

THE
RUBIN

MUSEUM
OF
ART

Masterworks: A Journey Through Himalayan Art

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SACRED SITES AND PURE REALMS Central Tibet; 17th century Pigments on cloth Rubin Museum of Art Gift of Shelley and Donald Rubin C2010.31 (HAR 210)

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Stop 1: 501 – Title Wall – Introduction

Welcome to *Masterworks: A Journey Through Himalayan Art*, I am the exhibition curator, Karl Debreczeny. *Masterworks* traces the history of Tibetan art, and Tibetan art's interconnected relationships with surrounding cultures, highlighting the quality and diversity of artwork from the Himalayas. The exhibition presents objects from both a geographic and chronological perspective, to elucidate the artistic and cultural connections in the Himalayan region, through objects of exceptional quality and interest, primarily drawn from The Rubin Museum's collection, augmented by a few select loans.

The exhibition moves from West to East, first exploring the early roots of Tibetan art in Northeastern India, Kashmir, and Nepal; and then looks at these artistic traditions' early expression in Tibet, especially in Western Tibet. Then we introduce the three major indigenous painting styles of "Classical Tibetan Art", which arose in Central Tibet in the 15th and 16th centuries, when Tibetan painters were increasingly inspired by Chinese landscape painting conventions of green and blue palettes into their own unique visual idiom.

Looking East, Tibetan styles continue to develop in the Eastern Tibetan provinces of Kham and Amdo, and continued exchanges with adjacent Chinese and Mongolian regions, which both provided inspiration for Tibetan artists, and who also adopted and adapted Tibetan Buddhist visual culture to their own needs.

First I will introduce each section, with reference to objects in that gallery, and I encourage you to explore the objects in that section while listening. Then, in a separate stop, we will explore one object that exemplifies that artistic tradition.

You will notice, as you move through the galleries, that interwoven into *Masterworks* is a selection of loans from the Zhǐguān Museum of Fine Art, Beijing, which houses one of the most important privately assembled collections of Himalayan art in China. These include objects (mostly sculpture) from Northeastern India, Kashmir, Tibet, and China ranging from the 11th to the 18th century.

Stop 2: 502 –India and Kashmir



CROWNED BUDDHA Northeastern India; Pala period (750–1174), 10th century Stone Rubin Museum of Art C2013.14
MODEL OF THE MAHABODHI TEMPLE Eastern India, probably Bodhgaya; ca. 11th century Stone (serpentine) Rubin Museum of Art Purchased with funds from Ann and Matt Nimetz and Rubin Museum of Art C2019.2.2

Buddhism originated in India sometime between the 5th and 4th centuries B.C.E, but did not reach Tibet until the 7th century A.D. Tibetan Buddhism originated in texts and practices adopted from northern India. Northeastern India, immediately to the south of Tibet, is the birthplace of Buddhism and home to the main pilgrimage sites celebrating the Buddha's life. This region and Kashmir to the northwest, were major artistic centers, and the work produced there was well known and collected in Tibet. Broadly speaking, Tibetan art inherited its proportions and much of its symbolism from Indian precedents.

Buddha Shakyamuni lived, taught, and died in this region, which includes many pilgrimage sites, such as **Bodhgaya**, as well as monastic universities, like Nalanada. Because of its religious importance, many people from the Himalayan region traveled to northeastern India as pilgrims or to study. There they would have encountered images like the

large stone stele of the Buddha along this wall (C2013.14), which once decorated temples in northeastern India.

When they returned home, they brought back texts, ritual objects, and souvenirs, like the small temple model of **Mahabodhi Temple** carved from stone (C2019.2.2).

After the Islamic conquests and decline of Buddhism in India, sites like Mahabodhi Temple fell into ruins. Without a local Buddhist community to welcome and support pilgrims, it became difficult to visit the site. But viewing replicas of the temple could serve as substitutes for visiting the site in person, and small models like this one have been found in places like Burma and Tibet, as well as full-scale temple replicas constructed in places such as Nepal, Beijing, and Mongolia. This model, likely created in Bodhgaya itself, represents what the temple may have looked like in the 11th century, shortly before it fell into ruin. On the basis of models like this one, the Mahabodhi temple was rebuilt by British archaeologists and early Buddhist scholars in the 19th century, and now receives more visitors than ever.

Scholars from India also carried illustrated texts and small votive objects on their travels to the Himalayas, particularly to Tibet. For instance, Atisha was a famed Indian scholar from Bengal who traveled to Tibet in the 11th century, where he helped revive Buddhism, and was instrumental in establishing and popularizing the cult of the female deity Tara. You can see a gilt copper sculpture of this goddess, Tara, with a strong Indic aesthetic, in this gallery (C2003.11.1) A Buddha sculpture Atisha brought with him to Tibet also became an important artistic model for later Tibetan artists.

