

PRESS RELEASE

Opening in March 2014, *Bodies in Balance* Highlights Rich Visual History of Tibetan Medicine Through Approximately 140 Paintings, Manuscripts, Sculpture, and Works on Paper and in Wood and Metal

First Comprehensive Exhibition on Art and Practice of Tibetan Medicine Demonstrates Ancient Tradition's Continued Relevance to Contemporary Life

Visitor Experience to Include Interactive Elements that Extend to Café and Shop



New York, NY (January 31, 2014)—As interest in healthy living and a holistic approach to healthcare gain popularity in Western culture, age-old healing traditions from the East are being reexamined as new sources of knowledge. On March 15, 2014, the Rubin Museum of Art will present an exhibition on the art and practice of Tibetan medicine, one of the most comprehensive medical systems in the world. *Bodies in Balance: The Art of Tibetan Medicine*, on view through September 8, 2014, will focus on the visual representations of Tibetan medicine from its earliest applications to its place in modern societies. The exhibition is the first to examine the guiding principles of Tibetan medicine through its diverse visual history, and will illuminate the connections between physician and artist; Buddhist ideas, medicine, and the visual arts; and ancient healing traditions and contemporary ideas of wellbeing.

The relationship between Tibetan medicine, Buddhism, and the visual arts has been integral to the development and transmission of this medical practice. *Bodies in Balance* will feature 140 objects dating from the ninth century to the present day that represent the spread of Tibetan medical knowledge across generations, including paintings and drawings, medical texts and tools, and natural ingredients used to create medicines.

Inspired by the individualized approach fundamental to much of Tibetan medical practice, *Bodies in Balance* will provide a questionnaire for a personalized visitor experience of the exhibition. The survey will include a set of sample questions that a Tibetan doctor might ask to determine the balance of the three main dynamic forces in the body and mind —wind, bile, and phlegm— thus allowing visitors to assess their own constitution. Visitors can then explore the exhibition by following color-coded markers based on their constitution and learn more about how ideas examined in the show are relevant to their own lives. The museum shop and Café Serai will also feature diverse offerings suitable for each of the specific forces, carrying exhibition concepts beyond the galleries.

Bodies in Balance will also include a pulse station that will teach visitors how to feel their pulse according to Tibetan practice. Pulse taking is a fundamental diagnostic tool in Tibetan medicine that identifies several characteristics of our mental and physical health. The Museum will also offer as part of its series of interactive, diagnostic workshops an opportunity to learn pulse-taking techniques from Tibetan and Chinese doctors. More information on public programming can be found below and on the Rubin website.

Additionally, the exhibition will feature a multimedia installation that presents the ways in which Tibetan medicine has thrived and been adapted in today's world. Medicinal compounds and graphic cards will also be displayed throughout the gallery spaces, helping to decode complex paintings and illustrations and providing additional details for the understanding of Tibetan medical concepts and the ingredients in medical compounds.

“With *Bodies in Balance*, we wanted to provide audiences with a personalized experience. We shaped the participatory elements so that there isn't one way to discover the exhibition. It's about our visitors and the opportunity to make the experience wholly their own,” said Patrick Sears, the Museum's Executive Director. “From the Rubin Museum's inception, our vision has been to create and nurture an environment where our audiences can feel connected to our exhibitions and programming. As we begin our second decade, we are expanding what this means and developing new ways for our audiences to engage with us.”

Organized by Guest Curator Theresia Hofer from the University of Oslo and Rubin Museum's Assistant Curator Elena Pakhoutova, the exhibition will be structured around ten major subject areas. The exhibition will first highlight the origins and history of Tibetan medicine, including the historical influence of early Buddhist, Chinese, Indian, and Greco-Arab medical traditions, and explore foundational principles of the system. It will, then, focus on the theory and practice of Tibetan medicine, showcasing a selection of copies from the *Tibetan Medical Paintings* —a 17th-century set of 79 *thangkas*, or scroll paintings, that have been invaluable in the instruction of medical practitioners. *Bodies in Balance* will also examine the connections between mind and body essential to health and wellbeing as well as diagnostics, treatment, Tibetan pharmacology, and the use of Tibetan medicine in today's global world.

Exhibition highlights, include:

- The earliest representation of the Medicine Buddha. On view for the first time in the U.S., the painting on silk depicts the Medicine Buddha Bhaisajyaguru, flanked by two Bodhisattvas. From the world famous Buddhist site of cave temples at Dunhuang on the Silk Road, the painting's Tibetan inscription clearly states the name of its creator and dedicates its creation to the improvement of health and wellbeing. The inscription confirms that the Medicine Buddha was the focus of the spiritual and healing practices as early as the ninth century and well-known to Tibetans at the time.
- An 18th-century gilded copper depiction of the Medicine Buddha. Tibetan Doctors and patients believe that the Medicine Buddha can relieve humans of all diseases. This great power is symbolized by the calming presence of the Medicine Buddha. He is shown holding a bowl of healing nectar in his left hand and the fruit of Arura (Myrobalan) plant in his right hand. This "supreme medicine," which is considered a panacea in Tibetan medicine mainly grows in India and is part of many Tibetan medical compounds.
- *The Tree of Diagnosis*, a 17th-century Tibetan painting on cloth and brocade. This painting presents the diagnostic process in Tibetan medicine shown in the popular mnemonic form of a tree. It depicts three trunks for each of the main diagnostic methods: visual observation, feeling the pulse, and questioning. As in most medical tree paintings, the three bodily constitutions are distinguished by color, and the leaves related to wind are blue, those related to bile are yellow, and those related to phlegm are white.

