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Holy Madness Portraits of Tantric Siddhas

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Rubin Museum of Art (RMA) is pleased to present *Holy Madness: Portraits of Tantric Siddhas*, a groundbreaking examination of the art representing some of the most colorful characters in South Asian and Himalayan civilization. These saintly tricksters were instrumental in transmitting tantric Buddhism from India to the Himalayas between the seventh and eleventh centuries. Their legends are filled with magic and eccentric behavior, the product of direct religious and mystic experience. At the heart of their enduring appeal are vivid stories told in prose and verse. Set against a vast array of backdrops, they tell of great frustrations and epiphanies, of the ordinary and the extraordinary expressed in compelling visual imagery.



Idealized portraits of *mahasiddhas* – Sanskrit, *maha* meaning “great” and *siddha* meaning “accomplished one” – are included both as secondary motifs in many Himalayan paintings and also as the primary subject of painting, sculpture, and woodblock prints. More than one hundred works of art are highlighted in the exhibition – from Indian miniatures, Nepalese clay sculptures, and contemporary photographs of ascetics to Tibetan woodblock prints, palm-leaf manuscripts, and life-size bronze sculpture, all of which are compared with art still surviving in situ. The exhibition pulls together for the first time works of art from American, European, and Asian museums as well as private individuals, making it possible to feature complete sets of paintings and sculptures, and in some cases reuniting groups that have long been dispersed among different museum collections.

Also on view are two related photography exhibitions:

- *Mahasiddhas at Gyantse* features photographs by scholar Ulrich von Schroeder of approximately twenty 15th century mural paintings. The murals, some of the most splendid extant painted representations of *mahasiddhas* in Tibet, have never before been exhibited or

published as a complete cycle. (Theater Level Gallery)

- *Mahasiddhas at Alchi*, a collage of photographs by photographer and Professor of Physics, Dr. Jaroslav Poncar, makes up an almost life size reproduction of a four meter tall clay sculpture of a standing *bodhisattva*. The *bodhisattva*, whose skirts are covered with superb miniature paintings of a set of the 84 *mahasiddhas*, was built during the late 12th to the early 13th centuries, at the Alchi Sumtsek temple. (Spiral Lobby)

Publications:

- *Holy Madness: Portraits of Tantric Siddhas* is accompanied by a 450-page illustrated catalogue, edited by Rob Linrothe, Associate Professor of Art History at Skidmore College, with contributions from ten of the most prominent scholars of Asian art, history, and literature. The catalog provides a survey of *mahasiddha* art, examining the contexts in which and the purposes for which the art was originally made. Essays in the catalog explore the various themes – literary, religious, sociological, and anthropological – found in *mahasiddha* art.
- *Empowered Masters: Tibetan Wall Paintings of Mahasiddhas at Gyantse*, a 224-page, fully illustrated catalogue by Ulrich Von Schroeder, will also be available in the Shop at RMA.

Images are available upon request.