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THE  
RUBIN

MUSEUM  
OF  
ART

## PRESS RELEASE

### THE RUBIN MUSEUM LAUNCHES EDUCATIONAL VIDEO SERIES “HIMALAYAN ART UP CLOSE,” PRODUCED IN COLLABORATION WITH SMARTHISTORY

**NEW YORK, NY, April 10, 2024** — The Rubin Museum of Art has launched “[Himalayan Art Up Close](#),” a new video series in collaboration with **Smarthistory**, the award-winning digital platform of public art history for students, professors, and learners and the most-visited art history resource in the world. This series begins with eight new videos highlighting select objects from the Rubin’s preeminent collection of Himalayan art and features Rubin curators Karl Debreczeny and Elena Pakhoutova in dialogue with Smarthistory’s art historians Beth Harris and Steven Zucker. Himalayan Art Up Close is an accessible and engaging online introduction to the art and material culture of the Tibetan, Himalayan, and Inner Asian regions for students, art enthusiasts, and learners across the globe. Additional videos will be added to the series later this year.

Viewers can explore the cyclical nature of life, death, and rebirth, known as samsara, through a thangka painting of the Wheel of Life; examine a sculpture of Mahakala, one of the eight great wrathful dharma protectors in Vajrayana Buddhism; learn about the life of Situ Panchen, an esteemed scholar and polymath of the 18th century; and discover how the symbolic composition of a handheld prayer wheel is activated through ritual practice.

Many of the highlighted objects are featured in the Museum’s traveling exhibition *Gateway to Himalayan Art*, which is currently on view at the Harn Museum of Art at the University of Florida and will travel to universities in Ohio, Utah, Oregon, and California through 2026. *Gateway to Himalayan Art* is a component of Project Himalayan Art, the Rubin’s three part-initiative — encompassing a digital platform, publication, and traveling exhibition — designed to support the advancement and inclusion of Himalayan, Tibetan, and Inner Asian art and cultures into undergraduate teaching on Asia. Project Himalayan Art is the first project of its kind to offer interdisciplinary, introductory resources for learning about Himalayan art and is a core component of the Rubin’s ongoing commitment to further expanding scholarship of this developing field of study.

As a key element of its transformation into a global museum in the fall, the Rubin will increase its investment in multimedia educational resources, providing broader access to its collection and nurturing the creative exploration and interpretation of traditional Himalayan art. The Smarthistory partnership joins other notable digital initiatives such as the Webby Honoree podcast [AWAKEN](#), with listenership in over 150 countries.

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“We can’t think of a better partner than Smarthistory to create these kinds of videos with,” says Rubin Museum Head of Digital Content and Strategy Kimon Keramidis. “Their passion for teaching and learning about art histories from around the world, and commitment to making their materials accessible, match the Rubin’s goals and perfectly align with the plans we have for continuing to grow Project Himalayan Art.”

“Smarthistory is delighted to partner with the Rubin Museum of Art to help bring their extraordinary expertise and collections to new audiences,” say Beth Harris and Steven Zucker. “The selections are invaluable in understanding the history of Himalayan art and culture. It was a pleasure to work with Dr. Karl Debreczeny and Dr. Elena Pakhoutova, both of whom approached these extraordinary works of art with deep expertise, enthusiasm, and profound respect.”

### **Himalayan Art Up Close Video Descriptions:**

#### **[Video 1: Wheel of Existence](#)**

Rubin Museum curator Dr. Elena Pakhoutova and Smarthistory’s Dr. Beth Harris reflect on a thangka painting of the Wheel of Life, also known as the Wheel of Existence. The painting depicts the cyclical nature of life, death, and rebirth (samsara) in various forms, which are in the grip of the Lord of Death, Yama.

#### **[Video 2: Panjaranatha Mahakala](#)**

Rubin Museum curator Dr. Karl Debreczeny and Dr. Beth Harris of Smarthistory examine a sculpture of Mahakala, one of the eight great wrathful dharma protectors in Vajrayana Buddhism and a remover of obstacles, both internal and external.

#### **[Video 3: Ushnishavijaya and Celebration of Old Age](#)**

Rubin Museum curator Dr. Elena Pakhoutova and Smarthistory’s Dr. Steven Zucker examine a painting that celebrates old age. The Newars — one of the traditional inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal — hold rituals for elders who reach the age of 77 years, 7 months, and 7 weeks. This painting represents the significance of this specific age.

#### **[Video 4: The Fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Lobzang Gyatso](#)**

Rubin Museum curator Dr. Karl Debreczeny and Dr. Beth Harris of Smarthistory explore a painting of the Fifth Dalai Lama, a significant figure in Tibetan Buddhism.

