ASIAN ART connections
RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS

FALL 2003

HIMALAYAS
An Aesthetic Adventure

Arthur M. Sackler Gallery
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The Curriculum Resource (pages 5–13) is designed to be used long after the information on the outer pages is outdated. When no longer current, discard them and keep the Curriculum Resource.

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Visit www.asia.si.edu for information about school tours, resources for teaching, and information about the ImaginAsia family program. The Resources for Teachers section offers online curriculum guides that include classroom projects, lesson plans, curriculum connections, and more.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Interested in having your work published? If you would like to share innovative ways to integrate Asia into the curriculum, send us a 200-word description of a classroom project and pictures of the activity. Tell us about the project—its premise, process, and outcome—and it may become our next feature.

EXHIBITIONS

3 SACKLER Exhibitions

Closing Soon!

Isamu Noguchi and Modern Japanese Ceramics

THROUGH SEPT. 7, 2003

The ceramics created by Japanese American artist Isamu Noguchi (1904–1988) during short sojourns in Japan in 1931, 1950, and 1952 disregarded widely accepted models of Japanese ceramic style. This exhibition is the first museum presentation since 1954 of Noguchi’s ceramic work, and it also presents works by the Japanese ceramic artists—ranging from traditional to avant-garde—with whom Noguchi interacted or collaborated.

Love and Yearning: Mystical and Moral Themes in Persian Poetry and Painting

AUG. 30, 2003–FEB. 22, 2004

Persian lyrical poetry is considered one of the most popular vehicles for pictorial expression in Iran. The rich imagery made poetry a natural choice for patronage, and artists strove to create pictorial interpretations of the text. This exhibition highlights the work of some of the most famous Persian poets, showcasing how artists used color and design to transform words into images.

Faith and Form: Selected Calligraphy and Painting from the Japanese Religious Traditions

MAR. 20–JULY 18, 2004

Featuring important examples of works inspired by Buddhist and Shinto beliefs, this exhibition displays Japanese painting and calligraphy from the eighth to the nineteenth centuries. Included are paintings, portraits, sutra texts, and ink monochrome aphorisms. The works on view illustrate the intimate relationships between calligraphy, painting, and transmission of faith within the major Japanese religious traditions.

4 Asian Art Connections

The Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery at the Smithsonian Institution together form the national museum of Asian art for the United States. The Freer also houses a collection of American art from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including the world’s largest collection of works by James McNeill Whistler.

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The Arts of China

Luxury Arts of the Silk Route Empires

Metalwork and Ceramics from Ancient Iran

Sculpture of South and Southeast Asia

6 Featured Exhibition

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Himalayas: An Aesthetic Adventure was organised by the Art Institute of Chicago. Major sponsorship support for this exhibition has been provided by Exelon, Proud Parent of ComEd.

This exhibition is made possible by the generous support of the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation. The Centennial Fund, the National Endowment for the Arts and the W. L. S. Spencer Foundation.

The Himalayan region is one of soaring natural beauty and rich culture. This exhibition showcases art from the entire Himalayan region, including sculpture, manuscripts, paintings, and ritual objects from India, Nepal, and the Tibetan plateau. The works created between the fifth and nineteenth centuries are religious in nature: Hindu, Buddhist, and Bon, the indigenous religion of the Tibetan plateau.

This exhibition offers the viewer the opportunity to appreciate the artistic similarities and differences of these diverse parts of the Himalayan geographical region. It explores cultural, religious, and artistic exchange in the Himalayas and examines how artists created objects that were acceptable by religious standards while incorporating astonishing and creative elements. Most of the objects have never before been publicly exhibited in the West.

For more information on future exhibitions, visit www.asia.si.edu.

* Indicates temporary working title
Buddhist Illuminated Manuscripts

WHO wrote these manuscripts?
Buddhist manuscripts like these were often written by monks. They might also have been written by professional scribes hired by wealthy individuals or royalty who gained religious merit for themselves and others by commissioning a Buddhist manuscript.

WHERE did these manuscripts come from?
Manuscripts like these were often housed in the libraries of Buddhist monasteries. Buddhists began writing manuscripts in the first century C.E. However, it was not until the seventh or eighth century that Buddhists began illustrating—illustrating or decorating—the manuscripts.

WHAT is in these manuscripts?
These manuscripts contain Buddhist scriptures, holy texts of the Buddhist faith. They also contain illustrations that were added not only for decoration but also to increase the sacred power of the manuscript.

HOW do you read one of these manuscripts?
The pages of these manuscripts are not bound together like most books written today. All of the pages are separate, but they are tied together between front and back covers. To read a Buddhist manuscript like this, unlift the string and carefully lift the cover off of the pages. When finished reading a page, flip it over and place it neatly on top of the front cover.

WHY were these manuscripts written?
The most common reason for writing a Buddhist manuscript was as a form of worship, to gain religious merit, or to transmit Buddhism. Manuscripts played a key role in the history of Buddhism; as Buddhist belief spread from north India, it became very important that Buddhist doctrines be recorded and translated so that foreign monks could read them and take them back to their home countries.