Stop 3: 503 – Snake Goddess Manasa and Tara



GREEN TARA Central Tibet; 14th century Gilt copper alloy Rubin Museum of Art C2003.11.1 (HAR 65209)

SNAKE GODDESS MANASA Northeastern India; ca. 12th century Phyllite Rubin Museum of Art C2005.36.2 (HAR 65569)

This small stone stele is an example of sculpture from the Pala Period of Northeastern India. The central figure is Manasa, a goddess venerated in the Hindu traditions of Bengal in northeastern India. She is worshiped primarily for her ability to prevent and cure snakebites, a power reflected visually in her hood of seven snakes and the snake she holds in her left hand. She is also believed to bestow agricultural prosperity and fertility, here represented by the fruit in her right hand and the vase underneath her foot. A kneeling female worshiper is shown at the base.

In the Himalayan region many craftsmen made objects for multiple religious traditions, and thus the appearance of Hindu and Buddhist works are often closely related. This is exhibited clearly if one compares this depiction of the Hindu goddess Manasa to depictions of the Buddhist deity Tara, such as the Tibetan example on your right.

Tara, known as the “saviouress,” is one of the most popular female deities in Himalayan and Inner Asian Buddhist traditions. This elegant bronze is an excellent example of early Tibetan aesthetics based on Indic models. If one compares it to the adjacent Indian stone sculpture one will see many similarities such as the aesthetic ideal of the female form, including their figural proportions; their body posture; the position of their hands and feet; the jewelry and clothing that adorn them; and the lotus thrones they both sit on.

More specifically, compare the slope of their shoulders, framed by consecutive rows of necklaces, the elegant sway of the body, the shape of the belly, the incised patters and folds of drapery in the skirt that cover both goddess’s legs, and how the cloth falls of the edge of the throne. If one were to replace the snake in the snake goddess’s hand with a flower one would have much the same figure.

Stop 4: 604 – Kashmira



KASHMIRA Kashmir, India; 10th century Copper alloy with inlays of silver Rubin Museum of Art C2005.16.5 (HAR 65427)

Kashmir, a fertile valley nestled between the highest ranges of the Himalayan Mountains, was a significant destination on trade routes that connected Western and Central Asia. It was an important center of Buddhist arts and learning from the 8th to the 13th centuries. Kashmiri art was one of the main early sources of artistic inspiration in Western Tibet and the Western Himalayan kingdoms.

Kashmira, depicted here, is the personification of Kashmir. She is also known as the Daughter of the Himalayas, and Parvati, and is revered by Hindus and Buddhists alike. Kashmira displays all of the attributes of her husband, Shiva, including a crescent moon in her hair, a trident, and her mount, Nandi the bull.

In Kashmir, women celebrated and worshipped the goddess Kashmira. Her festival was singled out as being especially important for women, who spend a few days fasting and making offerings to her. The female worshipper, kneeling before the goddess on her bottom right, wearing a long head-scarf, is probably the donor of the image.

This small sculpture is an excellent example of early metalwork from the northwestern Indian area of Kashmir. It includes many characteristic features of that art, including silver inlaid eyes; an inset chin; a small waist and fleshy abdomen, punctuated by a diamond-shaped belly-button; a linear, pointed, flaming halo; a plain geometric base; as well as the depiction of the small worshiper on the side of the base. This aesthetic was appreciated and adopted in parts of Tibet and the western Himalayas.

Interestingly, inside this image there is a consecration prayer on paper written in Tibetan, suggesting that this sculpture was later collected, appreciated, and preserved in the Western Himalayas, where she was likely worshiped as a Buddhist deity.

Stop 5: 505 – Nepal



MANDALA OF CHANDRA Nepal; ca. 1500 Pigments on cloth Rubin Museum of Art Gift of Shelley and Donald Rubin C2010.23 (HAR 100016)

HATHA DYA AS BHAIRAVA Nepal; ca. 16th century Gilt copper alloy Rubin Museum of Art C2005.16.14 (HAR 65436)

Nepal is on the main route between the holy places of the Buddha's life in northeastern India to Tibet. The small Himalayan kingdom of Nepal had an integral role in the transmission of Indian Buddhism and art to Tibet,

Newar artisans, the main cultural group within the Kathmandu Valley, were always known for their exceedingly high craftsmanship in metal sculpture (both **caste** and **repoussé**) as well as painting. In Nepal the same craftsmen made both Hindu and Buddhist images, thus their figural style and ornamentation are quite similar. Itinerant Newar artists traveled to Tibet and even as far as the Mongol court of Qublai Khan during the 13th century.

Newari artists continued to travel in Tibet for painting commissions into the 15th century, and several centuries longer for major sculptural projects. The artistic interchange between Nepal and Tibet was particularly strong prior to 1500, especially among the Sakya School in Tsang Province in

southwestern Tibet, demonstrated by the large painting of four mandala on the opposite wall in this gallery.

