pioneer in the treatment of cholera. In East Pakistan, now Dhaka, Bangladesh, he became captivated by the region's culture. An exhibition at the Rubin Museum of Art will present more than 50 works of art from Tibet, Nepal, India and Bangladesh that Nalin collected over several decades, including some pieces loaned by the Newark Museum and the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery of the Smithsonian, which he donated to those institutions. Among the objects in the exhibition will be 18th century thangka paintings, and sculptures of stone, copper alloy, silver, and wood, including Gandharan works dating from the 4th century.

David Nalin has had a passion for collecting since early childhood. His collections of toys, baseball cards, insects, curios, minerals and primitive art made from shells, feathers, beads, and teeth, culminated in his collecting Bengali, Pala/Sena, Gandharan, and Himalayan art. His mature collecting resulted from knowledge gained from frequent visits to The Metropolitan Museum of

Art as a child and later travel, in 1967, to Singapore where he visited the gallery of Helen Ling and purchased objects made of jade, terra cotta and ceramic as well as two small 15th -century Thai bronze buddhas.

That same year, Dr. Nalin has reported encountering “the sooty recycling market in the old part of the Bangladeshi capital where runners brought grimy gunny sacks full of metal they had scavenged to be recycled.” Among the objects were Pala sculptures made of bronze or copper, that appeared to be worth far more than the value of their metal content. His collecting and curiosity about Asian art reached new levels when upon his return to the United States he saw similar metal works in an exhibition at the Asia Society. His appreciation for these objects soon turned to concern for their preservation lest more of them be melted down for metal. “Realizing that the crisis of the civil war was already inevitable and with looming mass destruction of Hindu temples and households, I felt an overriding need to preserve as many of these artworks as possible,” he wrote in the catalog to the current exhibition. “Through these first-hand experiences with Pala/Sena art,” he wrote, “and through visiting exhibitions and reading many catalogues and books, I gradually acquired the knowledge, taste and ‘eye’ enabling me to create and preserve several extensive and beautiful groups of chiefly Buddhist and Hindu art works.”

The Rubin Museum of Art’s Chief Curator, Martin Brauen said, “Those of us who appreciate Himalayan art, and particularly those of us who work in the field and study this material, are indebted to David Nalin for his foresight, dedication, and generosity in sharing his collection and supporting scholarship.”

Catalog

Dr. Nalin’s collection of Himalayan art is the subject of a 176-page full-color catalog, *Artful Beneficence: Selections from the David R. Nalin Collection of Himalayan Art* (2009) by Melissa R. Kerin.

About RMA

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; \$7 for seniors, middle- and high-school students, and artists (with ID); \$2 for college students (with ID); \$7 for neighbors (zip codes 10011 & 10001 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 7 pm and 10 pm.

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 V to 14th Street; N, R, Q, W, 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.