

## PRESS RELEASE

**NEW RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART EXHIBITION TO FEATURE NEARLY 100 MASKS AND COSTUMES FROM DIVERSE CULTURES, EXPLORING THEIR POWER TO TRANSFORM IDENTITY**

***Becoming Another: The Power of Masks* Opens March 2015**



**New York, NY, October 28, 2014** — Across culture and time, masks have served to imbue power, transform identity, and connect people with each other and with their sense of the divine and the spiritual. In spring 2015, the Rubin Museum of Art will delve into the significance of masks to peoples across the globe, showcasing their diverse uses and meanings, in the exhibition *Becoming Another: The Power of Masks*. On view March 13, 2015 – February 8, 2016, the exhibition will highlight stunning masks and costumes from across the globe, including Siberia, the Himalayas, Mongolia, Japan, and the Northwest Coast of America, examining the striking similarities and distinct differences in practices across these distinct cultures.

Featuring nearly 100 masks ranging from the 15th – 20th centuries, the exhibition is organized around three predominant cultural practices: shamanism, communal ritual, and theatrical performance. The shaman medium uses a mask to communicate with or take on the identity of a supernatural entity. In communal ritual, masks are used as part of a broader social function to achieve a benefit for the group. Masks are also an important aspect of storytelling, whether an oral tradition or a theatrical performance. For many cultures, these uses are fluid and intermingled and the exhibition will explore the juxtapositions created by these diverse functions as well as the implications on both individual and communal identity.

“The Rubin Museum of Art holds a rich collection of visually-arresting masks and costumes from the Himalayas, India and neighboring regions, many of which are rarely exhibited. We are very much looking forward to sharing this lesser-known aspect of our collection with our diverse audiences,” said Patrick Sears, the Rubin Museum’s Executive Director. “The broad scope of the exhibition, drawn both from

our collection and other important collections around the world, highlights the universality and timelessness of masks and we look forward to seeing them engage our visitors' imaginations.”

Curated by Jan Van Alphen, the Rubin Museum's Director of Exhibitions, Collections, and Research, the exhibition guides visitors through a geographic and function-focused narrative. Several small groupings of masks explore cross-cultural similarities and differences in both form and type. The exhibition also features three exquisite full costumes paired with masks, including a shaman's costume, an oracle costume, and a Cham dance costume.

Highlights from the exhibition include:

- **A bear/land otter mask of Tlingit origin from the 19<sup>th</sup> century.** The mask is exemplary of those used by shamans of the Northwest Coast of America in connecting with animal spirits. During a performance, a shaman would seek the help of or take the identity of the spirit—sometimes changing identities several times throughout by changing masks.
- **Shaman's costume and attire from Mongolia from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.** This costume set features helping spirits rendered in metal and fabric and includes feathered headgear, drum, and boots. It is representative of basic shaman attire across Mongolia and Siberia.
- **Transformation mask by the artist Tsungani from the Northwest Coast, 1979.** Transformation masks are the most typical and impressive masks of the Native peoples of the Northwest Coast. These masks consist of several layers of collapsible masks that can be unfolded throughout a performance to represent different personalities.
- **Mask of wrathful Gonpo protector from Tibet, date unknown.** During communal rituals, including those performed in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, wrathful deities such as the Gonpo are staged in whirling dance performances as protectors of the community.
- **Padmasambhava as Nyima Ozer from Bhutan, 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> century.** Famous historical figures in Himalayan Buddhism appear in different forms in storytelling and theatrical performances. Nyima Ozer is one of eight manifestations of Padmasambhava, the Indian teacher who brought Vajrayana Buddhism to Tibet in the 8<sup>th</sup> century.
- **Mask possibly of Usofuki, a character in Japanese Kyogen plays, 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> century.** In Japan several theatrical forms of drama developed from medieval rituals and storytelling. Among them is Kyogen—traditional comic theater. Mask sculpting for these performances requires high craftsmanship in wood with minute details distinguishing the differences in facial expression and meanings.

**Image credits (left to right):**

*Mask of Begtse*; Mongolia; early 20th century; papier-mâché, coral, metal, fabric; Rubin Museum of Art; C2006.41.1; (HAR 65692). *Horned Mask*; Japan; date unknown; wood, pigment, cord; 11 5/8 x 8 x 5 in.; Asian Ethnographic Collection, American Museum of Natural History; 70.2/ 1204

**Exhibition Organization and Credits**

*Becoming Another: The Power of Masks* is curated by Jan Van Alphen, the Rubin Museum of Art’s Director of Exhibitions, Collections, and Research.

The exhibition is made possible by loans from the following institutions and lenders: The Brooklyn Museum, The Newark Museum, American Museum of Natural History, The Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology – Harvard University, Museum aan de Stroom-Antwerp MAS, the Bruce Miller Collection, and several private American and European collections.

**About the Rubin Museum of Art**

The Rubin Museum of Art is an arts oasis and cultural hub in New York City’s vibrant Chelsea neighborhood that inspires visitors to make powerful connections between contemporary life and the art and ideas of the Himalayas, India, and neighboring regions. With a diverse array of thought-provoking exhibitions and programs—including films, concerts, and on-stage conversations—the Rubin provides immersive experiences that encourage personal discoveries and spark new ways of seeing the world. Emphasizing cross-cultural connections, the Rubin is a space to contemplate the big questions that extend across history and span human cultures.

For further information and images, please contact:

**Robin Carol**

Public Relations and Marketing Manager  
Rubin Museum of Art  
212-620-5000 x213  
rcarol@rubinmuseum.org