

TIBETAN ART

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RIVERSIDE MUSEUM

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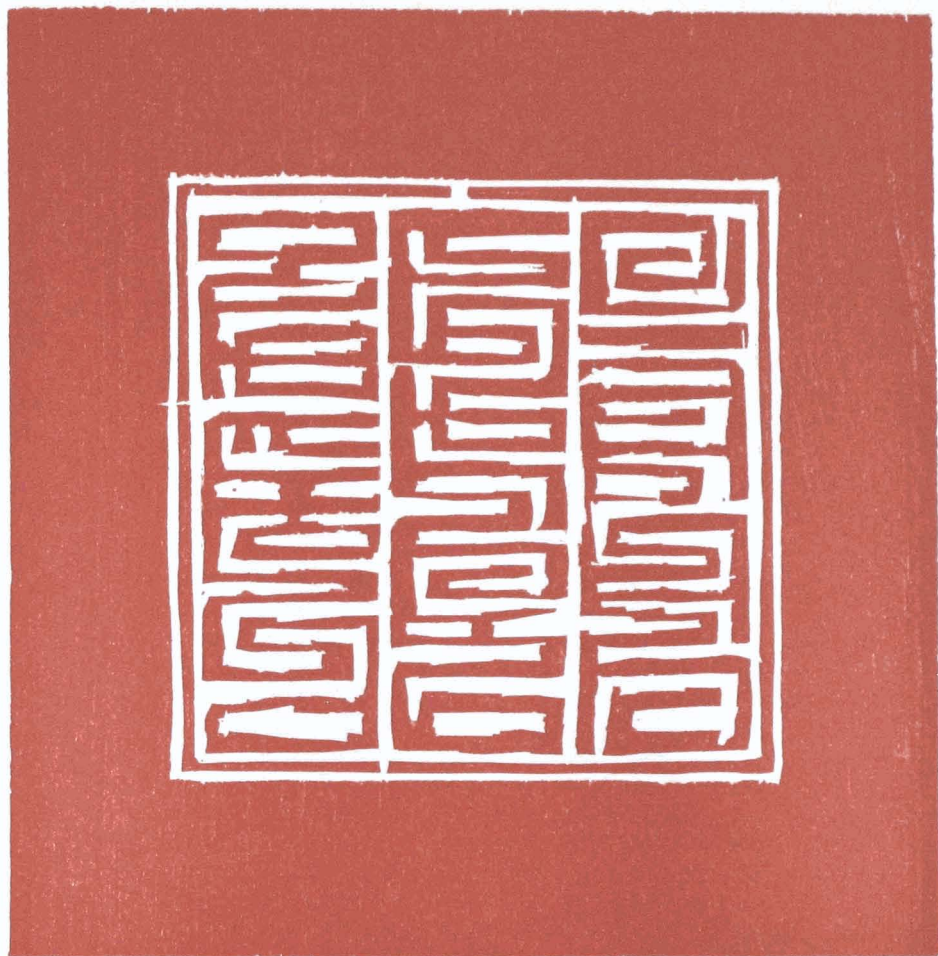
The *Lung-pta* (wind horse) was printed as a charm, very often hanging from the eaves of buildings. It carries three flaming jewels of sacred character. The Tibetans believed that by waving in the wind it would act as a prayer flag and clear away all dust from the six senses, bringing good luck and fortune.

THE RIVERSIDE MUSEUM

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# COLLECTION OF TIBETAN ART



*WITH COMMENTARY AND AN HISTORICAL ESSAY BY*

JOHN BRZOSTOSKI

RIVERSIDE MUSEUM, NEW YORK

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TIBETAN PAINTING and sculpture make up an exuberant and refined body of art which has retained deep significance throughout the centuries. Yet, this art has rarely been properly evaluated, nor has it ever enjoyed the popularity of Chinese and Japanese works. A primary reason is that good examples of Tibetan art are exceedingly rare; now that the borders of Tibet are closed, they will be even rarer.

One of the finest and most inclusive collections of Tibetan art is to be found in the galleries of the Riverside Museum. These works were acquired primarily during the years 1924-1928 by expeditions sent to Tibet by the Master Institute of United Arts, Inc., the parent organization of the Riverside Museum. In order to make a part of the collection more readily available to Oriental scholars, Mr. and Mrs. L. L. Horch, founders of the Riverside Museum, presented to the Columbia University Library editions of the monumental works in Tibetan literature: the *Kanjur* in 102 volumes and the *Tanjur* in 244 volumes.

Mr. John Brzostoski has accomplished an important service in the writing of this book. He has given both the layman and the artist a fuller and deeper understanding of Tibetan art—its historical and religious foundations, its artistic and aesthetic values. He has made it possible to understand much of this art by his selection, for intensive analysis, of the most representative paintings and sculpture from the collection. Once the importance and artistic accomplishment of these works are understood, the doors have been opened for the understanding of all Tibetan art. Mr. Brzostoski has brought great love and understanding to this task, and he has been unusually successful in communicating his own enthusiasm for the subject. He combines the practical experience of the painter with the scholarship of the teacher (at New York University and the New School) and the fluency of the writer (for leading art periodicals).