In the center of the gallery, is a masterful example of the **lost wax casting** technique for metal sculpture, whereby a detailed wax model is first carved from wax, packed in clay, and then fired to produce a hard mold that molten metal is then poured into. The warm patina of its gilding is a result of mercury in the firing process. (for a detailed display explaining the lost wax method of statue casting see the exhibition *Gateway to Himalayan Art* on the 2nd floor).

Here the Hindu goddess Durga is represented at the climactic moment of her victory over the Buffalo Demon, who endangered the order of the world. If one views this masterpiece from behind, you will discover that the goddess's fan of arms is magnificently rendered in three-dimensions; the positioning of multiple arms to her arched back gives the appearance of a pair arms naturalistically captured in different positions along an arc, like stop-motion photography.

Against the wall, a large-scale mask is made by hammering out thin sheets of metal, a technique known as **repoussé**, another important means for the creation of sculpture that the Newars exported all across North Asia. This technique uses less metal and is lighter. Also, repoussé sculpture can be made modularly (meaning in parts) in workshops, transported long distances, and assembled in temples and monasteries, allowing large scale images several stories tall to be built. Repoussé sculpture became popular across the Himalayas, all over Tibet, even as far as China and Mongolia, where it became especially popular in the 18th and 19th centuries for making colossal temple images.

Stop 6: 506 – Four Mandalas of the Vajravali Cycle



Wangguli and five other Newar artists (active mid-15th century) FOUR MANDALAS OF THE VAJRAVALI CYCLE Ngor Ewam Choden Monastery, Tsang Province, Central Tibet; ca. 1429–1456 Pigments on cloth Rubin Museum of Art C2007.6.1 (HAR 81826)

This exquisite perfectly preserved thangka is one of the most important, well-studied, and well documented paintings in the Rubin Museum collection. An inscription in gold ink at the top tells us it was the 13th in a set of Vajravali paintings. From this inscription we know it is the 13th painting in a set depicting the mandalas of the Vajravali or “Garland of Vajras” cycle, a compendium of esoteric teachings compiled in India in the 11th-century and widely transmitted in Tibet. It features, (at top left) the Vajradhatu mandala with an eight-armed form of Buddha Vairochana in the center; (at top right) the Durgati-parishodhana mandala; (at bottom left) the mandala of the wrathful Bhutadamara; and (at bottom right) the mandala of the goddess Marichi with her chariot of pigs. Recent research suggests this was the second-to-last in a set of 14 paintings.

At the bottom of this painting another gold inscription announces that this was to fulfill the last wishes of Lama Sazang Phakpa, which allows us to trace this painting in historical records to a set commissioned by the founder of Ngor Monastery, Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo (1382–1456), one of the great patrons of the arts, in memory of his deceased teacher Sazang Phakpa Shonnu Lodro around the time of the founding of Ngor Monastery in 1429, or shortly afterwards.

Ngorchen's biographer provides specific details of this set's creation, who recounts that soon after Ngorchen had just thought about commissioning a complete set of the mandalas of the Vajrāvalī, six Newar painters, including Wangguli and his brother, showed up one day at the Ngor retreat without any prior arrangement. One of these Newar painters, called in the Tibetan sources A khe ra dza, recalled that all the artists, without previously discussing the matter, had suddenly decided to come to Tibet to the "son of lama Phakpa" (meaning Ngorchen). Along the way they were given numerous offers to paint at other places along their route in western Tsang, all of which were located much closer to Nepal than Ngor. They had even been told by one man that they would be paid in gold if they came with him and worked at a famous Bönpo center in Tsang. Even so, none of them wanted to work at those places; they were drawn to the remote hermitage of Ngor in central Tsang, "as if summoned there by the power of the lama Kunga Zangpo's meditation." It is very rare to have surviving artworks that one can match to such detailed accounts of their creation.

This painting represents the culmination of Newar artisanship in Tsang, in (south-western) Tibet. Its refinement can be seen in its precision, and the variation in the delicate scrolling patterns filling the background. The dominant red, the arcades with lotus columns in the top and bottom rows, and many of the other details, especially the shape of the stupa at the center of the bottom-right mandala, identify the painters as Nepalese. This painting is also remarkable for its near pristine condition as there has been very little in-painting.

Ngor Monastery became particularly famous for such meticulous, intricately painted mandalas that closely followed Newar aesthetics inherited from such itinerant Nepalese master painters, even into the 16th century, long after most other schools had turned to Chinese inspired landscapes of green and blue palettes.

