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Stable as a Mountain: Gurus in Himalayan Art
March 13, 2009 – July 13, 2009

The likenesses of spiritual teachers in Tibetan and Himalayan art were created, and continue to be recognized, as human embodiments of the Buddha state. The exhibition *Stable as a Mountain: Gurus in Himalayan Art*, on view March 13 – July 13, 2009, will explore cultural and religious identity through nearly seventy works depicting primarily Tibetan Buddhist teachers. They include paintings, sculptures, and ritual objects created in Tibet, Nepal, China, and Mongolia dating from the 13th – 20th century. The sculptures are made of copper alloy, silver, ivory, clay, and bronze. Some are inlaid with semi-precious stones.

Portraits of the gurus serve as icons that not only remind their disciples of their presence, but also substitute for the teachers in their absence. Most of the gurus or lamas (the words can be used interchangeably) represented in the exhibition have been identified, but others are unnamed. These portraits often embody the traits of the enlightened mind. One such trait, remaining as “stable as a mountain,” is often evident in this art as the gurus sit in meditation.

The exhibition, organized by Dr. Ramon Prats, a senior curator at the Rubin Museum of Art, will focus on how to interpret unique characteristics of the subjects of the works through such details as types of dress, pedestal embellishments, physical marks and inscriptions, body positions, and

hand gestures. Four types of dress, for example, help to distinguish among ordained monks, lay tantric masters, siddhas, or yogic adepts, and masters of particular forms of psychophysical yoga. Liturgical hats also vary in style and indicate hierarchical status, specialty, or membership in a group. Pedestals may be throne-like lotus flowers (symbols of purity) or may simply consist of cushions.

The portrait of *Gyalwa Lhachog Sengge* (checklist 19), also known as *The Victorious Lhachog Sengge* (1468-1535) was created in the 17th century, carved of ivory and inscribed with the name of the teacher. He was the Ninth Great Abbot of the Ngor branch of the Sakya School, and a great patron of the arts. He wears a scholar's hat and cradles the precious Wish Fulfilling Jewel in his left hand. Marpa Lotsawa, Chokyi Lodro (checklist 33), one of the renowned 11th-century Tibetan Buddhist personalities, was a translator of sacred scriptures. He is depicted in a thangka painted in the 18th century. The painting presents him in one of the most common iconographic variations of him with black cropped hair, a moustache, and a goatee. He wears the common garments of a Tibetan layman indicative of his role as a tantric teacher, and sits with his legs in the "royal ease" pose while his hands rest in the position known as "relaxing in the natural state of the mind."

The exhibition is drawn from the collection of the Rubin Museum of Art, the Jacques Marchais Museum of Tibetan Art, The Newark Museum, and private collections.

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 7 pm and 10 pm.

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.

