



RUBIN  
MUSEUM  
OF ART

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***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***  
**May 2010**

**The Tibetan Shrine Room from the Alice S. Kandell Collection  
a feature of *Gateway to Himalayan Art***

New York—A site-specific version of the Tibetan Shrine Room from the Alice S. Kandell Collection now complements the Rubin Museum's new exhibition, *Gateway to Himalayan Art*, providing an extraordinary opportunity for visitors to experience Tibetan Buddhist art in context.

This spectacular shrine room, which opened October 6, 2010 and will remain on view for approximately one and a half years, is on loan from the Alice Kandell Collection. The exhibition has been organized by the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution. The shrine room contains approximately 170 works of art created between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries from the Tibetan Plateau, China and Mongolia, highlighting the religious context in which these sacred objects would be found in a private Tibetan shrine.

Alice Kandell's interest in Tibetan art and culture began during her college years when she took her first of many trips to Sikkim, Tibet and Ladakh. Kandell created the shrine room at her own apartment in New York to closely resemble Tibetan Buddhist shrines she encountered in her

travels. The Rubin and Sackler presentations are the culmination of her longstanding desire to share her collection with the public.

The shrine room was first displayed at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery in Washington between March 13 and July 18, 2010. Rubin Museum of Art Chief Curator Martin Brauen and Assistant Curator Elena Pakhoutova selected objects that preserve the shrine's authenticity for the Rubin Museum's presentation. All of the objects – scroll paintings (*thangka*), sculptures of buddhas, bodhisattvas, tantric, female, and wrathful deities and teacher portraits – are arranged on traditional Tibetan furniture and according to the hierarchy they assume in Tibetan Buddhist practices. Such practices involve the use of various ritual objects such as butter lamps, offering bowls, vajras and bells, rosaries, conch trumpets, horns and reeds, and hand-held drums, which are also on view. Ornamental textile decorations made of brocade silk hung on the ceiling and pillars are another integral part of a traditional shrine room and are included as part of the Rubin presentation. The room is complete with simulated flickering candles, and the tables and cushions that would normally be occupied during the religious practices.

Among the most notable objects in the Tibetan Shrine Room is a statue of Buddha Shakyamuni. The Buddha's silver body is haloed by an elaborate mandorla of gilt copper, accented by flowers of silver and coral. Such sculptures are typically separated from their mandorlas, making this complete ensemble particularly remarkable.

Another noteworthy sculpture depicts Padmasambhava, most likely produced in Central Tibet sometime in the later part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The skillful and sensitive renderings of his facial features, the fine details of his lotus hat, and the flowing folds of his robes are complemented by the sculpture's impressive size, creating a powerful presence.

The repoussé form, beautiful face, meticulous hair curls, and intricately chiseled hem details of Buddha Amitabha's robe make for another impressive sculpture. Created during the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, this sculpture is an example of Tibetan metal casting that, by this time, had fully appropriated and expanded upon the aesthetics and craftsmanship adopted from Nepal's Newar artists.

One of the most impressive scroll paintings (*thangka*) in the Tibetan Shrine Room depicts Chakrasamvara. Attributed to Eastern Tibet, it represents many of the aesthetic trends found in

18<sup>th</sup> century Tibetan paintings. The bold, rich color palette, subtle modeling, symmetrical composition and proportions suggest a hand familiar with both Eastern and Central Tibetan painting traditions.

As with in-situ shrine rooms, the objects in the Tibetan Shrine Room are rather tightly arranged. Visitors are invited to look into, but not completely enter the room. Writing for the *Washington Post* about the exhibition at the Sackler Gallery, Blake Gopnik noted, “visibility is not what this art was meant to be about: A cumulative effect of awe and richness, or even of the invisible and the impalpable, may have been as important.”

### **Catalogue**

An accompanying publication, *A Shrine for Tibet: The Alice S. Kandell Collection*, was recently published by Tibet House US, and features extensive full-color photography. The volume contains a foreword by the Dalai Lama and essays by Robert A.F. Thurman, the Jey Tsong Khapa Professor of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Studies at Columbia University and co-founder of Tibet House, and Marilyn M. Rhie, the Jessie Wells Post Professor of Art and professor of East Asian Studies at Smith College. It is available at the Rubin Museum’s gift shop. 299 pages; \$60.

### **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.