Stop 7: 507 –Early Tibet



Dorje Tseten (active first half 16th century) BUDDHASHRI SANGGYE PEL (1339–1419) Ngor Ewam Choden Monastery, Tsang Province, Central Tibet; ca. 1516–1534 Pigments on cloth Rubin Museum of Art C2006.66.220 (HAR 269)

PHAKMODRUPA (1110–1170) WITH HIS PREVIOUS INCARNATIONS AND EPISODES FROM HIS LIFE U Province, Central Tibet; ca. 1272 Pigments on cloth Rubin Museum of Art C2002.24.3 (HAR 65119)

This section presents a range of early Tibetan works, primarily dating prior to 1500. Although distinctive in composition, early Tibetan art quoted Indian and Nepalese art extensively.

Beginning in the early 13th century, works of art created in Tibet took on a distinctly Tibetan composition. Images are strictly organized according to a hierarchy of both size and placement, with each figure in its own compartment. At the top of the paintings were the religious masters responsible for the transmission of the particular teaching depicted. The main figure representative of the teaching was depicted larger at the center. The practitioner and/or donor and subsidiary practices were shown at the bottom. The paintings had a rather rigid organization and a color palette dominated by red, occasionally set against a blue background.

For instance, the painting to your right, depicting Phakmodrupa with His Previous Incarnations (C2002.24.3), painted around 1272, follows this typical hierarchic structure characteristic of early Tibetan painting. The

main figure, the Tibetan lama Phakmodrupa, is largest and placed in the center, with all of the other figures arranged around it, in cells, in a highly symmetrical grid. Phakmodrupa was a charismatic Buddhist mystic, and portraits of him circulated widely both during and after his lifetime. In such early Tibetan portraits, the lama, or religious master, is visually elevated to the level of a Buddha. He sits between two columns featuring scenes of his previous lives, including one (at the upper left) as a monkey! Above him his teacher Gampopa is flanked by the Five Buddhas of the Guhyasamaja Tantra and the goddess Prajñāpāramitā, who occupies the top-right corner.

On the back wall of this gallery is also a splendid example of Tibetan painting **inspired by Nepalese models**, which continued on at Ngor Monastery into the early 16th century, a portrait of the Tibetan master Buddhahri Sanggye Pel (1339–1419), painted by a Tibetan artist, “the supreme brush holder,” Dorje Tseten (C2006.66.220). Note for instance the ornate scrolling patterns in the red body nimbuses that frame the subsidiary figures, an immediately recognizable Newar decorative element.

These Indian and Nepalese inspired traditions remained strong, especially in western Tibet and the Western Himalayas, even while painting styles were rapidly changing in Central Tibet, as represented in pages from an illuminated manuscript in the center of the gallery (C2018.4.1-2).

Stop 8: 508 –Prajnaparamita Manuscript



ILLUMINATED TITLE PAGE AND FRONTISPIECE OF *THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM SUTRA* MANUSCRIPT
 Western Tibet; 15th century Ink, gold, pigments on paper Rubin Museum of Art C2018.4.1-2

These are the illuminated title page and frontispiece from an luxury edition of the *Prajñāpāramitā* or “Perfection of Wisdom” *Sūtra* in 8000 verses. On the title page is the Sanskrit title phonetically rendered into Tibetan written in large gold letters. If you look closely at the letters you will see patterns polished into their gold surfaces. On either side of the page are depicted (on the left) the Buddha, who taught the *sūtra*, and (on the right) the goddess *Prajñāpāramitā*, the personified embodiment of the text. Sitting below them are Tibetan masters from different traditions (including the 7th black hat Karmapa and yellow hatted Tsongkhapa (1357-1419)). Above and below the title are arrayed the 16 arhats, the original disciples of the Buddha, in rocky caves, with the bodhisattva of Wisdom Manjushri presiding at top center, recognizable by the book we see here, (the *Prajñāpāramitā*) and sword at his shoulders. All of the figures are labeled with small golden inscriptions.

Tibetans revere sacred books as **objects of devotion**, believing that the books contain the power to remove obstacles and advance a person on its spiritual path. It was a common practice to commission this text (the *Prajñāpāramitā Sutra*) on behalf of the deceased to remove obstacles and improve their rebirth in the next life. This is why in this western Tibetan

manuscript, on the frontispiece, the images of patrons are very prominent and even presents them as wishful participants in the text's narrative.

The illustrations on the frontispiece depict the story of the bodhisattva Sadāprarudita, or “the ever-weeping bodhisattva,” a story of unwavering devotion and perseverance, and is contained within some versions of the *Prajñāpāramitā* itself. It is also used by Tibetans to emphasize the importance of finding a qualified Spiritual Guide. The story recounts a bodhisattva who seeks the teaching of the *Prajñāpāramitā*. From gods and buddhas who appear before him, he learns that he will be able to find his teacher, Dharmodgata, who will instruct him in this teaching in the city of Gandhavatī. Lacking proper offerings for his teacher, he decides to sell flesh from his own body, but he encounters Mara’s obstacles. He is aided by a merchant’s daughter, who helps him overcome his difficulties by providing him with riches and servants. Then with a large entourage, he proceeds to his destination (seen depicted prominently along the bottom of the page). Having made elaborate offerings, he receives the *Prajñāpāramitā* from his teacher (seen here sitting in a large tower on the left side of the page).

