

PRESS RELEASE

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART EXHIBITION IS FIRST TO FOCUS ON RARE
IMAGES OF TIBET'S ICONIC ARCHITECTURE

Vicariously visit Tibet's rarely-seen sacred sites in "Monumental Lhasa: Fortress, Palace, Temple," opening on September 16, 2016

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Vicariously visit Tibet in #MonumentalLhasa exhibition opening 9/16 @RubinMuseum. <http://rma.cm/11q>



#MonumentalLhasa reveals Tibet's #architecture through #art & #photography. <http://rma.cm/11q>

New York, NY (June 21, 2016) – This fall, Rubin Museum of Art visitors will experience Tibet's most renowned architectural sites through historical and contemporary eyes in the exhibition "Monumental Lhasa: Fortress, Palace, Temple." Images of monuments and sacred sites like the Statue of Liberty, Eiffel Tower, and Taj Mahal act as powerful representations of place, and "Monumental Lhasa" is the first exhibition to explore this kind of visual representation in Tibet, featuring drawings, paintings, and photographs of landmarks created primarily by Tibetans and Westerners since the 18th century.

Bringing together over 50 works of art from the Rubin Museum collection as well as public and private collections across Europe and North America, the exhibition revives one of the original functions of these images—to transmit the holy city of Lhasa to a remote audience. Spanning art that ranges from pilgrimage maps to photo albums, the exhibition explores how images contribute to the iconic character, familiarity, and power of important landmarks.

"Architecture is deeply connected to our impression and experience of places. While we may never visit these sites ourselves, we often become acquainted with them through encounters with images on postcards, souvenirs, and various forms of media," exhibition curator Natasha Kimmet said. "In Lhasa, Buddhist pilgrims and other visitors created images focused on the capital's striking landmark buildings to recreate and convey their experience of this important religious and political center of Asia."

The exhibition introduces visitors to the monumental palace-fortresses, sacred temples, and powerful monastic institutions that anchored the religious and political life of Lhasa, including the Potala Palace, Jokhang Temple, and Samye monastery. Rare visual representations of Lhasa demonstrate the appeal of these monuments, as well as how cross-cultural encounters shaped the production of images. While the Tibetan images are shaped by Buddhist religious and historical narratives, Western

and other foreign visitors were focused on imperial exploration, travel, and scientific discovery, highlighting how architecture images have often been manipulated to convey the messages of patrons and artists. Tibetans and foreigners frequently adjusted their representations of Lhasa's buildings and geography to convey specific motives or perspectives—a practice that continues today through the use of photo editing tools and filters like Photoshop and photo apps for social media.

Key images include:



The Demoness of Tibet; Tibet; Late 19th/early 20th century; Pigments on cloth; Rubin Museum of Art; C2006.1.1 (HAR 65719)

Samye Monastery; Painted by a Tibetan monk; commissioned by Major William Edmund Hay (1805-1879); Tibet; ca. 1857; Watercolor on paper; The British Library; Wise Collection, Add.Or.3017, folio 3

Tashilhunpo Monastery from the south; Gobonjab Tsybikoff; Tibet; 1900-1901; Reproduction print of original black and white album photograph; From the American Geographical Society Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries; Digital Photo Archive, PC 40C 38

By collectively displaying these images, the Rubin invites visitors to vicariously traverse the key sites of central Tibet and to look closely at how architecture, geography, and the identity of Tibet have been represented and shared in ways that intersect with how we travel and experience places now.

Visitors can further engage with these ideas by peering into custom View-masters installed in the gallery that contain a variety of images representing Tibetan sites throughout history, from 17th century paintings to contemporary photos shared on social media.

Public programs and interpretive content will complement the exhibition, including an audio tour that features excerpts from Western travelogues and Tibetan pilgrimage guides. Additional programs will include a talk by Clare Harris, Professor of Visual Anthropology at the University of Oxford and Curator for Asian Collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum, tied to the launch of her latest book *Photography and Tibet* (Reaktion Books, 2016).

Support for this exhibition is made possible in part by the Ellen Bayard Weedon Foundation, Tulku Tsultrim Pelgyi, and by contributors to the 2016 Exhibitions Fund.

About Natasha Kimmert

Natasha Kimmert is Curatorial Fellow at the Rubin Museum of Art. She is a Ph.D. candidate in Art History at the University of Vienna and a member of the Graduate School “Cultural Transfers and Cross-Contacts in the Himalayas.” Her research explores intersections between the material and social dimensions of art,

architecture, and ritual/use in Tibet and the Himalayas. She earned a M.A. in the History of Art and Archaeology from the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, and has recently published articles in *Orientalism* and the anthology *Nako: Research and Conservation in the Western Himalayas* (Böhlau, 2016).

About the Rubin Museum of Art

The Rubin Museum of Art is an arts and cultural hub in New York City's vibrant Chelsea neighborhood that inspires visitors to make connections between contemporary life and the art and ideas of the Himalayas and neighboring regions including India. With a diverse array of thought-provoking exhibitions and programs—including films, concerts, and on-stage conversations—the Rubin provides immersive experiences that encourage personal discoveries and spark new ways of seeing the world. Emphasizing cross-cultural connections, the Rubin is a space to contemplate ideas that extend across history and span human cultures.

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