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BLOCK MUSEUM UNVEILS COMPLEX LEGACY OF KASHMIRI ART
Bold exhibition explores history of cultural impact and timely questions of collecting

- ‘Collecting Paradise’ is most ambitious exhibition in Block’s history
- Exhibit takes penetrating look at Buddhist art that traveled over centuries and borders
- Questions raised about transferring consecrated religious objects to museums
- Free programs explore issues of Buddhist art, history of collecting, current politics

EVANSTON, Ill. --- What is the impact when one culture acquires the sacred objects of another? The [Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art](#) at Northwestern University is putting that question under the microscope this winter with the exhibition [“Collecting Paradise: Buddhist Art of Kashmir and Its Legacies.”](#)

Free and open to the public from Jan. 13 through April 19, 2015, this Main Gallery exhibition takes a penetrating look at how Buddhist art from Kashmir and the Western Himalayas has traveled across centuries and borders -- first within the region and later to the U.S. and Europe -- raising questions about cultural impact and the varying motivations behind modes of collecting.

(See below for a list of free public events complementing “Collecting Paradise,” including an opening day celebration, Block Cinema film screenings and scholarly lectures.)

“Collecting Paradise” features Buddhist objects, including manuscripts, paintings, and sculptures in ivory, metal and wood, dating from the 7th to 17th centuries. With 44 objects, the exhibition presents an original and innovative look at art from the region of Kashmir and the Western Himalayas, as well as how it has been “collected” over time.

The exhibition was curated by a leading scholar in the field, [Robert Linrothe](#), associate professor of art history in Northwestern’s [Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences](#), with the support of [Christian Luczanits](#), the David L. Snellgrove Senior Lecturer in Tibetan and Buddhist Art at The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London.

“‘Collecting Paradise’ is the most ambitious exhibition in the Block’s history, and we are very grateful to the National Endowment for the Arts for recognizing its significance,” said [Lisa Corrin](#), the Ellen Philips Katz Director of the Block Museum. “As part of our new global initiative, this exhibition brings together works of Asian art that are true masterpieces -- among the most important of their kind in the U.S.”

“Professor Linrothe is one of the few experts in art of this region teaching in the U.S. today. He has spent decades traveling to remote locations to study historic sites and form relationships with local experts. This direct experience of the art of Kashmir and the Western

Himalayas ‘in situ’ has contributed to his innovative and thought-provoking thesis on the migration of culture,” Corrin added.

A companion exhibition, **“Collecting Culture: Himalaya through the Lens,” Jan. 13 through April 12**, in the Alsdorf Gallery, further examines the impact of centuries of collecting in the region. Co-curated by [Kathleen Bickford Berzock](#), the Block’s associate director of curatorial affairs, and Robert Linrothe, “Collecting Culture” looks critically at U.S. and European engagement in the Himalayas beginning in the mid-19th century, through lenses including photography, cartography, natural science and ethnography. It reflects on the ways Westerners have perceived, defined and acquired the Himalayas, raising questions about what is gained and what is lost when objects are removed from their intended cultural context.

“Collecting Culture” presents the expeditions of four individuals from the late 1920s through the 1940s -- Italian scholar Giuseppe Tucci; American zoologist Walter Koelz, who worked with Thakur Rup Chand, his Indian partner and guide; and Northwestern University professor William McGovern.

Eleven of Tucci’s, Koelz’s and Rup Chand’s acquisitions are included in “Collecting Paradise.” This enables museum visitors to consider the motivations and actions of these individuals, as well as contemplate the impact of transferring consecrated objects from religious shrines to museums, where they are presented for their aesthetic value.

“With these exhibitions, we are raising questions that a university museum is uniquely capable of addressing -- specifically, the complex issues surrounding the origins of an object and how its meaning can shift with context. Through a dynamic schedule of free public programs this winter, we will present audiences with unique opportunities to consider and examine these questions,” Corrin said.

“Collecting Paradise” brings together works from The Art Institute of Chicago, the Asia Society (New York City), the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, the Rubin Museum of Art (New York City), the Saint Louis Art Museum, the University of Michigan Museum of Anthropological Archaeology, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, and four private collections.

The exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated, color catalogue that shares new research and perspectives that have developed during the formation of the exhibition. After its premiere at the Block, “Collecting Paradise” will travel to the Rubin Museum of Art, the foremost museum of Himalayan art in the U.S.

THE INTRICATE HISTORY OF ART AND CULTURE IN KASHMIR AND THE WESTERN HIMALAYAS

From the 7th to 11th centuries, Kashmir -- a lush valley connected to the Silk Road -- was a wealthy center of transcultural trade, culture and religion. Beginning in the 10th century, Buddhists in the Western Himalayas traveled to Kashmir to acquire, preserve and emulate its sophisticated art.

Kashmiri artists also accepted invitations to travel to the Western Himalayas during this period to work with and teach local artists. The distinctive workmanship of the “Kashmiri style”

became integrated into the identity of Tibetan Buddhism in this period and experienced a revival in the Western Himalayas in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Centuries later, beginning in the 1900s, artworks from Kashmir and the Western Himalayas became prized acquisitions for collections in the U.S. and Europe. Western explorers, scholars and travelers removed these works -- often surreptitiously -- from their places of origin. Today many of these works reside in public and private collections.

ABOUT EXHIBITION CURATOR, ROBERT LINROTHE

Robert Linrothe is an associate professor in Weinberg College's department of art history at Northwestern University. He received a Ph.D. in art history from the University of Chicago. In 2008–09, he was a Scholar-in-Residence at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles. He has concentrated on the pre-modern mural painting of Ladakh and Zangskar (Indian Himalayas) and the contemporary revival of monastic painting in Amdo (China, northeastern cultural Tibet). From 2002–04, Linrothe served as the inaugural curator of Himalayan art at the Rubin Museum of Art. He is the author of many publications, including "Paradise & Plumage: Chinese Connections in Tibetan Arhat Painting"; "Demonic Divine: Himalayan Art and Beyond" (2002) with Jeff Watt; "Holy Madness: Portraits of Tantric Siddhas" (2006); and the article "Mirror Image: Deity and Donor as Vajrasattva" in "History of Religions" 54 no. 1 (2014): 5–33, among others. For more, visit www.arthistory.northwestern.edu/faculty/robert-linrothe.html.

The exhibitions were organized by the Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University; and the Rubin Museum of Art, New York.

Additional funding and support was provided by the National Endowment for the Arts; Myers Foundations; Alumnae of Northwestern; Elizabeth F. Cheney Foundation; Illinois Arts Council Agency; Illinois Humanities Council, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Illinois General Assembly; Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences, Northwestern University; and department of art history, Northwestern University.

"COLLECTING PARADISE: BUDDHIST ART OF KASHMIR AND ITS LEGACIES"

EVENTS

The Block is a teaching museum that aims to serve a general audience, students, and scholars and faculty with relevant, engaging programming. To enhance the exhibition and further explore its themes, the Block is hosting a variety of free programs during winter and spring 2015. Events include opportunities to hear from exhibition curator Robert Linrothe about the art works, a workshop on cross-cultural dialogue, a lecture on the development of Tibetan Buddhism and film screenings, among others.

All of the following events will take place at the Block Museum, 40 Arts Circle Drive, on Northwestern University's Evanston campus.

Unless otherwise noted, general admission to Block Cinema is \$6 for the general public or \$4 for Block Museum members, Northwestern faculty, staff and students; students from other schools with valid IDs and individuals 60 and older.

• **Opening Celebration, 2 to 5 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 17.** Robert Linrothe, Northwestern art history faculty member and curator of the exhibition, will provide an overview of **“Collecting Paradise: Buddhist Art of Kashmir and Its Legacies.”** Linrothe will address two sets of themes underpinning the exhibition -- travel, trade and artistic exchange across the Himalayas between the 7th and 17th centuries; and how and why works like those in the exhibition have been collected by Himalayan Buddhists and by Westerners, and the consequences of their respective approaches. The presentation will be followed by a conversation between Linrothe and [Sonya Rhie Quintanilla](#), the George P. Bickford Curator of Indian and Southeast Asian Art at the Cleveland Museum of Art.