The scenes are identified by inscriptions, and portray the story's lay-patron characters—a merchant and his daughter—in local western Tibetan garments (at the top left of the frontispiece), marked by black-and-white flags and a stylized parasol of honor. The merchant is depicted as a Tibetan lay religious master wearing a red hat and displaying the teaching *mudra* (hand gesture) and his daughter is shown in typical regional attire, with a distinctive white shawl and braided hair ornaments. Thus the Indian story is reimagined in a local Tibetan context, and the role of the lay-donor is visually emphasized in the story.



Stop 9: 509 –Classic Tibet



SACRED SITES AND PURE REALMS Central Tibet; 17th century Pigments on cloth Rubin Museum of Art Gift of Shelley and Donald Rubin C2010.31 (HAR 210)

YOGINI NAIRATMYA Tibet; 17th century Gilt copper alloy, gems, and pigment Rubin Museum of Art Gift of the Nyingjei Lam Collection and Anna Maria and Fabio Rossi C2018.3.1 (HAR 68463)

Beginning in the 15th century there was a gradual shift in Tibetan art from an Indian and Nepalese centered aesthetic toward a more Chinese inspired one. This shift reflects both the disappearance of Buddhism in India, and Tibet’s increasingly close cultural, economic, and political ties with its northeastern Mongolian and Chinese neighbors.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, newly emerging Tibetan painting styles in Central Tibet were named after famous indigenous masters and artistic centers (rather than adopted traditions such as Eastern Indian, Kashmiri, or Nepalese). These new styles, including the Menri (founded by Menla Dondrup in the mid-15th century), the Khyenri (founded by Khyentse Chenmo in the mid-15th century), the Gardri (or the “Encampment painting style”, the court style of “The Great Karmapa Encampment” (the Gar Chen) founded by Namkha Tashi in the 16th century), and later the New Menri style (founded by Choying Gyatso in the 17th century), which one might collectively call “Classical Tibetan Art.” They were all known for their integration of Chinese-inspired landscapes, and a corresponding shift to increasingly green and blue palettes of the mineral pigments malachite and azurite.

Tibetan painting compositions become increasingly diverse, but the principal figural and structural hierarchies established with early Tibetan art remained. In contrast to earlier traditions, later Tibetan painting also tends to employ a unifying landscape background, as dramatically represented by the very large painting in the center of the main wall in this gallery, depicting “Sacred Sites and Pure Realms” (C2010.31).

Also new formats develop, such as those with red, black, or gold backgrounds, which were only used for certain themes. For example, a black background (seen on the opposite wall; F1996.32.7) signifies a charnel ground, and is reserved only for wrathful deities.

Some sculpture in Central Tibet continued to follow Newar models, with Newar sculptors continuing to work in Tibet well into the 17th century. For instance, Newar casting practices can be seen in the small gilt dakini in the nearby freestanding case (C2018.3.1). While others show an increased interest in depicting the volume in the folds of the robes, as well as fabric ornamentation, inspired by imported silk brocades from China and Central Asia, as seen in the large parcel-gilt silver repoussé lama seated in the middle of the gallery (C2009.12).

Stop 10: 510 –Hevajra

Masterworks



HEVAJRA WITH CONSORT NAIRATMYA Central Tibet; mid-15th–16th century Pigments on cloth Rubin Museum of Art C2003.23.3 (HAR 90919)

This masterful painting depicts Hevajra, the primary meditational deity of the Sakya School of Tibetan Buddhism. He is flanked here by the eight goddesses who surround him in his mandala. On the back of this painting is an intriguing inscription “painted by Menthangpa” which either names the artist as the famous founder of the Menri painting tradition, Menthangpa Menla Dondrup, who was active mid-15th century, or more likely a later follower.

Beginning in the mid-15th century the indigenous Tibetan painting traditions of Menri and Khyenri—named after their respective Tibetan founders Menla Dondrup and Khyentse Chenmo—incorporated Chinese landscape elements into an otherwise Nepalese-inspired Tibetan painting tradition. Here figures are depicted following Indic models, symmetrically placed in a simple landscape of Chinese inspiration. The landscape is not designed to suggest spatial depth. Instead mountains and clouds are used as framing devices for the figures, as seen here in the top left corner.

However, as this painting is an example of a special genre of Tibetan painting called gold-ground painting (gser thang), it lacks the distinctive green and blue landscape palette typical of these painting traditions. Instead this genre emphasizes the artist’s mastery of brush control and line modulation.

