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RUBIN MUSEUM PRESENTS MILESTONE SURVEY ON MANDALA FORM

NEW YORK, NY — This fall the Rubin Museum of Art (RMA) explores the history and meaning of the mandala, Himalayan Buddhism's artistic representation of man and the universe. *Mandala: The Perfect Circle*, organized by RMA Chief Curator Martin Brauen, begins with the mysterious early forms of this perfect circle more than a millennium ago and extends to the role of the mandala as a key element in the Buddhist thought and meditation of today.

On view from August 14, 2009, through January 11, 2010, the exhibition is the first of three in *The Cosmologies Series*, the museum's ten-month-long investigation of how different cultures have visually represented the universe, from the solar system to the self.

Mandala: The Perfect Circle takes visitors from the 8th to the 21st century, displaying some of the oldest known mandalas in the world, large paintings found in the Dunhuang caves in northwestern China, alongside virtual, computer-generated varieties created by designers at Cornell University and Zurich University. On rare loan from the Musée Guimet in Paris, an early Dunhuang mandala masterfully depicts a crowded pantheon of deities, each situated

symmetrically in its proper symbolic place. The virtual mandalas will provide an explosion of intense digital color in rare three-dimensional views of a mandala's creation and final form.

“The mandala is one of Buddhism's singular conceptual and artistic achievements,” says Brauen. “Sanskrit for any circular or disklike object, the word only assumed its current association with the cosmos and its role as an aid to meditation with the advent of later Buddhism called Mahayana Buddhism.”

Considered one of the foremost experts on mandalas, Dr. Brauen organized the world's first exhibition on the subject in Zurich, Switzerland nearly two decades ago and, in the process, made the first film documenting the making of a sand mandala under the guidance of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

The objects on display in *Mandala: The Perfect Circle* were created for religious use and not as works of art. Four fragile, delicately limned and tinted pages, which are distinguished by graceful, rhythmic calligraphy, would have provided ritual guidance as part of a 400-year-old “instruction book” for Buddhist monks. Hand-size amulets, fashioned from cloth, paper, and brightly colored string, represent the last step in a ritual process whereby a woodblock is made and hand printed onto cloth, saffron is tucked inside, a prayer is offered, and the resulting sacred “package” is wrapped in a prescribed way, according to the year in which its owner was born.

Reflecting the devotional nature of these objects, the bright, contemporary, three-dimensional mandala on loan from New York's Tibet House, which is decorated with cotton threads dyed primary colors and crossed into traditional geometric patterns, is of no less value than the large, three-dimensional mandala crafted of bronze and copper, on loan from the Namgyal Monastery in India, or the gilded bronze reliquary adorned with turquoise and coral stones, glass, and shells, on loan from New York's American Museum of Natural History.

Visitors to *Mandala: The Perfect Circle* will find mandalas conceived as concentric circles, circles within squares, squares within circles, lotus blossoms, six-pronged stars, or inverted, crossed triangles. A deity, sometimes with a partner, is usually situated in the middle of the central disk, surrounded by four, six, eight, ten, or twelve assembly deities set in an additional circle. As such, the mandala's very construct graphically mirrors the Buddhist notion of the cosmos and of the human being. In addition to paintings, reliquaries, and amulets, the exhibition

includes tapestries, sculptures, and utensils used in sacred ceremonies and a time-lapse film of a mandala formed in sand.

Altogether, some 70 objects have been assembled for *Mandala: The Perfect Circle* from private and public collections around the world. Institutional lenders include the the Musée Guimet, Paris; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Kimbell Museum of Art, Fort Worth; Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich; Thyssen-Bornemisza Collections, Austria; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Sponsorship

Mandala: The Perfect Circle is supported in part by a generous grant from the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation.

The Cosmologies Series

This fall, RMA opens three exhibitions consecutively, each exploring in a different way how humankind has visually represented the universe, from the solar system to the inner self. *Mandala: The Perfect Circle*, opening August 14, 2009, is the first. The second, opening October 7, 2009, (and on view through January 25, 2010) is *The Red Book of C. G. Jung: Creation of a New Cosmology*, which displays for the first time a legendary cultural touchstone: the red leather-bound notebook in which Carl Jung developed his principal theories of archetypes, collective unconscious, and the process of individuation. The exhibition coincides with a major event in publishing, W.W. Norton & Company's publication of a facsimile and translation of Jung's original.

The third exhibition in the series, opening December 11, 2009, is *Visions of the Cosmos: From Milky Ocean to Black Hole*, an exhibition that will examine the ways that humans interpret and visually represent the creation and structure of the universe, including contemporary views, and humankind's place within it.

Visitors to the museum may view all three together from December 11, 2009 to January 11, 2010.

Accompanying Catalog

A revised and supplemented version of Martin Brauen's fully illustrated *The Mandala: Sacred Circle in Tibetan Buddhism*, has been published by the Rubin Museum of Art.

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; \$7 for seniors, 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 p.m. and 10 p.m.

Open Monday 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Wednesday 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., Thursday 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Friday 11 a.m. to 10 p.m., Saturday and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; 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.