



RUBIN  
MUSEUM  
OF ART

***ART AND ARTIFACTS OF  
BUDDHIST, CHRISTIAN, AND ISLAMIC PILGRIMAGES  
PRESENTED AT THE RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART***

***PILGRIMAGE AND FAITH: BUDDHISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM  
JULY 1 – OCTOBER 24, 2011***

***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
May 2011***

New York—For millennia, people of many faiths have sought to enrich their religious lives by embarking on pilgrimages to sacred places. From July 1 – October 24, 2011 the Rubin Museum of Art will explore the major characteristics of these important journeys in three of the world’s largest religious traditions with *Pilgrimage and Faith: Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam*.

Across faiths, pilgrimages tend to demand long days and physical hardship. The pilgrim’s physical journey encourages an inner one that affects some form of spiritual progress, strengthening of faith, attainment of merit, or purification. A number of ritual acts, both individual and communal, typically enhance the experience.

*Pilgrimage and Faith* brings together nearly seventy objects of diverse function and artistic expression reflecting pilgrims’ varied experiences related to visits to sacred sites. Dating from the 9<sup>th</sup> century to the present, the objects take myriad forms, but embody a shared desire to achieve spiritual advancement through a sacred journey. Some works of art—like a Persian Quran, the central religious text of Islam, ornately decorated with ink, watercolor, lapis lazuli, and gold—are of high artistic skill and were almost certainly reserved for wealthy practitioners. Others—such as Tibetan Buddhist prayer beads carved from bone—were relatively common and intended for everyday use.

The art and artifacts represent the greatest geographical scope ever presented in a single exhibition at the museum, with examples from Japan, France, Turkey, Spain, Iran, Tibet, England, Italy, China, Uzbekistan, Nepal and India.

*Pilgrimage and Faith* continues the Rubin Museum's dedication to cross-cultural exhibitions that set art of the Himalayas in relation to that of other artistic traditions. In 2009 [\*Visions of the Cosmos\*](#) paired Eastern and Western examples of man's interpretation and visual representation of the universe, and his place within it. In 2010 [\*Remember That You Will Die\*](#) compared depictions of death and the afterlife in Medieval and Early Renaissance Europe with those of Tibetan art. Most recently, [\*Embodying the Holy\*](#) shed light on similarities between Tibetan Buddhist *thangka* paintings and Eastern Orthodox Christian icons.

### **Buddhism**

For Buddhists, pilgrimage is an important means to accrue merit, secure a favorable rebirth, and advance towards the release from rebirth, and pilgrimage is a major means in this. First focused on sites associated with Buddha Shakyamuni, Buddhist pilgrimages to natural sites and places associated with powerful deities or holy persons and their representations, gained popularity as new forms of Buddhism emerged over time. The exhibition includes a large 19<sup>th</sup>-century Mongolian map depicting Mount Wutaishan, a popular pilgrimage site where the bodhisattva Manjushri is believed to have his earthly abode. Other notable Buddhist exhibition objects include a 9<sup>th</sup>-century terracotta votive plaque from Bihar, India, depicting the Buddha and a Japanese pilgrim's album dating to 1860 that bears ink stamps collected by the pilgrim as he progressed along his journey.

### **Christianity**

Western Christian pilgrims wishing to honor a revered place or individual, or to petition for grace for themselves or others, traditionally journey to Jerusalem, Rome, or Santiago de Compostela. Pilgrimages to Jerusalem involve visits to places mentioned in the Old and New Testaments, and important places in the life and Passion of Christ. The tombs and relics of various saints, such as Peter and Paul, are venerated during pilgrimages to Rome. Pilgrims journey to Santiago de Compostela in order to visit the tomb of St. James, the first of Jesus' disciples to die a martyr's death. Christian pilgrimages are represented in the exhibition in part by a range of objects, from richly ornamented ritual objects such as a 14<sup>th</sup>-century Italian chalice; and a 12<sup>th</sup>-century French reliquary chassé inlaid with champlevé enamels and adorned with cabochon crystals; to small,

15<sup>th</sup>-century metal pilgrims' badges from France and England which were worn by even the most humble pilgrim. Unique to the Rubin Museum's presentation are a group of objects, including those used by pilgrims, on loan from one of the most important pilgrimage sites in Europe, Santiago de Compostela, Spain.

## **Islam**

Pilgrimage to Mecca (*Hajj*) is the fifth and final pillar of Islam, and the most important representation of Islamic faith and unity. Other revered sites for Muslims include Medina, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, and the holy city of Karbala, Iraq. Unlike in Buddhism or Christianity, relics and material remains are not central to Islamic practice, and the Islamic exhibition objects reflect worship at local and pilgrimage sites alike. These include 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>-century Persian manuscript pages depicting Mecca, Medina, and events in the life of Muhammad; 19<sup>th</sup>- or 20<sup>th</sup>-century Shi'ite clay prayer tablets from Karbala; and a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Quran from Iran that includes Persian translations within the Arabic text.