However, things are not as simple as they first appear. Interestingly, this painting has also been attributed to the Khyenri school by a renowned Tibetan scholar, Penba Wangdu. Indeed, here the main deities, Hevajra and the eight yoginī, (and even the charnel ground depictions,) seem to derive from the contemporary artist Khyentse Chenmo, as seen in the wall paintings at the monastery Gongkar Chöde (near Lhasa). Khyentse Chenmo's art was known for its figures with delicate, differentiated facial features, realism and fine attention to detail –especially in animals, perfectly round halos, and vibrant depictions of wrathful deities. If you look closely, many such qualities can be found here, such as the sensitive realism in the treatment of the animals in the skull cups held in the deity's right proper hands.

While wall paintings closely associated with Khyentse Chenmo survive at a site called Gongkar Chode, however, as of yet, we have no such examples of paintings by the hand of Mentangpa (Menla Döndrup) to compare this painting to. Both Mentangpa and Khyentse Chenmo trained with the same teacher, This shows how early in development the study of Tibetan art is, and just how complex such stylistic attributions can be, even when a painting is labeled with what appears to be such a clear inscription.

Stop 11: 511 –East Tibet



WHITE CHAKRASAMVARA After Situ Panchen's (1700–1774) Set of Twenty-Seven Tutelary Deities Kham Province, eastern Tibet; late 18th century Pigments on cloth Rubin Museum of Art C2006.66.15 (HAR 432)

SHERAB CHAMMA, LOVING MOTHER OF WISDOM Eastern Tibet; 19th century Pigments on cloth Rubin Museum of Art C2005.4.7 (HAR 65397)

Kham Province in southeastern Tibet gave rise to a number of artistic traditions, two prominent ones being the New Gardri, or New Encampment Style, and Khamri, or Kham Style. While the Encampment Style Gardri or Gar luk) started in Central Tibet as the artistic school associated with the court of the Karmapas, it was nearly eclipsed there in the mid-17th century due to sectarian warfare. The scholar and artist Situ Panchen is largely credited with reviving the Gardri tradition far away to the East in his native Kham in the 18th century. This revival is sometimes called the “New Gardri Style”(sGar bris gsar ma) by modern Tibetan scholars. In it, landscapes gained a sense of depth, the relative size of the figures to the landscape became smaller, and large areas of canvas were left unpainted, giving them an open, airy feeling. Two examples of this tradition can be seen on this wall.

The painting on the left depicts Situ Panchen as a patron of the arts C2002.27.5. The painting on the right (White Chakrasamvara C2006.66.15) is an excellent example of a special painting technique employed by painters of the Encampment Style, in which the artist builds

up the landscape by applying successive layers of blue and green pigment in dry dots using the tip of the brush. This creates an effect of open airy compositions.

The Khamri Style was a hybrid of the Gardri and popular local New Menri styles. It featured paintings that were usually dominated by the dark, rich colors of the New Menri with certain landscape elements and brush techniques borrowed from the Gardri Style. Amdo Province in northeastern Tibet is a large, diverse area that was home to many communities of artists over the centuries. It had five local centers of art, each with their own distinctive painting styles. Most of Amdo's styles in recent centuries derived from the Menri styles rooted in Central Tibet. However, with the passing of time these styles became distinctively local with their own palette and aesthetic. One example of painting from Southern Amdo, with distinctive deep, flat blue and gray hues, hangs on the adjacent wall (Sherab Chamma C2005.4.7). This work is not Buddhist, but rather depicts a Bon deity.

Bon, a religion indigenous to Tibet said to go back to before the Imperial Period (7th century), flourished in southern Amdo and northern Kham Province, in the 18th and 19th centuries. Bon coexisted with Buddhism for centuries in some communities, and local painters created works for both religious traditions, drawing on the same visual vocabulary.

Stop 12: 512 –8th Karmapa, Mikyo Dorje

Masterworks



EIGHTH KARMAPA, MIKYO DORJE (1507–1554) Tibet; ca. 16th century Silver Rubin Museum of Art Purchased with funds from Ann and Matt Nimetz and Rubin Museum of Art 2019.2.1 (HAR 68498)

This silver portrait sculpture, (a new acquisition by the Rubin Museum), is important for both the figure that it represents and the style it is created in. It depicts the 8th Karmapa, Mikyo Dorje (1507-1554), identified by an inscription on the back (rje mi skyod rdo rje la na mo). This portrait sculpture displays an individuated physiognomy of this famous religious master, with high cheekbones.

Mikyo Dorje was a Karmapa, the head of the Karma Kagyu order in the 16th century, and is remembered as a master of great scholastic learning, who also had an important role in the arts. He said to be influential in the founding of the Encampment style (Karma sgar brisor sgar lugs), one of the main Tibetan artistic traditions. The 8th Karmapa is mentioned in numerous Tibetan accounts, and is recorded to have written a treatise on art, *The Great Sun of Drawing Proportions* (Ri mo'i thig rtsa nyi ma chen po) or *Mirror of the Great Sun* (Nyi ma chen po'i me long).

