



RUBIN  
MUSEUM  
OF ART

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***RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART EXPLORES THE PARALLELS  
BETWEEN EASTERN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN AND TIBETAN BUDDHIST ICONS***

New York, NY—The Rubin Museum of Art examines intriguing correspondences and differences between Eastern Orthodox icons and Tibetan Buddhist *thangkas* (paintings on cloth) in *Embodying the Holy: Icons in Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Tibetan Buddhism*, on view October 5, 2010 through March 7, 2011.

*Embodying the Holy* sheds light on parallels between the Eastern Orthodox Christian and Tibetan Buddhist sacred traditions in function, subject matter, composition, and story telling strategies, pairing some 63 icons from important private collections and The Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton, Massachusetts, with 26 from the Rubin Museum of Art and other collections. Whether Orthodox icon paintings, iconostases, and crucifixes or Buddhist *thangkas*, reliquaries, and stupas, all the works on view are essentially functional objects, created to be used in ritual and devotion.

The possibility of salvation, the battle of good versus evil, and the notion of heaven and hell: all are concepts raised by the works of art and artifacts featured in *Embodying the Holy*. The exhibition explores the different notions of compassion manifested in the iconography of Mary and Jesus and that of Tara, the most popular goddess of Tibet and the feminine embodiment of compassion. Symmetries are also seen in the development of “family” trees, such as Christianity’s Tree of Jesse and Buddhism’s diagrammatic

charting of the deities and teachers connected to particular historic figures, such as *Assembly Field* (18<sup>th</sup> century).

Icons illustrating episodes from the life of Christ are compared with Tibetan thangkas depicting events in the life of the historical Buddha. An 18<sup>th</sup>-century Byzantine icon from Greek Asia Minor depicting an angular Christ adorned in a flowing red robe and gripping a white banner, rising from the tomb amid fields like blue-green waves, will be exhibited nearby 19th-century Tibetan thangka in which the life stories of the Buddha are rendered with equal vitality, in loving detail and brightly colored profusion around a central, seated Buddha figure.

A good number of works on view are canonic representations of Christian saints, teachers, and other archetypal figures. These include a crowned St. Catherine of Alexandria, astride the attribute of her martyrdom, the wheel, Saint George and the dragon, and the vision of Saint Eustace—all works associated with the School of Crete. Specific to the Russian Orthodox Church is an image of Saint Nil of Stolbensk holding on to his crutches in order to remain upright and in prayer, and a c. 1750 painting of Saint Cyril and Saint Methodius. The panoply of Tibetan lamas, ascetics, and yogis is represented in a group of 18<sup>th</sup> century paintings that includes *Khedrub Geleg Pal Zangpo's Vision* as well as in a number of sacred statues and a *gau* or reliquary box.

“*Embodying the Holy* demonstrates for the first time how two very different religious traditions have utilized similar visual language and iconography to express fundamental beliefs and narratives,” says Martin Brauen, Chief Curator of the Rubin Museum of Art and one of the co-curators. The other co-curator, Senior Curator Ramon Prats, explains that “Both Tibetan Buddhism and Eastern Orthodox Christianity translate their written and oral traditions into symbolic imagery which is only understood fully by the believer.”

*Embodying the Holy* is part of the Rubin Museum’s ongoing exploration of the connection between Tibetan Buddhist art and Western art. Past exhibitions include: *Visions of the Cosmos* (December 11, 2009-May 10, 2010), an examination of the concept of the Cosmos in the East and West within the domains of both religion and science; and *Remember That You Will Die* (March 19, 2010 –August 16, 2010), looking at the visual representations of death in both Tibetan Buddhism and early European Christianity.

**Icon Academic Conference**  
**October 8-9, 2010**

A two-day conference that coincided with the opening of *Embodying the Holy*. The conference brought

together leading experts on the power of religious symbolism, including a keynote discussion moderated by **Kent dur Russell**, Curator, Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton MA and workshops with University Distinguished Professor of Art History Emerita Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX, **Annemarie Weyl Carr**; Lex Hixon Professor of World Religions at Yale University, **Phyllis Granoff**; Director, Centre of Buddhist Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, **Tadeusz Skorupski**; Director, The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore MD, **Gary Vikan**, and others.

### **About the Rubin Museum of Art**

The Rubin Museum of Art holds one of the world's most important collections of Himalayan art. Paintings, pictorial textiles, and sculpture are drawn from cultures that touch upon the 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. This rich cultural legacy, largely unfamiliar to Western viewers, offers an uncommon opportunity for visual adventure and aesthetic discovery.

Admission to RMA is \$10 for adults; \$5 for seniors; \$5 for students (with ID); free for seniors the first Monday of every month; and free for children under 12 and for museum members. Gallery admission is free to all on Fridays between 6pm and 10pm.

Open Monday 11 am to 5 pm, Wednesday 11 am to 7 pm, Thursday 11 am to 5 pm, Friday 11 am to 10 pm, Saturday and Sunday from 11 am to 6 pm; closed on Tuesday. The Rubin Museum of Art is located at 150 West 17th Street, New York, NY. To reach the museum by subway, visitors may take the A, C or E to 14th Street; the 1 to 18th Street; 1, 2, 3 to 14th Street; F and M to 14th Street; N, R, Q, 4, 5 and 6 to 14th or the L to 6th Avenue. By bus, visitors may take the B20 to the corner of 7th Avenue and 17th Street.