

PRESS RELEASE

**THE RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART LAUNCHES
THREE-PART INITIATIVE,
PROJECT HIMALAYAN ART,
TO BROADEN HOW ASIAN ART IS TAUGHT**

Project Himalayan Art will fill a gap in the learning space by providing global access to and a broader understanding of Himalayan art with a publication, traveling exhibition, and digital platform.

The Rubin was awarded a \$500,000 grant from the Henry Luce Foundation in support of this initiative.

NEW YORK, NY, May 25, 2022 —The Rubin Museum of Art is pleased to announce **Project Himalayan Art**, an ambitious, three-part initiative with the goal of creating resources for the inclusion of Himalayan, Tibetan, and Inner Asian art for teaching on Asia in higher education and other learning environments. The three integrated parts will include a publication of the first-ever multi-author and cross-disciplinary introduction to Himalayan art and cultures; a traveling exhibition; and a free, digital platform with online resources. Together they will provide multiple entry points for students, educators, and the public to learn about the art from the cultural regions centered around the Tibetan plateau and gain a holistic understanding of Asia. All three components will launch at the start of 2023, with the traveling exhibition's first stop scheduled for Lehigh University Art Galleries, opening January 31, 2023.

Despite its historical significance and impact in shaping cultural and artistic achievements in Asia, art from Tibetan, Nepalese, Bhutanese, Mongolian, and surrounding regions, has been—until now—rarely taught outside of local contexts. Himalayan art is often presented in isolation as a regional form, unconnected to other parts of Asia, and is excluded from long-established introductory surveys of the visual arts and cultures of Asia, such as those that exist for China, Korea, India, and Japan. Consequently, there are very few teaching resources about Himalayan art.

“The absence of Himalayan art and cultures from most teaching curricula in the United States is a missed opportunity to engage with the meaningful contributions of these artistic traditions to global culture in the broader context of Asia. This omission also runs the risk of typecasting and cultural erasure,” says Elena Pakhoutova, senior curator at the Rubin Museum.

As a solution to this underrepresentation, Project Himalayan Art will develop, aggregate, and disseminate scholarly and pedagogical material on Himalayan art and cultures for incorporation into humanities and liberal art curricula in colleges and under-resourced

academic environments. The project is led by **Elena Pakhoutova** and **Karl Debreczeny**, senior curators at the Rubin Museum, in collaboration with academic advisory groups composed of faculty from diverse disciplines. Project Himalayan Art was conceived of in 2019 and over the last three years has been informed by survey responses of more than 250 educators, faculty, Asia-focused institutions, and foundations.

The Henry Luce Foundation awarded the Rubin Museum a 4-year, \$500,000 grant to support the traveling exhibition and the digital platform. Together with other donors, including planning grants from the National Endowment of Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts, the Rubin Museum has raised nearly half of its total funding goal for Project Himalayan Art to date.



The object-centered **publication**, titled **Himalayan Art in 108 Objects**, is the first interdisciplinary introduction to Himalayan art which contextualizes art within historical developments in religious, literary, and material culture. The publication is arranged chronologically from Neolithic to present day and highlights paintings, sculpture, drawings, pilgrimage maps, architectural structures, and ritual and everyday objects. The essays, from over seventy international scholars from different fields, explore complex connections through the movement of objects, people, styles, traditions and ideas outward and inward from Tibet, a region that plays a prominent role in cross-cultural exchange in Asia. Topics include historical traditions, ritual and social practices, and art forms and technologies from different connected regions.

The **traveling exhibition**, titled **Gateway to Himalayan Art**, is conceptually modeled after the introductory exhibition at the Rubin Museum. It will acquaint visitors with the fundamental visual language and meanings of Himalayan art, the materials and techniques used, and the purposes for the objects' creation. The traveling exhibition further integrates first-person Himalayan, Tibetan, and Inner Asian voices, commissions from contemporary artists working in traditional forms, and new engagement materials that expand the exhibition into further avenues to study. *Gateway to Himalayan Art* will feature forty to eighty objects from the Rubin Museum's collection, depending on the venue size. Visitors can deepen their experience using QR codes that lead to essays from the publication *Himalayan Art in 108 Objects* and multimedia on the digital platform.

Venues for the traveling exhibition include:

- Lehigh University Art Galleries, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA, January 31 – May 26, 2023
- McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, Boston, MA, fall 2023
- Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art at the University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, spring 2024
- The Frank Museum of Art, Otterbein University, Westerville, OH, fall 2024
- Utah Museum of Fine Arts, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT, spring 2025

The **digital platform** will bring the objects in the publication and exhibition into a broader context, serving as a resource for educators and academics from a range of disciplines as well as the general public. The digital content will include thematic overviews, essays, videos, animations, interactive maps, audio, curriculum guides, and other contextual resources.

Each of these three components can be used in tandem or as an independent resource, providing students and the general public with diverse pathways for discovery and focused engagement with the material.

“Project Himalayan Art is the Rubin Museum’s most ambitious contribution to and investment in the field of Himalayan art and cultures yet. It will be a major resource for the next generation of students, educators, artists, and interested public for decades to come,” says Jorrit Britschgi, Executive Director at the Rubin Museum. “Project Himalayan Art is also a seminal part for our growing focus on global initiatives -- such as the inaugural Nepal Pavilion in Venice, our partnership with Itum Bahal in Kathmandu, Nepal, and the first presentation of the new traveling Mandala Lab in Bilbao, Spain -- that deepen the understanding and appreciation of Himalayan art, ideas, and cultures worldwide with well-researched, accessible, and transformative content accessible to audiences beyond the museum.”

“In short, the goal for Project Himalayan Art is to emphasize cultural connectivity and exchange and demonstrate that these connected traditions extend well beyond the Himalayan mountain range—and even the Tibetan plateau—playing a significant role in Asia,” says Karl Debreczeny, senior curator at the Rubin Museum.

SUPPORT

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Dr. Bibhakar Sunder Shakya, to honor the memory and legacy of Professor Dina Bangdel, art historian, curator, cultural activist, and educator from Nepal.

Samphe and Tenzin Lhalungpa, to honor the memory and works of L.P. Lhalungpa, Tibetan scholar, broadcaster, and educator.

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ABOUT THE RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

The Rubin Museum explores and celebrates the diversity of Himalayan art, ideas, and culture across history and into the present. With its globally renowned collection, the Rubin fosters understanding and appreciation of this extraordinary region by connecting its art and ideas to contemporary issues that are relevant in our visitors' lives today. Largely inspired by the philosophical traditions of Buddhism and Hinduism, the Rubin offers innovative exhibitions and programs that examine provocative ideas across the arts and sciences. In doing so, 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

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Image captions:

Left: Mountain God Kula Khari; Tibet; 19th century; Terracotta and pigments; H 9 7/8 x W 8 1/4 x D 4 5/8 in.; Rubin Museum of Art C2002.7.3

Right: Achala; Tangut Xixia; Early to mid-13th century; Kesisilk tapestry with seed pearl; 90cm x 56cm; Potala Palace Collection