However, little is known of his actual role in the founding of this artistic tradition, and it is not mentioned in his available Tibetan biographies. The founder of the Encampment painting style, Namkha Tashi, was considered to be a spiritual emanation (or “sprul sku”) of the 8th Karmapa, continuing his activities, specifically in the realm of religious painting.

This statue is contemporaneous with the founding of the Encampment style, and yields insights into the Encampment sculptural tradition. This is a lesser-known artistic tradition founded by Karma Sidrel (srid bral), who was also considered to be an emanation of the 8th Karmapa, to continue his work in sculpture. This silver portrait reveals a distinctive feature of the sculptural style of the Karmapa's court, namely an intense interest in the patterning of repeated lines in the layers of the robes, that gives them a sense of both weight and plasticity of form. The medium of silver itself also seems characteristic of these early portraits, as seen in a few other extant examples.

Stop 13: 513 – China and Mongolia

Masterworks



MANJUSHRIKIRTI, KING OF SHAMBHALA From a Set of Previous Incarnations of the Panchen Lamas Du Jinsheng Silk Factory, Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, China; ca. 1922–1937 Silk embroidery Rubin Museum of Art Gift of Shelley and Donald Rubin C2006.66.155 (HAR 132)

School of Zanabazar (1635–1723) GODDESS OF THE DAWN, MARICHI Mongolia; late 17th or early 18th century Gilt copper alloy Rubin Museum of Art C2005.16.26 (HAR 65449)

Although early in its history, Tibetan art was predominantly oriented westward toward India, economic trade, and as a result, Tibetan populations gradually shifted eastward. Tibetan culture both influenced and absorbed successive Chinese artistic traditions. These connections were particularly close during periods when the emperor who ruled China adopted Tibetan Buddhism and invited Tibetan teachers to court, which began on a large scale with the Mongol Empire in the 13th century.

Hence Chinese imperial workshops adopted Tibetan Buddhist artistic conventions, and Tibet became a repository of Chinese art. These Chinese objects collected in Tibet gradually inspired Tibetan artists to adopt certain Chinese artistic conventions, such as landscape, into Tibetan painting. Tibetan Buddhism played a prominent role in the courts of the Mongolian Yuan (1279–1638), Chinese Ming (1368–1644), and Manchu Qing (1644–1911) dynasties, resulting in the creation of Tibetan Buddhist art in Chinese ateliers, which reached its peak of production in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Certain topics in Tibetan art are imported from China and Central Asia, and their derivation remains visible in their depiction, as can be seen in the depiction of the Arhats and the Heavenly King in these galleries. In Chinese painting and sculpture, robes usually take precedence over the form of the body. In other cases, craftsmen at the Chinese imperial court reproduced Tibetan, or even Nepalese, artistic conventions. Luxury mediums such as silk and lacquer prominent in China were employed to create distinctive forms of Tibetan Buddhist art. One of the most prominent forms of these court productions are Tibetan compositions created in the Chinese luxury medium of silk, an example of which you can find along the wall in this gallery.

Mongolians were intimately involved in Tibetan affairs beginning in the 13th century, during Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), when they ruled both Tibetan and Chinese populations. Later in the 16th-17th centuries, with the rise of the Geluk School, Mongolians directly aligned with branches of Tibetan Buddhism and converted to the religion en masse. The Buddhist art of Mongolia was similar to that of Tibet but distinctive in certain subjects, materials, and styles.

For instance, one of Mongolia's most prominent and influential artists, Zanabazar (1635–1723), was also recognized as Mongolia's first incarnate lama and leader of Mongolian Buddhism. He founded a sculptural style, represented by a gilt bronze of the goddess Marichi in a freestanding case in this gallery (C2005.16.26). His distinctive style is characterized by an elegant soft sleekness of the body, a round face and fleshy "bee-stung" lips, patterned etching on her garments, the warm patina of the gilding, and a finesse of ornamentation, which appears to be inspired by Nepalese art. It seems that during Zanabazar's ten years of training at Tashilhunpo Monastery in Tibet, he was exposed to Newar sculptors who were then working for his teacher, the Panchen Lama. After he returned to Mongolia, he became a prolific artist.

Stop 14: 514 –Arhat Chudapantaka



THE ARHAT CHUDAPANTAKA Tibet; late 15th century Pigment on cotton Rubin Museum of Art C2003.50.3 (HAR 129)

Chudapantaka is one of the sixteen arhats, the original followers of the Buddha. He is typically depicted seated in meditation, sometimes with a lion nearby. In the Tibetan tradition, the arhats are usually depicted as a group (not individually), so this painting was once likely part of a set of up to 23 paintings.