The publication of this book coincides with the fortieth anniversary of the Master Institute. It is hoped that this book will accomplish one of the main purposes of the Riverside Museum: a broader understanding of the great contribution of art to world culture.

ORIOLE FARB  
*Associate Director*

*September 28, 1962*

***For Vajrasattva, Teacher of Teachers.***



DRUP-PAR GYUR-CHI. (*Let it be performed.*)

Reaction to this art is immediate. Great whirlpools of air stir in a room with these objects and inevitably begin to draw people in. This will happen with or without a previous knowledge of what this art is or where it came from. It places the works immediately into an area of operating objects. As such, these things are an experience to be entered. They reach out to touch the visitor with familiarity, for they are very personal in their structures, echoing a relationship with our human systems.

Tibetan art should be used. Its aesthetic factors are only a part of its make-up, although important and operative. They function for definite reasons far removed from anything that is inaccessible to understanding. Each object has a definite application and is no more mystical than a drill press or a grinding wheel. Being genuine, they are a source of power and as tools of power these paintings are unique. They are *yantras* (mental machines) that operate on the matter of consciousness and its flow. They work as transformers of energies through us. This will allow in many instances any person to gain an advantage, whether they are Buddhists or not. They are primarily elements for the manipulations of reality.

As visual arts they are strange, for they operate in a field of sound. The place of this sound is "in" the mind, where it is always bouncing. There, heard and unheard, is a constant talking turmoil which man seldom governs: those waking dreams known as thoughts. These subtle paintings operate on a reflector basis. They plug into a nervous system and allow their organized circuits to operate, giving a sequential control over the following thoughts. Specific reactions arrive in the observer. It is not an art of circumstances which demands a mood, a time, or a proper environment. It creates all of these, destroying previous conditions of looking, hinging only on the presence of a person. If he looks, he is absorbed.

One basic idea of Tibetan art refers to an entity whose main tone of mind is bliss. Seeing something as it really is will bring delight and overcome all theories of sorrow. So whatever is seen—come to it calmly with a feeling of comfort and pleasure. It should come as easily as exhaling and inhaling. Allowing the art a chance, it will do this work. It is as easy as one, two, three! (*Gzugs, zung, rtse!*) Body, pair, summit!

The starting point for all these words must be the Tibetan collection of the Riverside Museum of Art. Originally it was gathered from the monasteries of Tibet by an expedition sent in 1926-27 by the Master Institute of United Arts. All of this was made possible through the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Louis Horch. Its material presence speaks to people



as a fact and its aesthetic presence makes them act in a relationship that begins and grows stronger. When one sees this collection, many things happen. He believes it without explanation. He wrestles with it and its reasons. The results thunder down about his head.

The best thing to do is to leave all aggregates of knowledge outside while this art is pursued inside. Those elements are no help in the penetration necessary here. For instance, without the environmental mis-education of a puritan tradition, the seemingly sexual paintings will be better understood. Without a pre-fixed idea, everything known as the world is revealed cracking open—into a thousand fragments, into dark suns penetrating immeasurable thunderclouds. These are pierced by the substance of a million falling bolts of lightning. The notion of the world (massive tons of rock) becomes suspended in mid-air to be scorched by the sun. It will vanish in the blink of the eye of the mind. And yet . . . it is as if all were under an overhanging ledge of silence, constantly shaking from an unheard—but felt—avalanche, somewhere approaching.

This is where this art takes us.

Born in the glacial Himalayas, water—as the holy rivers Brahmaputra, Indus and Sutlej—eroded its way down as a pilgrim to India. Each river washed down sand impregnated with gold that exists universally distributed in the crystalline rocks of the main Tibetan upheaval. It is easily taken by the handfuls from natural hollows in steam beds where it collects. Later, in reverse, came spiritual gold traveling into Tibet, also as easy of access in cups of minds-stuff.

The thick philosophy of Tantric Buddhism came from India to the high wind-torn plateaus of Tibet. The Tantras, which means literally salvation by “spreading” or teaching, contributed much to Lamaism. It is one of the deepest “systems” ever plumbed by man, and the land mass of Tibet is one of the densest lived upon. The rarified thought and the subtleties of a cosmic wind permeates them both. There at great elevations, rock met stratified mentation. The consequence is what is called Tibetan culture. It is built completely upon these two: the geography of Tibet and Buddhist thought.

Beneath all the complexities of Tibetan thought is laid sound. Above that, all the symbolic stone and fire of the earth. Its basic foundations are revealed in its art to help in our epoch of destruction. This is the Kali age, named after the destroying goddess. Flowing hot under pressure, molten stone allows the speaking of the basic oracles in the earth. A continent is heaving. Its height makes air gasp, pushing up. Inside, the gold is separated by soil-binding frosts. Outside, the pine forest is an outer blue. Mists and ice cover the pressures of building, rising. Inevitably out of the open crust come screaming hot geysers. Sometimes, in the intense cold air, these steaming eruptions of water immediately crystallize as columns of translucent ice. These point higher into immaculately clear skies. There all breath is.

