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***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***  
May 2009

***Major Exhibition of Jain Art Reaches Back in Time  
to an Ancient, Little-known Cosmology***

New York — From September 18, 2009, to February 15, 2010, the Rubin Museum of Art invites visitors to take a leap of imagination, away from Western paradigms and over the millennia, into the universe of the Jains. Present-day practitioners of this lesser known ancient and ascetic faith, which dates from between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE in India, aim to live non-violently, accumulate few material possessions, and look at things from the points of view of others.

All of the works of art in *Victorious Ones: Jain Images of Perfection* portray the founding figures of Jainism. These Jinas, or conquerors, are depicted in stone sculptures, bronzes, and paintings. Their life stories are told in illuminated manuscripts and the places where they are revered are portrayed in detailed pilgrimage maps and diagrams of the vast Jain cosmos. These diagrams afford a glimpse of a complex universe of multiple continents and encircling oceans, whose outermost reaches harbor temples containing images of the Jinas.

The exhibition also represents some of the highest moments in the Indian artistic tradition, with exceptional works drawn from private and public collections around the world, many of which have never before been on public view. The majority of these objects date from the fifth to the sixteenth century.

“We are treating the exhibition galleries as a uniquely Jain sacred space during the exhibition, because, as did their forbearers, present-day Jains pay homage to Jinas, the last of whom is thought to have preceded the historical Buddha,” says Martin Brauen, chief curator at the Rubin Museum of Art.

For *Victorious Ones*, lead curator Phyllis Granoff has translated medieval hymns and devotional texts from their original Prakrit and Sanskrit into English for the first time. To help evoke the experience of Jain worship, translated quotations from such texts will be displayed adjacent to works of art portraying the Jinas. Here, for example, is how one medieval monk described the image of a Jina, “His glance ripples with tender waves of compassion, while his face is serene and gentle. He seems to be the embodiment of tranquility. Everything around him is calm and his body radiates contentment. Surely he is the god of gods, the only one who can destroy birth, old age, and death, for no other god in this world looks anything like this.”

One of the world’s preeminent experts on Jainism, Dr. Granoff teaches at Yale University as the Lex Hixon Professor of World Religions. She has co-organized *Victorious Ones* with Becky Bloom, assistant curator at the Rubin Museum.

“Although akin to Buddhist and Hindu forms, Jain art is unique,” says Dr. Granoff. “The images of the Jinas are meant to convey their invincible strength and infinite knowledge. These powerful images are the visual counterparts of one poet’s metaphor that the Jina could no more be moved by the passions than the cosmic Mount Meru could be shaken by a breeze.”

She continues: “Some images, made from highly reflective stone or metal, or surrounded by circles of flames, vividly depict the brilliance of the knowledge of the Jina, which illumines the entire universe, and the heat of his asceticism that burns away all sin.” The Jain hymnists stressed that Jinas hold no weapons, for they follow a path of nonviolence, and are never accompanied by a spouse, for they have left behind sensual pleasures.

Among the highlights of *Victorious Ones* are the cosmographs and colorful tantric diagrams that were used in various rituals. One large-scale painting suggests the enormity of the Jain cosmos. It portrays the universe in the shape of a man. His small waist is in the shape of a circle representing the space where humans live and may achieve liberation, containing two and a half land masses, or “continents,” surrounded by oceans. At one side is a circular map of the cosmos, while on the other we see the graphically depicted the tortures in the many hells that await the unrepentant sinner.

Other colorful paintings, many of them the size of medieval European tapestries, portray pilgrimage sites. These actual temples and locations, such as Mount Shatrunjaya in the Indian state of Gujarat, are believed to have been sanctified by the presence of Jinas and virtuous monks and nuns. Several of the featured maps record real pilgrimages while also recreating an ideal sacred realm.

In addition to the extremely large paintings of the cosmos and panoramic scenes of pilgrimage sites, *Victorious Ones* also features texts illuminated with paintings of outstanding quality, many small in scale with images that are flattened and abstracted, but nonetheless vibrant and energetic.

Stone sculptures, many quite massive in size, are featured in the exhibition. The earliest is the head of a Jina created in the city of Mathura in the fifth century. This and other sculptures depicting Jinas would have been worshipped in either domestic shrines or public temples.

Jain temples became quite magnificent structures in the Middle Ages. Particularly well-known are the temples of gleaming white marble in the Indian state of Rajasthan. Helping to give a sense of this ascendant moment in Jain history will be an intricately carved marble arch from the thirteenth century, on loan from the Yale University Art Gallery. This wall-sized architectural fragment is to be joined by another, a tenth-century reddish stone shrine from Madhya Pradesh, a rare loan from a private collection.

*Victorious Ones: Jain Images of Perfection* also assembles a number of elaborate bronzes with multiple Jinas and attendant figures. The figures are backed by filigree-like reliefs resembling elaborate shrine and temple architecture. Some of the earliest bronze sculptures made in India were created by Jains: this exhibition features a number of important examples from the fifth to seventh century.

*Victorious Ones: Jain Images of Perfection* is made possible by a lead gift from Sital and Suman Jain and family. Additional gifts and grants have been received from Bina and Navin Kumar Jain, Ronak Hemant Shah and Family, and the Rubin-Ladd Foundation. Promotional support was provided by the Pandya Jain Family Foundation.

### ***Accompanying Catalog***

A fully illustrated and comprehensive 304-page catalog will include the following essays by Jain scholars:

- *Victorious Across Eternity: The Lives of Jain Tīrthārīkaras* by Paul Dundas
- *The Cosmic Man and the Human Condition* by John E. Cort
- *Contemplating the Jain Universe: Visions of Order and Chaos* by Phyllis Granoff
- *The Mathematics of the Jain Cosmos* by Kim Plofker
- *Lokākāśa and Lokadhātu: A Comparison of Jain and Buddhist Cosmology* by Padmanabh S. Jaini
- *Sacred Place and Structured Space: Temple Architecture and Pilgrimage in Jainism* by Julia A. B. Hegewald
- *Icons in the Manifold: Jain Sculpture in Early and Medieval India* by Sonya Rhie Quintanilla
- *Digambara Narrative Painting of South India* by Robert J. Del Bonta
- *Contemporary Jain Mandala Rituals* by John E. Cort

### ***Jainism***

The twenty-third Jina, Parshvanatha, who is thought to have lived in the seventh century BCE, founded a Jain community based on renunciation of the world. Mahavira, the twenty-fourth and last Jina to appear in this age, is traditionally thought to have lived from 599 to 527 BCE, but some scholars believe he was a contemporary of the Buddha in the early fifth century BCE.

Jainism encourages personal meditation, following a strict ethical code, and practicing ahimsa, or non-violence, and kindness toward every living creature. The goal of Jainism is ultimately to end the painful cycle of rebirth and attain liberation from all suffering.

While liberation is possible only for those who as monks or nuns have renounced the world, wealthy Jain merchant families have been the mainstay of the religious community throughout history, supporting monks and donating temples and images.

“The Jains continue to teach that right conduct includes giving away part of one’s wealth, in bad times as well as good. We might all aspire to learn something from them as we contemplate their art,” says Donald Rubin, founder of the Rubin Museum of Art.

The major centers of Jainism are located in India, mainly in the states of Gujarat and Rajasthan in western India, Madhya Pradesh in central India, Maharashtra in the Deccan, and Karnataka in the south.

### ***Rubin Museum of Art***

The Rubin Museum of Art 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.