Images: Left: Fierce Yuthog Protector, Red Wolf-Headed Protectress underneath a Blue Medicine Buddha (from a set of nine protectors). Central Tibet; 19th century. Pigments on cloth; 86 × 60 cm. Rubin Museum of Art, C2006.66.9 (HAR 192). Middle: Pulse-taking interactive. Still. Rubin Museum of Art. Right: Bhaisajyaguru on Lotus Seat. Central Tibet; 18th or 19th century. Gilded and painted solid wood; 24 × 16 × 12 cm. Private Collection

PUBLIC PROGRAMMING:

Bodies in Balance will be accompanied by a broad range of public and education programs focused on the confluence of Eastern and Western approaches to health and wellbeing. The Rubin Museum's popular *Brainwave* conversation series, which brings together personalities from different creative walks of life with neuroscientists and psychologists will, in its 2014 iteration, focus on themes from the exhibition.

Program highlights include:

- **In the Garden of the Medicine Buddha:** A mini-retreat with David Crow. The mandala of the Medicine Buddha's healing realm contains many symbolic teachings and meditations relevant to our modern world. Join David Crow, a master herbalist, aromatherapist and acupuncturist, and practitioner of Tibetan Medicine for a three-day exploration of Tibetan Medicine's inner dimensions, including a conversation on the Medicine Buddha's symbolic teachings, guided meditation, and a lesson on the at-home pharmacy.

- **Chef's Table:** A Jackson Heights field trip. Spend an afternoon at the Rubin Museum learning about Tibetan nutrition, and then travel to Jackson Heights' Gangjong Kitchen for a discussion and carefully conceptualized dinner with Chef Tenzing, a Gold Medal decorated chef, and an expert in Tibetan herbs and spices.
- **The Dreamover.** Come in your pajamas and sleep over at the Rubin Museum beneath a work of art selected just for you. Dream under the compassionate and wakeful gaze of a hundred Buddhas and learn how dreams can inform your health and vitality.
- **The Living Mandala.** Under the guidance of a Tibetan lama you will be able to enter a living mandala. In this two-hour intensive workshop the lama will induct participants by physically guiding them through a tantric meditation initiation process, retuning their minds to enable them to become the embodiment of the Blue Healing Buddha at the center of the mandala.

A full roster of programs, including dates and ticket information, can be located on the Rubin Museum's website at www.rmanyc.org/programs.

CATALOG:

The exhibition will additionally be accompanied by a comprehensive illustrated publication, representing the first major publication dedicated to an interdisciplinary exploration of the triangular relationships between the Tibetan art and science of healing, Buddhism, and the visual arts.

The catalog is edited and introduced by Theresia Hofer and features essays by 12 renowned scholars in the field, dealing with contemporary practice, pharmacology, astrology, history, foundational treatises, and the Medicine Buddha. The volume brings to life the theory and practice of this constantly evolving, ancient healing art, which is becoming increasingly sought after world-wide. The text is generously illustrated with more than 250 images of works from *Bodies in Balance*, highlighting both specific objects and contemporary medical practice.

EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION AND CREDITS:

Bodies in Balance is curated by Theresia Hofer, Guest Curator, University of Oslo, with the assistance of Elena Pakhoutova, Rubin Museum Assistant Curator.

Bodies in Balance: The Art of Tibetan Medicine is made possible, in part, by the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation and Gildan Active Wear, in honor of Robert Baylis.

Theresia Hofer

Theresia Hofer is a social and medical anthropologist with a PhD from University College London. She works as Marie Curie Research Fellow at the University of Oslo, with her research and teaching focus on the contemporary practice and history of Tibetan medicine and cross-cultural studies of health, illness and disability. She has carried out extensive fieldwork in the Tibet Autonomous Region (China), Bhutan, India, and Nepal. She has spent a year in Lhasa and western Tibet working with Tibetan doctors, researching their work in transforming and developing Tibetan medical traditions in the latter

half of the 20th century. Hofer is the author of *The Inheritance of Change: Transmission and Practice of Tibetan Medicine in Ngamring* (2012), numerous academic articles, and a co-edited special issue of *Asian Medicine Journal on Women and Gender in Tibetan Medicine* (2011, together with Heidi Fjeld).

Elena Pakhoutova

Elena Pakhoutova is an assistant curator at the Rubin Museum of Art with a PhD in Asian Art History. Her background in Tibetan Buddhist studies contributed to her interdisciplinary approach to art history. Her research interests include dialogue in visual traditions of Inner Asia, text and image, art and ritual, art and Buddhist pilgrimage, art production and patronage, and narrative in Tibetan visual culture. Her other current interests are cross-cultural exchanges, material culture, and contemporary Tibetan Art.

ABOUT THE RUBIN:

The Rubin Museum of Art's immersive environment stimulates learning, promotes understanding, and inspires personal connections to the ideas, cultures, and art of Himalayan Asia. The only museum in the U.S. dedicated to the Himalayan region, the Rubin has welcomed more than 1.3 million visitors since its founding in 2004. Featuring more than 2,000 works spanning the second to the 20th centuries, the Rubin Museum's collection includes some of the finest examples of Tibetan, Bhutanese, Mongolian, and Nepalese art as well as works from surrounding regions. The collection is complemented by a diverse array of films, on-stage conversations, concerts, and special events. The Museum's education, community, and access programming is dedicated to providing audiences of all ages and backgrounds with multidimensional experiences that foster dialogue and active engagement with the traditions and cultures of the Himalayas. The Rubin Museum's Café Serai and shop are also inspired by the region and serve as a natural extension of the gallery and programming experience.

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