

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

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NEW EXHIBITION SHOWCASES MATERIAL SPLENDOR OF SACRED BOOKS ACROSS FAITHS AND TRADITIONS

FEATURES LAVISH MANUSCRIPTS ADORNED IN GOLD AND SILVER FROM BUDDHIST, JAIN, HINDU, CHRISTIAN, AND MUSLIM CULTURES

NEW YORK—The material splendor of sacred books across Buddhist, Jain, Hindu, Christian, and Muslim cultures will be the subject of a new exhibition opening at the Rubin on April 6, 2012. Adorned in silver, gold, and other precious materials, these ornate texts were thoughtfully created, used, and appreciated, handed on through generations as valued objects of art as well as devotion.

Cross-cultural explorations of sacred books have often focused on common themes and topics running through different faiths and traditions. This exhibition, however, takes a different approach. *Illuminated: The Art of Sacred Books* celebrates the aesthetic and creative elements of the objects on view: their diverse formats, the common use of lavish materials, the shared innovations and tools developed for early mass production.

Running through September 3, 2012, *Illuminated* is part of a series of exhibitions at the museum designed to examine Himalayan works within the context of living traditions and cultures worldwide. Last year, the Rubin presented an exhibition of Buddhist, Christian, and Islamic art and artifacts related to pilgrimage, and research is underway for an upcoming exploration of shamanism and traditional medicine across cultures.

The exhibition will feature just under one hundred objects, including illuminated Tibetan manuscript pages and complete books dating as early as the 13th century, written in gold and silver on dark blue and black paper of various sizes in the traditional book format. The works come from the Rubin Museum as well as other museum and private collections. These will be shown along with a bifolio of the famous “Blue Qur’an” written in gold on indigo colored velum in Tunisia in the 9th-10th century on loan from the Rose Trust; a Japanese Buddhist Sutra scroll written in gold on indigo paper in 1720 on loan from Anna and James Melikain Collection; a medieval Gospels Lectionary written in gold letters on purple parchment from the New York Public Library; and illuminated pages of Jain Sutras and illustrated Indian Hindu classics from the Brooklyn Museum, the Morgan Library and Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University.

“The objects in this exhibition—many extraordinarily beautiful to behold—were created as tools of persuasion and conversion, as offerings worthy of the sacred and divine,” said Rubin Museum of Art assistant curator Elena Pakhoutova. “They were therefore rendered in the finest materials available. It is believed that precious materials enhanced the sacred message and the efficacy of the book, that its power rested on the measure of its lavish production.”

In addition to focusing on the physical aspects of sacred books, the exhibition also draws attention to their patronage and their significance as religious objects. *Illuminated* explores technological innovations used to create and adorn books found across traditions, and examines the earliest means of mass production shared by all literary religious cultures, namely the creation of texts using carved and inked wooden blocks pressed onto paper that is then often decorated. The exhibition also includes adorned book covers, painted or carved from wood, made of leather or silver repoussé, and other related objects.

In the immersive Explore Area of the exhibition, visitors can watch two videos about traditional Tibetan paper book making and woodblock carving. There will also be four large photo microscopic prints of different types of paper, along with microscopes where visitors will be able to closely examine the samples. In conjunction with the exhibition, the museum will offer a “journey scrolls” workshop that looks at narrative structure as well as family paper making programs.

ABOUT THE RUBINMUSEUM:

The Rubin Museum provides an immersive environment for exploring Himalayan and Indian art and culture and its connections to contemporary life and ideas. The only museum in the U.S. dedicated to Himalayan art, the Rubin holds outstanding collections of Tibetan, Indian, Nepalese, Mongolian, and Bhutanese art, and provides a bridge to the cultures of the region. Dedicated to creating a multidimensional experience, the Rubin engages its visitors with a diverse range of exhibitions, dialogues, films, performances, and educational programs, and the shop and café are also inspired by the region’s varied cultures. For more information, including hours and location, visit www.rmanyc.org.

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For further information and images, please contact:

Alina Sumajin
Resnicow Schroeder Associates
212-671-5155
asumajin@resnicowschroeder.com

Anne-Marie Nolin, Head of
Communications
Rubin Museum of Art
212-620-5000 x276
amnolin@rmanyc.org