*Pilgrimage and Faith* includes a substantial number of domestic and international loans from private collectors and institutions, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art; John J. Burns Library, Boston College; Arthur M. Sackler Museum at Harvard University; Loyola University Museum of Art; Museo das Peregrinacicus e De Santiago, Santiago de Compostela; The Newark Museum; Tibet House, New York; and Volkenkunde Museum, Leiden.

The Rubin Museum of Art is the final venue for this exhibition that originated at College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts and curated by Virginia Raguin. The Rubin Museum's presentation was curated by Beth Citron, Karl Debreczeny, Christian Luczanits, and Elena Pakhoutova.

Beginning July 22, the exhibition *Human Currents: The World's Largest Pilgrimage as Interpreted by Hannes Schmid* will provide visitors with the opportunity to explore an important Hindu pilgrimage, the Maha Kumbh Mela festival. Held only once every one hundred and forty-four years, the festival celebrates the gods' symbolic triumph over demons in taking possession of the nectar of immortality. *Human Currents* presents still and moving images captured by photographer Hannes Schmid in 2001 as the banks of the sacred Ganges River swelled with tens of millions of pilgrims of all ages, castes, and classes from every corner of India. The exhibition

offers a glimpse into the crushing crowds and frenetic energy of this largest recorded gathering of human beings on earth. On view through November 13, 2011.

## **PUBLIC PROGRAMS**

In conjunction with *Pilgrimage and Faith*, guests from different walks of life and spiritual experiences will engage in on-stage conversations during a series entitled *The Road that Teaches*. Guests will include feminist icon Gloria Steinem, artist Hughie O'Donoghue, and poet Eliza Griswold, who will reflect on questions like: What is sacred in this largely secular age? How do we honor other belief systems? What is it about pilgrimage that lends it abiding power to transform? Visit [www.rmanyc.org/theroadthatteaches](http://www.rmanyc.org/theroadthatteaches) for complete details.

## **EDUCATION**

The museum has developed a number of educational programs for families, teens, adults, and seniors inspired by *Pilgrimage and Faith*. For complete details, please visit [www.rmanyc.org/education](http://www.rmanyc.org/education).

### **Families**

#### ***The Little Explorers Club: Travel the World Together***

**Wednesdays, 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM**

Children ages 3-5 create crafts inspired by the world's terrains, from the tops of the tallest mountains to the depths of the seas. They'll explore mountains in June, rivers in July, and jungles in August. \$10 for each child/adult pair; \$5 for each additional child

#### ***Meaningful Maps***

**Saturdays in July and August, 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM**

Families will use treasure maps to search the museum for hidden secrets, learn about maps made in the Himalayas, and plot a path to their favorite place on their own map. \$10 for each child/adult pair; \$5 for each additional child

### **Teens**

#### ***Transformative Treks Teen Art Lab***

**July Session: Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, 2:00 PM – 5:00 PM**

**August Session: Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, 2:00 PM – 5:00 PM**

Teens will create travel-inspired works of art as they journey to cultural hotspots all over New York City. They'll discuss art critically, think creatively, and work with professional artists. Free

### **Adults**

#### ***Meaningful Maps Collage Workshop***

**Wednesdays in July, 6:00 PM – 9:30 PM**

After learning about the symbolism and significance of art objects in *Pilgrimage and Faith*, participants will develop collaged compositions based on their own life experiences. \$150 (\$135 for museum members)

## **Seniors**

### ***Personal Pilgrimage Writing Workshop for Seniors***

#### **First Monday of each month, August – October**

Seniors will collaborate with peers before incorporating their own personal pilgrimages into short, written works. Free

*Pilgrimage and Faith* Verbal Description and Touch Tours and American Sign Language Tours are also available for visitors who are blind or partially-sighted, and deaf or hard of hearing.

## **ABOUT THE RUBIN MUSEUM**

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. The museum explores these rich cultural legacies—largely unfamiliar to Western viewers—from a variety of perspectives, offering multiple entry-points for understanding and enjoying the art of the Himalayas.

Admission to the Rubin 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 12 and under, and for museum members. Gallery admission is free to all on Fridays from 6pm to 10pm.

Open Monday 11am to 5pm, Wednesday 11am to 7pm, Thursday 11am to 5pm, Friday 11am to 10pm, Saturday and Sunday from 11am to 6pm; closed on Tuesday. To reach the museum by subway, visitors may take the A, C or E to 14th Street (8th Avenue); the 1 to 18th Street (7th Avenue); 2, 3 to 14th Street (7th Avenue); F, M, L to 14th Street (6th Avenue); and N, R, Q, 4, 5 and 6 to 14th Street (Union Square). By bus, visitors may take the B20 to the corner of 7th Avenue and 17th Street.

### **For further information or images, please contact:**

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