



RUBIN  
MUSEUM  
OF ART

FROM:  
Rubin Museum of Art  
150 West 17th Street, NYC, 10011  
Contact: Alanna Schindewolf  
Phone: (212) 620 5000 x335  
E-mail: [Aschindewolf@rmanyc.org](mailto:Aschindewolf@rmanyc.org)

***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***  
**April 2010**

***Gateway to Himalayan Art***  
**A New Keystone Exhibition at the Rubin Museum of Art**

New York—Since 2005 hundreds of thousands of visitors to the Rubin Museum of Art have learned the fundamentals of how to look at Himalayan art through *What Is It?*, the museum's introductory exhibition. The new exhibition, *Gateway to Himalayan Art* marks the redesign and rethinking of the way the museum introduces visitors to the art of the Tibetan cultural sphere, presenting the major concepts comprehensively and equipping visitors with the tools to understand, appreciate and contextualize many of the works of art throughout the museum's six floors of galleries.

**Geography**

The exhibition begins with a large map and multimedia display of the Himalayas which orients visitors to the geographic scope and diversity of the region as well as adjacent cultural areas including parts of India, China, and Mongolia, that are distinct but comprise the greater Himalayan region.

From there, the exhibition invites visitors to explore Himalayan art in three main sections. A fourth section, art in context, opening in October 2010, will feature a shrine room of Tibetan Buddhist objects from the Collection of Alice Kandell.

### **1. Figures and Symbols**

The first section explains the symbolism and iconography central to understanding the content in most Himalayan paintings and sculptures. These include identifying the distinguishing characteristics of buddhas, bodhisattvas, female, as well as peaceful and wrathful deities.

Alongside works of art, large format graphic panels call attention to the figures' hand gestures, implements and other identifying features. A "Looking Guide," a compilation of tips for easy recognition of the figures and symbols in this exhibition will be available as a brochure that may be used to look at works of art throughout the museum.

The key types of Himalayan works of 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 a 16<sup>th</sup> century painting of the same subject. In addition to Buddha, bodhisattva and various kinds of deities, humans, such as arhats (enlightened disciples of the Buddha), Mahasiddhas (great adepts of Tantric practices), and teacher portraits are also presented and explained in terms of the basic conventions of their depiction.

### **2. Materials and Techniques**

The next section demonstrates materials and techniques with which paintings and sculptures are traditionally made. A detailed three-dimensional installation presents the intricate six-stage process of Nepalese metal casting using the lost wax technique. Methods of *thangka* painting with ground mineral pigments and iconometry (guidelines for body proportions) for images are explained with grid drawings alongside an actual painting of the same figure. Other mediums of production such as clay, stone, and wood sculpture, woodblock printing, painting on paper and textile artworks are also represented.

The composition of Himalayan paintings are explored in another large wall graphic that illustrates other identifying clues such as the hierarchical relationship between figures that can be determined by their sizes and positions. The sequence in which the figures are arranged within a painting is also introduced. Interactive monitors with examples to decode will allow visitors to delve deeper into different kinds of Himalayan paintings structures and compositions.

### **3. Purpose and Function**

The third section of *Gateway* addresses purposes and functions of 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 the individuals who commissioned the works and fulfilled through ritual functions and uses of these objects.

A 14<sup>th</sup>-century metalwork Reliquary Stupa and a richly painted 20<sup>th</sup>-century Nepalese prayer wheel made from wood and metal are examples of objects commissioned for ritual interaction in order to earn merit. A mandala in this section of the exhibition was made for use as a meditational aid. A beautiful copper gilt sculpture of the Secret Assembly Guhyasamaja was created for spiritual and meritorious gains as well.

### **Multimedia**

Throughout these three sections of the exhibition, multimedia and interactive components offer visitors the option to delve deeper into topics of interest, and encourage close examination of art works. "Decode it" stations feature interactive in-depth explorations of narrative, figural, and landscape painting compositions and content through interactive touch screens. A computer-generated three-dimensional representation brings to life a mandala palace and the protector deities that are normally hidden from view in schematic two-dimensional mandala forms. A comprehensive audio tour features more than 15 topics and some 20 minutes of additional commentary from curators and educators.

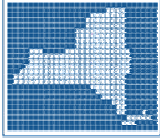
### **4. Tibetan Art in Context**

The Rubin Museum is now home to a spectacular Buddhist shrine room, 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, which opened October 2010 and will remain on view, for approximately one and a half years, contains approximately 170 works of art created between the 13th and 19th centuries from the Tibetan Plateau, China and Mongolia. The shrine room shows the religious context in which these sacred objects would be found in a private Tibetan shrine.

At the conclusion of *Gateway to Himalayan Art*, visitors will have a working knowledge of Himalayan geography and cultures, important deities and symbols, the materials and techniques used in creating these works of art, and their uses in the context of Himalayan culture.

### **Support**

State of the Arts



**NYS**CA

*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.