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OF
ART

PRESS RELEASE

RUBIN MUSEUM EXHIBITION ILLUSTRATES HOW TIBETAN BUDDHISM EMPOWERED RULERS THROUGH EXQUISITE ARTWORKS

Opening February 1, 2019, “Faith and Empire” explores the intersection of politics, religion, and art in Tibetan Buddhism

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@RubinMuseum exhibition highlights how art, religion and politics were intertwined in Tibet. <http://rma.cm/2s3>



Artworks in #FaithandEmpire highlight how Buddhism was key to power in the courts of North Asia. <http://rma.cm/2s3>

New York, NY, December 10, 2018 — Religion has influenced and empowered countless political leaders throughout history, and Tibetan Buddhism is no exception. “Faith and Empire: Art and Politics in Tibetan Buddhism” is the first exhibition of its kind to explore Tibetan Buddhism’s dynamic political role in the empires of Asia from the 7th to the early 20th century.

The exhibition places Himalayan art in a larger global context and sheds light on a little-known aspect of Tibetan Buddhism related to power, one that may run counter to popular perceptions yet is critical to understanding its importance on the world stage. Tibetan Buddhism offered a divine means to power and legitimacy to rule, with images serving as a means of political propagation and embodiments of power. Artworks on view in the exhibition, many for the first time in the United States, illustrate empires that not only embraced Tibetan Buddhism but were empowered by its masters, ritual magic, and religious artwork.

“In the West, Buddhism has often been romanticized as an unchanging passive tradition, but historically this was not the case. In Tibet, religion and politics were so intertwined as to be inseparable. For over a millennium Tibetan Buddhism was an active force in politics, both as a means to claim the right to rule and the magical means to take it,” said Karl Debreczeny, Senior Curator at the Rubin Museum. “‘Faith and Empire’ brings together more than 60 remarkable works of art —many from the highest levels of imperial court production— that illuminate the ways in which art and religion had a tremendous impact on politics in the courts of North Asia.”

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Artwork highlights include a set of 8th-century gilt-silver drinking vessels from the Tibetan Empire; an early 13th-century wrathful icon made of silk and ornamented with tiny seed pearls; a 4 ½-foot-tall 680-pound gilt-bronze bodhisattva from the early 15th-century Ming court; and a 19th-century 8-foot-wide Mongolian depiction of the final battle against the heretics and nonbelievers. The exhibition is arranged chronologically, beginning with the Tibetan Empire in the 7th century, and includes sections on the Tangut kingdom of Xixia, the Mongol Empire, the Chinese Ming dynasty, the rule of the Dalai Lamas, and the Manchu Qing dynasty.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a publication, an audio guide, a conference (the weekend of April 6th; details to be confirmed), and other public programming.

“Faith and Empire” is the first exhibition in the Rubin’s yearlong thematic exploration of power, focusing on how visitors can activate the power that exists within and between us. The Rubin Museum’s 2019 exhibitions and programs highlight multiple perspectives and seek to empower visitors to think about their role as individuals and as a collective in creating, maintaining, and challenging existing systems of power.

“Faith and Empire” is curated by Karl Debreczeny and supported by Fred Eychaner, Ann and Matt Nimetz, Zhou Yu Quan, the Zhiguan Museum of Art, the Ellen Bayard Weedon Foundation, the E. Rhodes & Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, Lisina M. Hoch, Christopher Fussner, the Thomas and Frances Blakemore Foundation, the Neil Kreitman Foundation, Yury Khokhlov, Margot and Tom Pritzker, Carlton Rochell and Kathleen Kalista, and John Eskenazi.

About the Rubin Museum of Art

The Rubin Museum of Art is an arts oasis and cultural hub in New York City’s vibrant Chelsea neighborhood that inspires visitors to make powerful connections between contemporary life and the art and ideas of the Himalayas, India, and neighboring regions. 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 the big questions that extend across history and span human cultures.

About Karl Debreczeny

Dr. Debreczeny is Senior Curator, Collections and Research at the Rubin Museum of Art. He received masters’ degrees from Indiana University in both art history and Tibetan studies (1997) and earned a doctorate in art history from the University of Chicago (2007). His research focuses on exchanges between Tibetan and Chinese artistic traditions, and he is currently leading a comprehensive assessment of the Rubin Museum collection. He has curated several exhibitions for the Rubin Museum of Art including “The All Knowing Buddha: A Secret Guide” (2014); “Wutaishan: Pilgrimage to Five Peak Mountain” (2007); “Patron and Painter: Situ Panchen and the Revival of the Encampment Style” (2009); “Remember That You Will Die: Death

Across Cultures” (2010); and “Lama Patron Artist: The Great Situ Panchen” (2010) at the Smithsonian Freer-Sackler Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

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