Paradise—A Magician’s Garden

As the story begins, Siddhartha reveals himself to be the historical Buddha. He is also known as the Bodhisattva, a seeker of enlightenment. Buddhists believe the Buddha’s teachings at Vulture Peak, a site in northeastern India in the present-day state of Bihar.

Gandhavati, the magnificent paradise

On the left side of page a, a bodhisattva—a Buddhist being who has achieved enlightenment but chooses to stay on earth to help others attain enlightenment—named Dharmodgata sits on a lotus throne, greeting the visitors who appear on an elongated chariot on the right side of the page. The visitors are led by Sadaprarudita, a seeker of enlightenment.

The visitors are led by Sadaprarudita, a seeker of enlightenment.

Sadaprarudita and Dharmodgata appear in the Prajñaparamita. Buddhists believe it was told by the Buddha to demonstrate the importance of worshipping the text and its contents.

Sadaprarudita set off from his home in search of enlightenment, but he soon realized that he did not know where he wanted to go, so he began to weep. After crying for an entire week, he had a vision in which he was told to go to Gandhavati, the magnificent paradise of the bodhisattva Dharmodgata. However, on his way he realized that he had no gift to offer, so when he reached the next town, he decided to sell the only thing he had—his body, or himself. When no one would buy him, Sadaprarudita became very sad and openly wept in the marketplace. Seeing Sadaprarudita’s misery, the god Indra appeared in the form of a young man and offered to buy his heart, blood, and bone marrow. As Sadaprarudita began to selflessly take his body apart, a merchant’s daughter approached him. She was so impressed by his demonstration of self-sacrifice that she decided to help him and accompany him on his journey. She persuaded her parents to join them, along with five hundred maids in five hundred carriages. Indra then dropped his disguise as a young man and restored Sadaprarudita’s damaged body. After embarking on a long journey, the group finally reached Gandhavati and met the bodhisattva Dharmodgata, and they worshiped a text of the Prajñaparamita written in lapis lazuli on golden tablets.

Prajñaparamita Manuscript

Two illuminated pages from a Prajñaparamita manuscript: Buddha, Prajñaparamita, and narrative scenes

Central Tibet, ca. 1200

Pigment and gold on paper

6.5 x 17 cm (a), 5.7 x 15 cm (b)

Lent by a private collection, EL2003.7.126a-b

These two illuminated pages are the title page and final page of a Prajñaparamita manuscript translated from Sanskrit and written in Tibetan. The Prajñaparamita is an Indian Buddhist text of the Mahayana tradition whose title means “Perfection of Wisdom.” Mahayana Buddhists traditionally believe this to be a record of the Buddha’s teachings at Vulture Peak, a site in northeastern India in the present-day state of Bihar.

The Prajñaparamita is personified as a goddess of wisdom. She appears on the left side of page a, seated with her legs crossed in the lotus position. On the right side of the page is an image of the Buddha Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha. He is also seated in the lotus position, and his hands form a gesture of “calling the earth to witness,” a gesture he performed after he first reached enlightenment and touched the earth with his right hand so that it could witness his transformation. Both figures are seated on lotus thrones atop formal flower arrangements.
VOCABULARY & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

VOCABULARY

- Two illuminated pages from a Prajnaparamita manuscript
- Mandalas are geometric representations of the Buddhist cosmos, and Buddhists use them as a visual tool to guide them on the path to enlightenment.
- Depictions of the lotus flower appear several times in the paintings on pages 8–9. Two of the figures sit cross-legged with their feet on top, knees opening outward, in a position thought to resemble a lotus flower. The thrones of all three of the single figures are modeled after the petals of the lotus. Even the wheels of the chariot appear to take their form from this important flower.
- Buddhists consider the pattern of growth of the lotus plant to be a metaphor for reaching enlightenment and as a symbol of purity. The lotus plant grows in marshy water, but it rises from mud through the water and produces a lovely, pristine flower when it reaches the surface.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are the similarities and differences?
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In Search of an Artist in Nepal

by Stephen Truax Eckerd, coordinator, ImaginAsia family program, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery

While in Nepal this past spring to collect materials for education department programs, I went in search of an artist to demonstrate the technique of creating Buddhist religious paintings. Buddhist paintings, called thangkas, are painted on cloth using mineral pigments and gold and framed with silk and gold brocade. They are an important tool for teaching about Buddhism and a point of focus for practitioners of meditation. The size and location of figures in the paintings, the hand gestures and body positions, the use of color, and the placement of objects, animals, and aspects of nature are all used to tell the stories of the historic Buddha and later great teachers in the history of Buddhism and to illustrate the beliefs of Buddhism. Students who wish to become thangka painters apprentice to a master painter. Over many years they learn all of the steps in painting a thangka—stretching and polishing the cloth, mixing colors, doing line work, applying gold, and more. The teachers are usually monks living in Buddhist monasteries, and their students are young monks who show promise as artists. As a result, all of the thangka painters that I met in Nepal were men.

