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BIG! Himalayan Art
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RMA is pleased to present ***BIG! Himalayan Art***, an exhibition focusing on large scale works of art in the Museum's collection. Curated by RMA Senior Curator, Jeff Watt, the exhibition includes over 30 paintings, appliqué textiles, *tangkas* (painting or textile work on cloth) and ritual objects. Additionally, a large-format photograph, taken by contemporary photographer Nancy Jo Johnson and showing a *tangka* unfurled down the side of a mountain, provides a vivid sense of their use and place in the community. Viewers are invited to experience the awe-inspiring scale that characterizes art as it is frequently displayed in temples and at community festivals in the Himalayas. The exhibition looks at why works of art are made in large sizes, where they are traditionally displayed, and how and why they are used.



Himalayan art experienced *in situ* is almost always a sensory overload. Architectural elements are brightly painted, and paintings and cloth banners are often hung in layers. Paintings are shown in sets, running into scores of individual, brightly mounted hangings on a common theme, and walls are covered with large figures and complex narratives. ***BIG! Himalayan Art*** provides a sense of the scale at which such environments are conceived by bringing together over life-sized, intricately detailed, kaleidoscopically-colored works of art. Because works of art made for religious purposes in the Himalayas are commissioned and created as acts of devotion and celebration, the bigger the scale, and the more lavish the materials, the more merit is generated. These works of art are most commonly used in community settings, effectively commanding the attention of crowds of people, conveying and sustaining a sense of shared place, practice, and tradition. This places big works of art in a larger context by highlighting their social and cultural significance in the Himalayas and surrounding regions.

Four techniques for making two-dimensional large scale works of art are represented in ***BIG! Himalayan Art***. These include giant, appliqué textiles; paintings on cloth as stand-alone objects;

murals painted on walls of temples and government buildings; and sets of paintings created as single compositions composed of as many as one hundred or more individual works.

Of particular note is a painting on the scale of a mural created by RMA’s artist-in-residence, Pema Rinzin. The elaborate project took Rinzin a year to complete, working steadily in an open, atelier-like space in RMA’s galleries. The mural depicts the Four Great Guardian Kings. Twelve feet long and seven feet high, Rinzin’s mural offers viewers a sense of what they would see painted directly on the exteriors of almost all temples in the Himalayas.

Two highlights from the exhibition follow. Additional images are available upon request.

<p><i>Yogambara</i> Tibet, 17th century Pigment on Cloth 38 1/2 x 25 1/2 in. Rubin Museum of Art, C2001.1.2 (HAR 65002)</p>	
<p><i>Shiva Vishavarupa, Universal Form with Consort</i> Nepal, mid-19th century Pigment on Cloth 63 x 38 in. Rubin Museum of Art, C2003.20.2 (HAR 65250)</p>	

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.