• **Block Cinema Screening, “The Epic of Everest,” (Captain John Noel, 1924, United Kingdom, DCP, 85 minutes), 7 p.m. Friday, Jan. 23.** “The Epic of Everest” is a fascinating account of an attempt to climb the fabled mountain and a vibrant look at Tibetan villagers and nomads, but it is the stunning photography of Everest and the Himalayas that steals the show. Explorer and director Captain John Noel captures the awe-inspiring beauty of the region and its harsh conditions.

• **Curator’s Gallery Talk, 6 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 28.** Join Northwestern art history faculty member and exhibition curator Robert Linrothe for a guided view of selected objects in the Main Gallery. He will introduce the exhibition's five main sections and direct visitors' attention to relationships in the themes and styles of works from Kashmir and the Western Himalayas. This will be followed by a tour of **“Collecting Culture: Himalaya through the Lens,” Jan. 13-Apr. 12, 2015**, a companion exhibition in the Alsdorf Gallery, in which some of the primary Western collectors are featured.

• **Block Cinema Screening, “Lost Horizon” (Frank Capra, 1937, United States, DCP, 132 minutes), 7 p.m. Friday, Jan. 30.** Based on James Hilton’s best-selling novel, Frank Capra’s “Lost Horizon” creates one of the most vivid settings in film. A plane crash brings the diverse group of survivors to Shangri-La, a mysterious and harmonious valley high in the Himalayan mountains.

• **Music in the Galleries, 4 to 5 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 5, Feb. 12, Feb. 19 and Feb. 26.** Organized by the Block Museum’s Student Advisory Board, informal weekly Thursday afternoon performances by Northwestern student musicians and musical ensembles, inspired by both Eastern and Western musical traditions, will permeate the museum’s galleries.

• **Lecture by Siddiq Wahid, “The History of a Border-Crossing Lineage in Central and South Asia: The Radhu Family,” 6 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 4.** Siddiq Wahid, a historian of Central Asian and Tibetan political history and a Senior Fellow at the Centre for Policy Research in New Delhi, will trace the history of the Western Himalayas through the eyes of his family’s experience. The Radhu family, to which Wahid belongs, is arguably a microcosm of the experience of frontier peoples in the transition from a ‘traditional’ world to the ‘modern’ one. The case will illustrate what happens to frontier populations that are wrapped around ‘lines’ drawn in faraway capitals and called ‘borders.’

• **Block Cinema Screening, “Black Narcissus” (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1947, United Kingdom, 35mm, 100 minutes), 7 p.m. Friday, Feb. 6.** One of the glories of Technicolor cinema, “Black Narcissus” focuses on a group of Anglican nuns who live in a

convent high in the Himalayas. The exotic locale has an almost mystical influence on the sisters, kindling both romantic and carnal releases that threaten their mission, their state of mind and their way of life.

• **Lecture by Madhuvanti Ghose, “Early Art of Kashmir,” 6 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 11**
(please note new date and time)

Madhuvanti Ghose, Alsdorf Associate Curator of Indian, Southeast Asian, Himalayan, and Islamic Art at the Art Institute of Chicago, will discuss the art of Kashmir prior to the period covered by ‘Collecting Paradise’ as a way of contextualizing the exhibition. She will speak about the impact of Gandharan art on the origins of an indigenous Kashmiri style of art from the 5th century to the period where ‘Collecting Paradise’ picks up the narrative.

• **Block Cinema Screening, “Haider” (Vishal Bhardwaj, 2014, India, DCP, 160 minutes), 7 p.m. Friday, Feb. 13.** In the latest film by Bollywood director Vishal Bhardwaj, a young man returns to Kashmir after his father's disappearance to confront the uncle who had a hand in his father's fate. “Haider” is an adaptation of Shakespeare’s Hamlet, displacing the action from Denmark to the city of Srinagar in the war-torn Kashmir of the mid-1990s.