#### **[Video 5: The Medicine Buddha Palace](#)**

Rubin Museum curator Dr. Elena Pakhoutova and Smarthistory’s Dr. Beth Harris delve into a painting of the Medicine Buddha — a reproduction of the first in a set of medical paintings commissioned in the 17th century by the regent of the Fifth Dalai Lama.

#### **[Video 6: Handheld Prayer Wheel](#)**

Rubin Museum curator Dr. Elena Pakhoutova and Smarthistory’s Dr. Steven Zucker take a look at an ornate handheld prayer wheel, a ritual object that is ubiquitous in Tibetan Buddhist culture. The action of turning a prayer wheel with conscious intent is believed to “recite” or “read” the mantras, activating and releasing them into the world for the benefit of all.

#### **[Video 7: Mahabodhi Temple Model](#)**

Rubin Museum curator Dr. Elena Pakhoutova and Smarthistory's Dr. Beth Harris explore a model of the most important temple in the Buddhist world. The Mahabodhi Temple, located in Bodhgaya, India, is where the Buddha attained awakening while sitting under the bodhi tree.

### **Video 8: Situ Panchen**

Rubin Museum curator Dr. Karl Debreczeny and Smarthistory's Dr. Steven Zucker look at a painting of one of the great scholars and polymaths of the 18th century, Situ Panchen. As leader of the Karma Kagyu school of Buddhism at a time of its near eclipse, Situ Panchen revitalized the arts of southeastern Tibet and wrote widely about the arts.

## **ABOUT THE RUBIN'S TRANSFORMATION**

This fall the Rubin will transition into a global museum, a "museum without walls," with the goal of bringing greater awareness and understanding of Himalayan art to more people around the world. As part of this evolution, the Rubin will close its physical galleries on 17th Street on October 6, 2024, and sell its building.

In its new global model, the Rubin will continue to care for, study, and share its celebrated collection of Himalayan art through traveling exhibitions curated by the Rubin, an extensive long-term object loan program, partnerships with organizations, research initiatives, and multimedia and educational resources. The Rubin will also expand its commitment to supporting artists and creatives engaging with Himalayan art with a grant program and Rubin Himalayan Art Prize. [Learn more about this transition.](#)

## **SUPPORT**

Himalayan Art Up Close was produced in partnership with Smarthistory.

Leadership support for Project Himalayan Art is provided by the Henry Luce Foundation.

Project Himalayan Art has been made possible in part by a major grant from The National Endowment for the Humanities: Democracy demands wisdom.

This project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services MA-253379-OMS-23.

This project is supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Lead support is provided by the Ellen Bayard Weedon Foundation, Bob and Lois Baylis, Barbara Bowman, the E. Rhodes & Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, Noah P. Dorsky, Fred Eychaner, Christopher J. Fussner, the Estate of Lisina M. Hoch, Lilly Endowment, Matt and Ann Nimetz, The Randleigh Foundation Trust, Shelley and Donald Rubin, and Jesse Smith and Annice Kenan.

Major support is provided by Daphne Hoch Cunningham and John Cunningham, Stephen and Sharon Davies, the Edward & Elizabeth Gardner Foundation, Mimi Gardner Gates, Hongwei Li, Max Meehan, the Monimos Foundation, Edward O'Neill, The Prospect Hill Foundation, Sarah and Craig Richardson, Rossi & Rossi, Basha Frost Rubin and Scott Grinsell, the Andrew Sabin Family Foundation, Namita and Arun Saraf, Eric and Alexandra Schoenberg, Eileen Caulfield Schwab, UOVO, Sandy Song Yan, and the Zhiguan Museum of Art.

Special support is provided by:

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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.



Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this initiative, do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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### **ABOUT SMARTHISTORY**

Smarthistory, the center for Public Art History, is a radical collaboration of more than eight hundred art historians, curators, archaeologists, and artists committed to making the history of art accessible to more people, in more places, than ever before while retaining depth, nuance, and analytic rigor. Smarthistory, a tiny not-for-profit, has become the most visited art history resource in the world. Smarthistory supports the ethical and open sharing of cultural knowledge. All of its resources are published under a Creative Commons non-commercial license and are available ad-free to anyone with an internet connection. Smarthistory is public art history.

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

The Rubin is a global museum dedicated to sharing Himalayan art with the world. Founded in 2004, the Rubin serves people internationally through a dynamic digital platform, participatory experiences, exhibitions, and partnerships. Inspired and informed by Himalayan art, the Rubin invites people to contemplate the human experience and deepen connections with the world around them in order to expand awareness, enhance well-being, and cultivate compassion. The Rubin advances scholarship through a series of educational initiatives, grants, long-term loans, and the stewardship of a collection of nearly 3,500 Himalayan art objects spanning 1,500 years of history — providing unprecedented access and resources to scholars, artists, and students across the globe. [rubinmuseum.org](http://rubinmuseum.org)

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