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***MAN'S PLACE IN THE UNIVERSE IS THEME  
OF UPCOMING EXHIBITION AT RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART***

New York, NY — A leaf from a medieval manuscript depicting man at the center of the universe; a 12<sup>th</sup>-century sandstone sculpture of Vishnu reclining on a bed of serpents, afloat on the cosmic ocean; and photographs of the galaxies taken from the Hubble telescope: these are among 75 works on view in *Visions of the Cosmos: From the Milky Ocean to an Evolving Universe*, opening at the Rubin Museum of Art on December 11, 2009 (remaining on view through May 10, 2010).

The exhibition marks the culmination of *The Cosmologies Series*, a series of three consecutive exhibitions exploring the ways in which humankind has interpreted and visually represented the creation and structure of the universe, and its place within it. *Visions of the Cosmos* spans history and geography, delves into traditions of the East and the West, and examines ideas from within the domains of both religion and science.

“This exhibition marks the first time that the Rubin Museum of Art, an institution devoted to Himalayan art, displays examples of European art. We hope to make connections between

Western and Eastern art that will yield valuable insights for our visitors,” says Dr. Martin Brauen, chief curator of the Rubin Museum of Art, who has organized this loan exhibition in collaboration with a team of staff and guest scholars. On view will be sculptures, paintings, illuminated manuscripts, rare books, and prints from American and European collections, both private and public.

For an Eastern perspective, the team looked to the deity-centered cosmologies of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism, which envision gods as primary protagonists in the universe. The Western perspective is represented by images reflecting the human-centered cosmology of Christianity in the Middle Ages and the heliocentric universe embraced during the Renaissance. The intricate cosmic construct of the Kabbalah is also considered, as is the world-view of alchemy. The exhibition ends with photographs representing current astrophysical findings and virtual travel through the universe via a digital simulation created by the American Museum of Natural History.

“In juxtaposing Eastern conceptions of the universal with Western, we emphasize European works, in the hope that they will be more familiar ‘entry points’ for our visitors,” says Dr. Brauen. “But the discussion started here lends itself to incorporating more cosmologies.”

As the exhibition title suggests, visitors enter the galleries at the moment of creation in Hindu belief. Here they encounter the delicately carved sandstone sculpture portraying Vishnu sleeping on the cosmic ocean. This is juxtaposed with bronzes and paintings depicting the godheads of Hinduism acting as protagonists in a great cyclical cosmology, one that includes the birth of Brahma and the churning of the milky ocean. A late 12<sup>th</sup> to early 13<sup>th</sup>-century Shiva figure, on loan from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, depicts the deity as Lord of the Dance, surrounded by a circle of flames representing the cosmos: fire in one hand, the drum of creation in the other, Shiva symbolizes the Hindu belief in the dual forces in the universe: creation and destruction, day and night, and male and female.

The second section of *Visions of the Cosmos* traces how Western medieval cosmology envisioned humans as the center of the universe and was replaced in the Renaissance by a heliocentric universe, giving rise to the present evolving astrophysical world-view.

Inner cosmologies as well as external ones are evident in the exhibition. Four Jain drawings from the 16<sup>th</sup> century depict the manner in which different cosmic realms relate to the human body, or *Cosmic Man*—a concept perhaps arising from the universal impulse to view the human body as a microcosm of the cosmos. Other examples include a Nepalese Hindu chart of the Chakra system, mapping energy centers along the spinal column corresponding to internal organs, and a late medieval Italian manuscript portraying a common figure called the *Zodiac Man*. Every part of the *Zodiac Man*'s body is linked to an astrological sign, making explicit the then widespread belief in the power of the planets over human behavior.

A number of Buddhist *stupas*—created to house the relics of a deceased Buddha or teacher—depict the cosmos in three-dimensional form. Also on view are two gilt three-dimensional mandalas, representations of a perfected universe intended as an offering to deities.

### **The Cosmologies Series**

*Visions of the Cosmos: From the Milky Ocean to an Evolving Universe* is the last in a three-part exhibition series at the Rubin Museum of Art designed to investigate how humankind has interpreted and visually represented the creation and structure of the universe and its place within it.

*The Cosmologies Series* also includes: *Mandala: The Perfect Circle* (August 14, 2009 – January 11, 2010) and *The Red Book of C. G. Jung: Creation of a New Cosmology*, (October 7, 2009 – January 25, 2010). During the exhibition period of *Visions of the Cosmos*, the Rubin Museum also presents *Victorious Ones: Jain Images of Perfection* (September 18, 2009 – February 15, 2010), also exhibiting some cosmological paintings.

### **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.