• **Lecture by Matthew T. Kapstein, “Kashmir and the Development of Tibetan Buddhism,” 6 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 18.** Director of Tibetan studies at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris and Numata Visiting Professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of Chicago’s Divinity School, [Matthew T. Kapstein](#) will address aspects of the history of Buddhist philosophy and literature in Kashmir and their legacy in Tibet, providing historical and cultural context to the objects on display in the exhibition.

• **Block Cinema Screening, “Valley of the Saints” (Musa Syeed, 2012, United States, DCP, 82 minutes), 7 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 19.** Widely considered to be the crown jewel of Kashmir, Dal Lake is a sprawling aquatic community where erupting political violence often distracts from the natural beauty. Gulzar, a young, working-class boatman, plans to skip town with his best friend Afzal in search of a better life, but a weeklong military curfew (and a beautiful ecologist, Asifa, delays their departure. With the end of the conflict looming, Gulzar has to choose between a new life or a new love.

• **Lecture by Liza Oliver, “Luxury's Labors: Kashmir in the South Asian Textile Trade with Europe,” time to be announced, Friday, March 6.** Liza Oliver, postdoctoral fellow at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and recent Northwestern Art History Ph.D., will consider the symbolic and commodity value of Kashmiri shawls across Indian and European markets. With primary focus on the 19th century, she will also examine how Kashmiri trade with Europe altered the social standing and labor practices of Indian textile artisans.

• **Block Cinema screening, “Saving Mes Aynak” (Brent Huffman, 2014, United States, DCP, 60 minutes), 7 p.m. Friday, March 6.** “Saving Mes Aynak” follows an Afghan archaeologist as he races against time to save a 5,000-year-old archaeological site from imminent demolition by a Chinese mining company. Some believe that future discoveries at the site have the potential to redefine the history of Afghanistan and Buddhism itself. Director Brent Huffman will attend the screening. General admission is free.

• **Artist’s Talk by Larry Snider, “Photography and the State of Kashmir,” 6 p.m. Wednesday, April 1.** Chicago-based photographer [Larry Snider](#) has travelled to regions

across Asia, including Ladakh, part of the Indian province of Jammu and Kashmir, immersing himself in the landscape and culture and photographing individuals from diverse communities. In conversation with “Collecting Paradise” curator Robert Linrothe, Snider will share his work and observations of the region, with Linrothe reflecting on the ways in which Ladakh’s environment and religious heritage connects to the present.

• **Gallery Talk by Carla Sinopoli, “Collecting Kashmir: The Expeditions of Walter N. Koelz,” 6 p.m. Wednesday, April 8.** The collection of Walter Koelz, an American zoologist who undertook collecting expeditions in the Western Himalayas during the 1930s, has contributed significantly to our understanding of Himalayan art. In a gallery talk focused on “Collecting Culture,” which includes many objects from Koelz’ collection, [Carla Sinopoli](#), University of Michigan anthropology faculty member and curator of Asian archaeology at the Museum of Anthropological Archaeology, will address Koelz’ collecting practices.

CONSTRUCTION AND PARKING INFORMATION

The Block Museum is located at 40 Arts Circle Drive on Northwestern University’s Evanston campus. A long-term construction project has limited access to Arts Circle Drive. For the most up-to-date directions, visit www.blockmuseum.northwestern.edu/visit/directions-and-parking/index.html.

Parking in the garage and lot directly south of the museum is always free after 4 p.m. on weekdays and all day on weekends.

ABOUT THE MARY AND LEIGH BLOCK MUSEUM OF ART

The Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art is the fine art museum of Northwestern University. It serves the academic and cultural needs of the University and Chicago-area community with thought-provoking exhibitions, a rich and diverse permanent collection, dynamic programs, and classic and contemporary film screenings at Block Cinema.

Celebrating its 35th anniversary in 2015, the Block is a dynamic, imaginative teaching and learning resource that aims to inspire a new generation of artists, scholars and arts professionals. It is free and open to all, and visitors are invited to participate in experiential learning opportunities that bridge the classroom and the world beyond the campus. Learn more at www.blockmuseum.northwestern.edu.

NORTHWESTERN NEWS: www.northwestern.edu/newscenter/

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