Despite the fact that the arhats, and their textual descriptions, originally came from India with Buddhism, the arhat as a painting genre first became quite popular in China, and thus was imported to Tibet from China by at least the 14th Century. The arhat genre thus brought along with it various Chinese painting conventions, such as depicting landscape with blue and green rocks, trees, animals (lions and dragons), as well as the depiction of Chinese material culture, including: clothing, patterned silk brocades, lacquer, porcelain, and so on.

This Tibetan painting closely follows an early 15th century composition produced in the Chinese court of the Ming Yongle emperor (reproduced here with a small photo inset in the label). Large numbers of such paintings on silk were recorded given to high ranking Tibetan religious clerics by the early Ming emperors.

If you closely compare this painting with the one in the photograph, you will notice this Tibetan painting faithfully reproduces the figures,

including the arhat wearing the long sleeves of Chinese monastic dress, his shoes placed before him, and the young attendant holding a jade or celadon bowl on an ornamental red lacquer stand. It also follows the basic landscape composition, from the stairwell that leads to the arhat's hidden realm at top right, to the entwined trees that frames him to the left.

However, this Tibetan painting lacks the subtle depth found in the Chinese model. The intense azurite blues and malachite greens are reduced to muted shades of green, and the trees' leaves and needles are rendered more schematically. On the other hand, the opulence of the highly polished Chinese court productions, with their emphasis on richly detailed decorative landscapes accented in gold, often compete for the viewers' attention, whereas in the Tibetan work the divine figures are more emphasized. The Rubin Museum's painting also includes a common Tibetan innovation to this genre, a long-life deity, the Buddha Amitayus, hovering in the sky.

Stop 15: 515 –The Bardo Thodrol



Masterworks

PAGES FROM A MONGOLIAN LIBERATION THROUGH HEARING IN THE INTERMEDIATE STATE (BARDO THODROL) MANUSCRIPT Mongolia; 19th century Textile over wood; pigments and ink on paper Rubin Museum of Art C2004.37.3 (HAR 65385)

This manuscript of the Liberation Through Hearing in the Bardo (Bar do thos grol), more widely known in Western language translations as the Tibetan Book of the Dead, is contained in the hidden treasure teachings (or terma) “The Self-Liberated Mind of the Peaceful and Wrathful Deities” revealed by the great treasure revealer (or tertön) Karma Lingpa, in 1326. This manuscript features a vertical Uyghur-based Mongolian script that was instituted by order of Chinggis (Genghis) Khan in the early 13th century. For many centuries the Tibetan script was used as the language of liturgical Buddhism in Mongolia (much like Latin in Europe), but texts were increasingly translated into Mongolian in the 18th and 19th centuries. Illuminated books, such as this one, became very popular in 19th century Mongolia, most hand written.

The Liberation Through Hearing in the Bardo is a guide to navigating the intermediate state of consciousness between death and rebirth. Painted illustrations translate the written word into the easily recognized and memorable forms and shapes, both peaceful and fearsome, that are meant to be visualized during the bardo practice in preparation for one’s own death. This is to prepare one for the series of visions one will experience at death, which are said to take the form of a series of peaceful and wrathful deities, which the text repeatedly reassures the practitioner (like a refrain) are only projections of one’s own mind. Or, the text might be read by the deceased’s body as part of the ritual at someone else’s death, performed by a ritual specialist.

The first folio is from the introduction, when homage is made to the buddhas and guru (teachers), and basic instructions are given such as the arrangement of the deceased’s body.

The second folio is from the immediate state of the peaceful deities, when buddhas appear, and the text says everything one sees appears as lights and images. Each buddha is depicted in the manuscript color coded to his Buddha Family, seated on an animal throne, embracing his consort. The passages for the appearance of each buddha says not to be afraid of the colored light associated with that buddha’s wisdom. But it also

admonishes not to take pleasure or be attracted to another light that leads to rebirth in another realm of existence, (like the hells).

The third folio is from the immediate state of the wrathful deities, when blood-drinking wrathful deities (Heruka) will appear. They are depicted here in the manuscript standing in dynamic postures, embracing their consorts, surrounded by flames. While they appear scary, the text says not to be afraid, to recognize them as the forms of your own mind. They are one's yidam (or meditational deities), and are in reality forms of the same buddhas whom the practitioner previously met among the peaceful deities.

In the bottom folio, after the wrathful Herukas, yogini will emerge, here depicted in active postures, each with a different animal head and body color. The colors relate to basic elements such as fire, air, and earth, and the animal heads are derived from Central Asian species of birds and wild game along with some iconic Indian animals such as elephants.

To give you a better sense to the text, here is an excerpt from the Liberation Through Hearing in the Bardo read by our own Tashi Chodron, Assistant Manager of Himalayan Cultural Programs & Partnerships.