



RUBIN
MUSEUM
OF ART

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***BUDDHISM'S INFLUENCE ON CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS
EXPLORED BY THE RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART***

New York, NY—From November 5, 2010 to April 11, 2011, the Rubin Museum of Art will present works by five artists of different generations and ethnicities, working between 1960 and the present, whose oeuvres have been influenced by the tenets of Buddhism, including its central principles of emptiness and the fleeting nature of all things.

Grain of Emptiness: Buddhism-Inspired Contemporary Art assembles videos, paintings, photographs, and installations dating from 1961 to 2008 by Sanford Biggers (b. U.S., 1970); Theaster Gates (b. U.S., 1973); Atta Kim (b. Korea, 1956); Wolfgang Laib (b. West Germany, 1950); and Charmion von Wiegand (U.S., 1896-1983). Biggers and Gates will each present new site-specific performance works. The exhibition highlights the continuously evolving nature of art inspired by Buddhist ideas and themes.

“These artists are inheritors of a rich tradition that threads throughout modern and contemporary art,” says Martin Brauen, organizer of *Grain of Emptiness* and Chief Curator at the Rubin

Museum of Art. “The ideas of emptiness and impermanence, embraced by the Abstract Expressionists in the 1950s, have since been taken up by such cultural icons as John Cage and Merce Cunningham, as well as by conceptual and performance artists and others who have sought to explore in art how the insights of Buddhism intersect with everyday life.”

In the exhibition, the viewer will encounter several paintings by Charmion von Wiegand, an undeservedly little known painter, critic, and journalist. A friend of Piet Mondrian, von Wiegand was influenced by his *oeuvre* and the ideals of neo-plasticism, and used abstraction to express complex religious ideas. Here, pulsing, prismatic geometric shapes coalesce into the essential Tibetan religious forms: offerings, altars, temples, and chakras. The large scale *Triptych* (1961), on loan from the Whitney Museum of Art, is a highlight of this section with its circular, rectangular, and diamond shapes locked into the optical equivalent of the mind’s concept of infinity.

The luminous blur of a melting ice sculpture of a seated Buddha and panoramic views of a street in New Delhi and New York’s Times Square are among the subjects of 11 color photographs by the South Korean artist Atta Kim, created as part of his *ON-AIR Project*. All in different ways remind the viewer of the ephemeral and ‘empty’ nature of things, even those that seem inextricably tied to cultural identity and daily life.

Sanford Biggers is represented in the exhibition gallery by one major work: his *Lotus* (2007), a seven-foot wide, etched glass disc that, from afar, looks like the blossom of a flower. As light filters through the disc, another image is revealed, etched into each of the petals: a cross-section illustration of bodies lined up in the cargo hold of an 18th-century slave ship.

In subtle installations the German born Wolfgang Laib contributes works that embody simple forms by using natural materials such as white marble, milk, rice, pollen, and lacquer. *Rice Meals* (2003) and *Milkstone* (2010) are in part meditations on the transitoriness and interwovenness of all things, an idea parallel to the concept of Pratityasamutpada, the doctrine of dependent arising in Tibetan Buddhism. Each day for the length of the exhibition, milk will be poured into the recess in the *Milkstone*, creating a seemingly solid, pure white surface. Visitors are invited to watch as trained museum staff fill the *Milkstone* each day at 11:30am.

Urban planner, potter, educator, and installation and performance artist, Theaster Gates will be represented in *Grain of Emptiness* by a new video work commissioned by the Rubin Museum of

Art. The 8-½ minute, high definition, four-channel installation video will follow a handful of African-American Buddhist monks through their morning rituals, which are solemn and private, into a space where their practice becomes an exploration of black music with other musicians and singers.

“Historically, Buddhist art has reflected the concepts of the Buddhist canon,” notes Dr. Brauen. “What is interesting is the manner in which artists today internalize these concepts to create new art forms.”

Performance Art

Sanford Biggers

Saturday, January 15; 3:00pm and 6:00pm

Koto, DJ, piano and vocals, lead by Sanford Biggers, provide an improvised aural landscape for the artist’s often troubling and inspiring video work. Images of punk, film noir, minstrels, traditional Samoan dance and Buddhism collide in this evocative concert/experimental film screening. \$15

Theaster Gates & the Black Monks of Mississippi

If we breathe

Saturday, January 22; 12:00pm, 1:00pm, 2:00pm, and 3:00pm

Echoing his *Grain of Emptiness* video installation, Theaster Gates will infuse the gallery with live monastic chanting at the top of each hour. Monks layer meditative sutras and gospel singing in this accumulative performance, juxtaposing the Buddhist and African American spiritual experience. Each performance is distinct, building upon the experience of the previous hour. Free with museum admission.