During the trip I was also looking for a painter who could create a series of thangkas for the Sackler Gallery’s Himalayas: An Aesthetic Adventure exhibition and could demonstrate the steps involved in producing a thangka. I hoped to find someone to paint the series and also come to the museum to give demonstrations. I first went to Tsonamgel Lama, a well-known painter who spoke good English and had experience in teaching thangka painting to Westerners. However, he is the head of an artist collaborative that would not give him permission to leave for the length of the exhibition, so he instead recommended his older brother, Indra, as a better painter for the job. Indra agreed to create the thangkas for the exhibition but could not spare three months to come to the museum. While most Nepalese would jump at an opportunity to come to America, thangka painters are very dedicated and see their work as an act of worship. Tsonamgel and Indra recommended a young painter they declared was already better than either of them. Much to my surprise, the painter turned out to be a woman! Dhan Kumari Ghising had dreamed of being an artist since she was in third grade and copied every picture in her schoolbooks. Indra had seen her work when she was in tenth grade, and she had confided to him her dream of becoming a thangka painter. Although no woman had ever been admitted into a monastery in Nepal to study painting, Indra recognized her talent and went to the monastery of one of Nepal’s most famous teachers of thangka painting. After a long discussion, the monastery admitted its first female student.

That was six years ago. While many artists can copy thangkas, few can do the drawings for original paintings. The proportions written down in ancient texts require the artist to be a master of geometry and proportion. Dhan is able to create these drawings, and her work is outstanding. She has mastered the most difficult aspect of thangka painting, and I hope she will be able to come for the exhibition to give demonstrations for families and school groups visiting the museum.

Dhan Kumari Ghising showing one of her colored drawings

Iconometric drawing of the head of the Buddha
Iconometric drawing of the body proportions for the Buddha
Iconometric drawing for a robed Buddha

ART TODAY
Student tours are tailored for a unique learning experience that emphasizes the art of looking closely at objects. Docents employ a variety of techniques in the galleries, including writing activities, storytelling, and the use of hands-on objects, to engage students while they learn. Individual tours are based on age appropriateness and classroom curriculum.

For information or to arrange a class tour, e-mail asiatours@asia.si.edu. Sign-language interpreters and tactile tours are available. Allow four weeks’ notice for all group and special tours. If you plan to take your class on a self-guided tour, call the tour scheduler at 202.633.0467, 8 A.M. to 12:15 P.M. with them.

INTRODUCTION TO CHINESE ART
LIMIT: 60 students
RECOMMENDED FOR: grades K–12
Students discover the arts and cultures of China, Japan, South Asia, the Islamic world, and the ancient Near East in this tour of the collections.

INTRODUCTION TO JAPANESE ART
LIMIT: 45 students
RECOMMENDED FOR: grades K–12
Participants examine the Freer’s unparalleled collection of Japanese screens, scrolls, ceramics, and sculpture.

THE PEACOCK ROOM: JAPANESE STYLE IN AMERICAN ART
LIMIT: 60 students
RECOMMENDED FOR: grades 4–12
Students learn about China’s history through seven thousand years of technical and artistic achievements. The following tours are offered as both a one-time single tour and as a series of three tours. We encourage teachers to consider the three-tour series, which creates a broader and deeper understanding of the tour topics.

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LIMIT: 30 students
RECOMMENDED FOR: grades 6–12
Students explore the arts of the Islamic world and view examples of ceramics, metalwork, painting, and calligraphy.

HANDS-ON TUESDAYS
LIMIT: 45 students
RECOMMENDED FOR: grades 3–8
Students participate in a hands-on activity. This tour is held only on Tuesday mornings from 10 A.M. to 12:15 P.M.

ARTIST THURSDAYS
LIMIT: 30 students
RECOMMENDED FOR: grades 3–8
Students participate in a hands-on activity. This tour is held only on the first Thursday of each month from 10 A.M. to 12:15 P.M.

ASIAN ART FOR THE ENGLISH-LANGUAGE LEARNER
LIMIT: 60 students
RECOMMENDED FOR: grades 4–12
Students learn about the history of art and objects with examples of student work.

ARTFUL WRITING
LIMIT: 60 students
RECOMMENDED FOR: grades 4–12
Students respond to art in the galleries through descriptive writing, poetry, and personal response. This tour sharpens writing skills and visual perception.

RECOMMENDED FOR: grades 4–12
Learn about the arts of Islam with resource lists, reference information, 8” x 10” reproductions of works of art, and lesson plans with examples of student work. $20

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All videos are open-captioned.

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Please make checks payable to Sackler Gallery. Shipping and handling are included in all prices. Unfortunately, we are no longer able to accept purchase orders.

For additional information, call 202.633.0483; fax 202.633.9838; or e-mail shops@asia.si.edu.

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* Due to ongoing gallery installations, some tours or objects may be unavailable.

TOURS

We can accommodate large groups! Call the tour scheduler at 202.633.0467, or e-mail asiatours@asia.si.edu to make arrangements.
In our popular family program, children ages six to fourteen accompanied by an adult use an activity book to explore an exhibition and create a related art project to take home. Family programs take place on the dates and times listed at www.asia.si.edu and do not require a reservation. This fall in conjunction with the exhibition *Himalayas: An Aesthetic Adventure*, ImaginAsia focuses primarily on art of the Himalayan region. Other fall programs include Fly a Kite and Animal Hunt.