

Tradition Transformed: Tibetan Artists Respond

HOOD
MUSEUM OF ART
www.hoodmuseum.dartmouth.edu

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Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College Exhibits Work of Contemporary Tibetan Artists



Contemporary Tibetan artists are in a precarious position. While their work is informed by Tibetan artistic traditions, the majority of these artists do not live in Tibet, and some never have. Their challenge is twofold: as they forge a name for themselves in the competitive art world, they must also try to find their own place within Tibet's rich and formalized artistic legacy.

Tradition Transformed: Tibetan Artists Respond, on view at the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, from January 15 through March 13, 2011, features artists who grapple with these very issues of cultural and artistic negotiation and who work with traditional forms in innovative ways. Technology, travel, displacement, and personal artistic freedom have informed their individual responses to the complex interaction between tradition and modernity in both art and culture. The artists—Dedron, Gonkar Gyatso, Losang Gyatso, Kesang Lamdark, Tenzin

Norbu, Tenzing Rigdol, Tsherin Sherpa, and Penba Wangdu—were invited to submit new and recent works for this exhibition, which originated at the Rubin Museum of Art in New York City.

Of the artists, five were born in Tibet, three come from Nepal, and one was born in India. Dedron (the only woman featured in the exhibition and one of a handful of Tibetan woman artists), Tenzin Norbu, and Penba Wangdu continue to live in their Himalayan homelands, while the others have emigrated to Europe and the United States at different stages in their lives. The majority of these artists are trained in traditional painting and the strict interpretations prescribed by Buddhist religion—spiritual formulas and artistic norms from which they break by experimenting with alternative media and by extracting sacred symbols from their religious context, repurposing them for self-expression. Two of the artists featured in the exhibition, Tenzing Rigdol and Tsherin Sherpa, will present public talks at the Hood. Tenzing Rigdol will speak in the exhibition's galleries on Tuesday, January 25, at 12:30 PM, and Tsherin Sherpa will present a talk in the museum's Arthur M. Loew Auditorium at 4:30 PM on Tuesday, February 15. Both programs are free and open to everyone.

Many of these powerful works consistently juxtapose and merge the sacred with the profane. The large Buddha in Gonkar Gyatso's *L.A. Confidential* (2007) is filled with tiny, disarmingly

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colorful stickers. Though born in Lhasa, Gyatso describes his life as “imbued with Chinese tradition,” a source of great frustration and disconnect from the cultural observations of previous generations of Tibetans. It is this cultural rift that Gyatso explores in his art.

Tsherin Sherpa makes a case for the value of transforming traditions. His *Preservation Project #1* (2009) warns against the pitfalls of forced cultural preservation. It features the Buddha’s head and many hands in the shape of various mudras, all pressed against the inside of a glass jar. Sherpa describes his painting as “an attempt to question and provoke all of us to check and see how we are actually preserving” traditions. For Sherpa, and for many of these artists, Tibet’s traditions may be kept alive and relevant through their very transformation.

During the opening week of the exhibition, the museum will host monks from the Namgyal Monastery and Institute of Buddhist Studies to create a traditional sand mandala in the galleries. Visitors are welcome to visit during regular museum hours between Wednesday, January 19, and Saturday, January 22, to see their progress. On Friday, January 21, at 4:30 PM, Kabir Mansingh Heimsath from the University of Oxford will deliver the opening lecture in the museum’s Arthur M. Loew Auditorium entitled “Untitled Identities #3: Contemporary Tibetan Art in Context,” followed by a public reception in Kim Gallery. On Saturday, January 22, the exhibition’s curator, Rachel Weingeist, Deputy Director of the Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation, will present a special tour of the exhibition at 2:00 PM. All events are free and open to everyone.

The mandala is co-sponsored by the Hood Museum of Art, the William Jewitt Tucker Foundation, a Himalayan Undergraduate Studies Grant from the Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation, and the Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies. The opening lecture and special tour are co-sponsored by the Hood Museum of Art and a Himalayan Undergraduate Studies Grant from the Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation.

Organized by the Rubin Museum of Art, New York, and presented at the Hood Museum of Art through the generosity of Yoko Otani Homma and Shunichi Homma M.D., Class of 1977, the Cissy Patterson Fund, and the Hansen Family Fund.

About the Hood Museum:

The Hood Museum of Art is dedicated to teaching and promoting visual literacy for all of its visitors. This dynamic educational and cultural facility houses one of the oldest and largest college collections in the country, with more than 65,000 objects acquired since 1772. Among its most important works are six Assyrian stone reliefs that date from around 900 BCE. The collection also presents art from other ancient cultures, the Americas, Europe, Africa, Papua New Guinea, and many more regions of the world. The Hood seeks to inspire and educate through direct engagement with works of art and offers access to the rich diversity of its collections through ongoing highlights displays, special exhibitions, an online collections database, and a wide array of programs and events.

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Image caption:

Dedron, *We Are the Nearest to the Sun*, 2009, mineral pigments on canvas. Collection of Shelley and Donald Rubin.