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***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***

***Bhutan, the Sacred Within: Photographs by Kenro Izu***

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Rubin Museum of Art (RMA) is pleased to present ***Bhutan, the Sacred Within: Photographs by Kenro Izu***, the second exhibition of Kenro Izu's photographs to premiere at RMA and the last of his trilogy of works related to sacred landscapes. Izu has spent much of his career traveling the world, seeking the sacred and spiritual in landscapes and the people who inhabit them and attempting to capture the moments in which he senses these qualities are revealed. The photographs in this exhibition reflect Izu's exploration of Bhutan, a country that he visited repeatedly over a period of six years (2002 – 2007) and in which he found, in his words, "a wealth of spiritual value." Approximately 40 of Izu's large-scale, handcrafted photographs taken in Bhutan are on view in the exhibition, combined with a selection of Bhutanese works of art drawn from RMA's permanent collection.

The people of Bhutan are heirs to an unbroken tradition of Buddhist government and religion. The kingdom is known for its measurement of national success, not in terms of the Gross National Product but rather in the Gross National Happiness of its people. Gross National Happiness is a concept based on the Buddhist idea that happiness is an individual and inner pursuit. The Bhutanese government sees it as its responsibility to create the right environment for its citizens to seek happiness. Izu finds this focus in the faces and postures of his subjects and in the shifting moods of the landscapes and sacred buildings he photographs. Combining an artist's vision with exquisite sensitivity to the historical craft of photography, Izu creates work that brings us closer to a country on the brink of modernity that seeks to maintain traditions.

Izu's close observation of Bhutan led to self scrutiny, revealed in the sensitive character of his photographs and in his extensive journal entries. Excerpts of Izu's journal entries are incorporated into the exhibition, weaving a visual path among his photographs to give form to his journeys both throughout Bhutan and within himself.

In Izu's words:

*Traveling many years, I have not yet to seen a place as peaceful as Bhutan, or a place that affects such peacefulness within me. If there is a place indeed named Utopia, this place may come the closest to it. . . . As I gaze at Dzong and a surrounding village through the clouds, I start to wonder if this scene, before my eyes is real or just an illusion? Or this trip of incredible peacefulness is an illusion itself? Or my life itself may be...*

Pursuing the craft of photography to its essence, Izu uses a custom-made, 300-pound camera to expose specially made film in 14 x 20 inch negatives. He prints the image directly, without enlarging it (contact print), on paper that has been painstakingly prepared and finishes it with a hand-brushed coating of carbon pigment or platinum/palladium metals. Vigilant developing, careful washing then drying the print completes a three-day process.

Izu was born in Osaka, Japan, in 1949. While at Nihon University in Tokyo, he made the decision to come to New York City and moved there in 1970, where he has lived and worked since. His photographs have been exhibited nationally and internationally and are represented in numerous public and private collections, including the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California; Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Massachusetts; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Japan.

#### **About RMA**

RMA houses an esteemed collection of Himalayan art. The paintings, pictorial textiles, and sculpture are drawn from cultures that touch upon the 1,800 mile 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.

The rich cultural legacy of this region, largely unfamiliar to Western viewers, offers an uncommon opportunity for visual adventure and aesthetic discovery. For young and old alike it is an environment in which to encounter the unknown and find meaningful dialogue. It requires actively bringing to bear one's previous experience, looking closely at the material at hand, discriminating carefully, and shaping the imagination. The fundamental aim of the Museum is to provide this adventure in learning through art.

Working to foster connections between visitors and the art is RMA's diverse team of knowledgeable and professional guides who are always available on the gallery floors to answer questions, engage in discussions, and help explore the art at any level. The guides work in concert with RMA's ambitious schedule of exhibitions, education, and public programming, designed to provide multiple entryways to delve into Himalayan art.