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IN THE SHADOW OF EVEREST: PHOTOGRAPHS BY TOM WOOL

TIBETAN LANDSCAPES AT THE RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

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In May 2001 photographer Tom Wool spent four weeks photographing life in the villages of Tibet's Rongbuk Valley, an expanse of rugged terrain which stretches roughly thirty miles from the base of Mount Everest on the north side. Home to some 3,000 Tibetans, this area is of distinct importance to the indigenous population for its sacred geography and religious history. Believed to be the place where earth touches the heavens, Mount Everest is called "Chomolungma" in Tibetan, meaning "Mother Goddess of the Earth." The valley is also home to the Rongbuk Monastery, the highest of any in the world at 17,000 feet.

Accompanied by two yakmen and a tiny horse, Wool followed the route taken during the first British expeditions of this area, including that taken by George Mallory and Andrew Irvine as they attempted their ill-fated Everest climb in 1924. Indeed, Wool feels that the ghosts of Mallory and Irvine haunted his trip. During his stay, an expedition was underway to find Irvine's body and the elusive camera whose exposed film might place the two as first at the mountain's summit.

Wool quickly came to realize how little the Rongbuk Valley had changed since those early expeditions. His photographs epitomize the Valley's harsh terrain that has been marked by mud brick homes, populated by Buddhist monks and yogis, and inhabited by yaks, sheep, and goats for centuries. Within several years of Wool's documentation, however, this remote area saw the encroachment of modernity when a road was created to bring the Beijing Olympics torch to Mount Everest.

Taken together, Wool's sensitive photographs that capture religious and village life, landscapes and domestic scenes, and even the contents of his guide's pockets, form an intimate glimpse into this remote land. The 40 x 40 inch gelatin silver prints will line the walls of the museum's theater level gallery which has served as a home to photography exhibitions since the museum's founding in 2004. *In the Shadow of Everest* marks the museum's first showing of photographs of Tibet since its inaugural year.

Tom Wool

Born in London in 1961, Tom Wool grew up in the South of France and in England. As an adult, Wool worked briefly as a photographer's assistant in Italy before embarking on a career as a fashion photographer that lasted nearly two decades. During his travels as a commercial photographer, Wool was always fascinated by the people and environments in which he found himself, inspiring him to turn to independent work. For the past eight years, Wool has traveled extensively under the auspices of a number of NGOs, his photographs now focusing on humanitarian concerns.

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 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 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.