Participating Artists:

Sanford Biggers, a New York resident originally from Los Angeles, has held solo and group exhibitions at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; The Project, New York; and Triple Candie Gallery, New York. Other works by Biggers have been on display at Tate Britain and Tate Modern, London; Whitney Museum of American Art and the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; and the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco; as well as at institutions in China, Germany, Hungary, Japan, Poland, and Russia.

Theaster Gates’ work has been featured in solo and group exhibitions at the Milwaukee Art Museum, Chicago Cultural Center, Iowa State University, St. George Cathedral, Cape Town, South Africa, and he has participated in the 2010 Whitney Biennial. Much of Gates’ work is comprised of art events that bring together disparate people and cultures resulting in unusual hybrids, such as a concept in which a fictional Japanese character, Mr. Yamaguchi, moves to the South of the U.S., marries a black civil rights activist and begins to cook meals inspired by both

cultures. In the months following the inception of this idea, Gates, along with a traditional Japanese chef and an African American cook, organized a series of dinners based on the concept.

Atta Kim, a native of South Korea, has been creating installation photography in the United States for ten years. The artist's long exposure photographic technique particularly demonstrates an interest in documenting the process by which the works are created. Invoking the Buddhist notion of impermanence, his method shows the impossibility of grasping the true essence of his subject. He has had many solo exhibitions and participated in numerous group exhibitions at such institutions as the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago, and the 25th São Paulo Biennial.

Wolfgang Laib's work has been shown at venues world-wide, including the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; the Fondation Beyeler, Basel, Switzerland; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia; The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; and Sperone Westwater, New York.

In 1980, *Charmion von Wiegand* was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and in 1982 the Bass Museum of Art in Miami Beach, Florida organized her first retrospective. She continued to work and live in New York City until her death in 1983. Today von Wiegand is represented in such museum collections as those of the Museum of Modern Art, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.

Support

Grain of Emptiness: Buddhism-Inspired Contemporary Art is supported, in part, by the W.L.S. Spencer Foundation. Additional funding was provided by Dedalus Foundation, Inc., E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation and the Clinton Hill / Allen Tran Foundation.

Catalog

With an introduction by Martin Brauen and an essay on the featured artists by Mary Jane Jacob, the groundbreaking curator and editor of and contributor to, *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*, the catalog for *Grain of Emptiness* documents not only the works of art in the exhibition but also their installation at the Rubin Museum of Art. Brauen describes his process for choosing the artists, discusses the underlying concepts that bring them together at the Rubin and places the exhibition in the context of the museum and commitment to presenting contemporary art. Jacob's essay discusses philosophy and the art of each of the five artists in the exhibition. The book is 160 pages with approximately 70 color plates.

Public Programs

The Sound of Insects

The museum will host the American premier of Peter Liechti's *The Sound of Insects*. Profound, disturbing, and revelatory, Liechti's film is a stunning rapprochement of a fictional text, which itself is based upon a true event: a cinematic manifesto for life, challenged by the main character's radical renunciation of life itself.

This is the incredible story of how the mummified corpse of a 40-year-old man was discovered by a hunter in one of the most remote parts of the country. The dead man's detailed notes reveal that he actually committed suicide through self-imposed starvation only the summer before.

Ten Screenings in December and January:

Wednesday December 22, 7 p.m. - premiere
Sunday December 26, 2 & 4 p.m.
Wednesday December 29, 7 p.m.
Sunday January 2, 2 & 4 p.m.
Wednesday January 5, 7 p.m.
Saturday January 8, 2 & 4 p.m.
Sunday, January 9, 4 p.m.

Talk About Nothing Series

In the spirit of the Rubin Museum of Art's groundbreaking conversations series *Brainwave*, in which creative thinkers are paired with neuroscientists, and *The Red Book Dialogues*, in which people from many different backgrounds interpreted Carl Jung's imagery with analysts on stage, *Talk About Nothing* is a series of on-stage conversations between people from different walks of life about what 'nothing' means to them. Participants:

Laurie Anderson, performance artist
Karen Armstrong, writer on comparative religion
Sandra Bernhard, comedian
Ken Burns, documentarian
Amit Chaudhuri, writer
Andrew Cohen and Surya Das, spiritual teachers
Brian Cox, Shakespearean actor
Michael Cunningham, writer
Melissa Franklin, physicist
Antony Gormley, sculptor
Marie Howe, poet
Wolfgang Laib, artist
Rick Moody, author
Nico Muhly, composer
Mike Nichols, director
Raj Patel, economist
Christopher Potter, writer
Lisa Randall, astrophysicist
Patsy Rodenburg, acting coach
Oliver Sacks, neurologist
Charles Seife, journalist
Peter Sellars, director
Bill Viola, artist
Robert Wilson, director

For dates and full program information visit: www.rmanyc.org/nothing

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.

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