

## PRESS RELEASE

THE RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART,  
ITUM BAHAL CONSERVATION SOCIETY,  
AND LUMBINI BUDDHIST UNIVERSITY'S  
MA PROGRAM IN MUSEOLOGY AND BUDDHIST COLLECTIONS  
PARTNER TO RESEARCH, PRESERVE, AND DISPLAY THE  
COLLECTION OF ONE OF NEPAL'S OLDEST AND MOST  
IMPORTANT MONASTERIES

**NEW YORK, February 23, 2022** – The Rubin Museum of Art announced today a partnership with **Itum Bahal Conservation Society, Kathmandu**, and **Lumbini Buddhist University, Kathmandu**, to research, preserve, and display the collection of one of the oldest, largest, and most important monasteries in Kathmandu, Nepal.

This news follows the January 2022 announcement by the Rubin Museum and the Consulate General of Nepal in New York regarding the transfer of ownership of two objects from the Museum's permanent collection to Nepal. One of the returned objects is the lower part of a wooden, faux-window decoration showing a Garland Bearing Apsara (14<sup>th</sup> century), which research confirmed to have been originally situated at Itum Bahal in Kathmandu.

Itum Bahal is recognized as the oldest and most important of the 18 Buddhist monasteries in Kathmandu and it retains its original layout. According to legend, it was built by Keshchandra, a son of a king of the Thakuri dynasty (ca. 600–ca. 1200) in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The large complex is made up of several monasteries, courtyards, shrines, lanes, and many buildings.

“There's long been a need to fully document Itum Bahal's collection, which comprises over 500 objects. The collection includes numerous ritual objects, pieces of architecture, and particularly noteworthy works such as a golden gate, a wooden Chaitya (Stupa) that is approximately 600 years old, as well as many miniature votive stupas”, said **Secretary of Itum Conservation Society, Pragya Ji**. “We have vacant spaces on the complex which are well suited to display and tell the history of this important site. It is our hope that through this collaboration we can create further awareness around the cultural importance of historic collections held in religious institutions like our own and the need to document and protect them.”

The Rubin Museum and Itum Bahal Conservation Society are working together with a MA class in Museology and Buddhist Collections, led by Swosti Rajbhandari at Lumbini Buddhist University in Nepal, to document Itum Bahal's collection, as well as create three permanent display galleries for the objects within the monastery complex. The galleries are currently

scheduled to open in August 2022, as part of the Gunla festival.

The Rubin Museum will provide feedback and expertise on collection care, documentation, display, and interpretation, and will assist in funding the project.

**Jorrit Britschgi, Executive Director of the Rubin Museum of Art, said:** “We’re committed to strengthening connections between the Rubin and the Himalayan region and to forging partnerships that promote meaningful exchange and learning. This project feels naturally aligned as we support a new generation of museum professionals from the Himalayan region and an important monastery and its history.”

“My students look forward to working closely with the Rubin Museum’s collections team to create an inventory of all the works held by the monastery and to jointly develop a museological approach for presenting objects at this historic site,” said **Swosti Rajbhandari**.

### **RETURN OF OBJECTS FROM THE RUBIN**

In January 2022, the Rubin Museum of Art and the Consulate General of Nepal in New York announced the transfer of ownership of two objects from the Rubin’s permanent collection to Nepal: the Upper Section of a Frieze/Torana (17<sup>th</sup> century) and a Garland Bearing Apsara (14<sup>th</sup> century).

The Nepal Heritage Recovery Campaign originally brought claims related to the two objects to the Museum’s attention. In immediate response to the claims, the Rubin engaged two scholars of Nepali art to further examine and research the known provenance of the pieces. The Museum also collaborated with the Consulate General of Nepal, New York, in determining the origin of the objects, the possibility of returning them to their original sites, and the repatriation process. After thorough investigation, all parties collectively determined that these objects were unlawfully removed from their original sites in Nepal.

The Garland Bearing Apsara is documented to have been originally situated at Itum Bahal, and went missing in spring of 1999. It was brought to the United States and added to the Museum’s collection in 2003.

### **ABOUT ITUM BAHAL**

The Shree Bhaskardev Sanskrita Keshchandrakrit Paravat Mahavihar Conservation Society was formed in 2005 and is legally registered with the Government of Nepal. The Society manages the administrative, financial, and legal matters of Itum Bahal. Furthermore, it is in charge of the conservation and preservation of the monastery’s buildings and collection and ensures the cultural traditions of the Itum Bahal are preserved by conducting rituals and disseminating knowledge on tangible and intangible heritages.

The Conservation Society is chaired by Capt. Chandra Bahadur Shakya and Swasti Ratna Shakya, Roop Kumar Shakya, Prajna Ratna Shakya, Manjib Shakya, Sanubabu Shakya, Ratna Sambhav Shakya, Sunday Man Shakya, Bhagwan Shakya, Amritman Shakya, and Rajendra Shakya.

### **ABOUT LUMBINI BUDDHIST UNIVERSITY’S MA PROGRAM IN MUSEOLOGY AND BUDDHIST COLLECTIONS**

The MA Program in Museology and Buddhist Collection focuses to impart students with theoretical knowledge and practical skills in museology to support and strategically plan for

the promotion and preservation of the immense cultural heritage in Nepal. Special focus has been on the practicum of the academic program to equip students with skills to work in museological environments.

### **ABOUT THE RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART**

The Rubin Museum of Art in Chelsea, New York City, explores and celebrates the diversity and uniqueness of Himalayan art, ideas, and cultures across history and into the present. With its globally renowned collection, largely centered around art from the Tibetan Plateau, the Rubin fosters understanding and appreciation of this region by relating its art and ideas to our shared human experience today. Inspired by the philosophical traditions of Buddhism and Hinduism and aligned with ongoing research into learning, behavior, and the brain, the Rubin offers innovative exhibitions and programs that examine provocative ideas across the arts and explore the mind. Through this work, the Museum serves as a space for reflection and personal transformation, opening windows to inner worlds so visitors can better navigate outer ones. [www.RubinMuseum.org](http://www.RubinMuseum.org)

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