This is a geography that makes breathing come a certain way. It is built into the landscape, valley next to valley.

From an ethnographic viewpoint, Tibetan culture has no borders that exist on maps. It crosses vast empty mountain slopes southward into Nepal,

or wanders through the empty mists of Bhutan, western China, or Mongolia. The wind (*lung*) blows the seed (*bija*) of the Tibetan views across a plateau of emptiness (*strong-pa*), over a precipice into the void (*mkhah*), to fertilize a neighboring area and grow homes for tutelary gods. The dividing lines necessarily fade, whispering away as its vibrations move from central Tibet.

Even real borders, such as the Bhutan 11,500 foot contour between the boundaries of the upland pine forests and lowland bamboo, are of a fuzzy sort.

Tibet is vast by any measurement. Its high area and mountain walls are similar to its own diagram of the universe. On the south it is hemmed in by Mt. Everest and other peaks. On the north it is bound by more vast mountain ranges whose passes average three thousand feet higher than the Himalayan passes. It never narrows to a single range of mountains, but remains in multiples. Its northern lakes are like so many giants, being the highest in the world (*Hospa Tso* is at 17,930 feet.) and among the largest (*Koko-Nor* is 1630 square miles.). Remnants of glaciers at the head of the Brahmaputra look down, off to the river regions, to the south, east and west.

The eastern mountains arrest the monsoon and it drops rain and snow on the southern slopes all year. The west is drier but colder. In the north, unhindered winds whip across vast desolate solitudes, too cold for grain or trees. There is intense heat in the summer and intense cold in the winter. The most hospitable areas are in the southern and eastern valleys which contain the cities of Lhasa, Shigatse and Gyantse. Here there are groves of trees and good soil. It is well irrigated and richly cultivated. The Tsang-po ("purifier") river valley is the great arterial valley of south Tibet. Most of Tibet's vegetation is stunted, but in these "hotlands" a warmer climate prevails and is more hospitable to barley, buckwheat, potatoes and even to peaches, apples, apricots and grapes.

One oral tradition tells that the Tibetans are descended from a demones and Hanuman (the monkey god). All that is known is that they came from the southeast in ancient times to make the "country of the red faces" their home. Theirs is a feudal society with a settled population in the valleys and nomadic tent dwellers elsewhere. This "icy land" was called *Bhot* by the Tibetans. The Mongolians called it *To-Bhot* (high *Bhot*) which turned into Tibet.

Tibet has always been in great isolation. Armies or pilgrims, everyone went around it. Before the Seventh Century A.D. there were no written records. There were notched sticks and knotted cords in use as aids to memory. Possibly a picture writing existed, used by the medicine men for magical purposes. But the reign of Srong tsan gam-po opened a new era. As a conqueror he held sway over vast territories from parts of China into India. In 622 A.D. he sent his minister Thumi Sambhota (regarded now as an incarnation of Manjusri) to collect sacred books in India. The Tibetan language was then reduced to writing in a form of Sanskrit characters. The thick letters with heads are now used in printed books. The half-cursive "cornered letters" became the more current "headless" form. Though the first Buddhist objects reached Tibet from Nepal in 461, Srong tsan gam-po introduced Buddhism. In this he had the help of his two

wives, the princess Bribsun, daughter of King Jyoti-varma of Nepal, and the princess Wen Ching from imperial China. They are now worshipped as semi-divine personages (*Taras*). He was the founder, in 639, of *Lha-ldan* (God's ground), afterwards Lhasa. The succeeding kings favored Buddhism and during the Eighth Century invited Indian scholars to Tibet. Kamala Sila came and the monastery of Sam-je was built for him. In 747 Padma Sambhava arrived. During his short stay he exerted tremendous influence and translated volumes of the *Kanjur*, primarily Tantric texts.

However, under Lang-Dharma in 899 there were widespread persecutions of Buddhists. Afterwards, in a period of confusion, the influence of various monasteries was felt. The first of several chief priests whose authority became paramount in the country was Atisha who had come from India in 1050 and settled at the great monastery of Thoding. First the Sa-skyapa lamas were dominant, then another group. Changes came. The first was due to Tsong Ka Pa, a great reformer, who in 1407 organized a stricter form of Lamaism known as *dGe lugs-pa* (the yellow sect) as opposed to the *zva-dmar* (red caps). Another was the coming of the first Dalai Lama. This was Lama Sodham rGyamts'o who, in turn for helping Buddhism reach the Mongols, received the abbotship of Galden near Lhasa. The Mongols gave him the title *Vajra Dalai Lama* (Lightning wide-ocean superior one) in 1576. During the reign of the fifth Dalai Lama, the Mongols interfered in the affairs of the country. Tibet called for help from China and the Gushri Khan in anger invaded Tibet and subjugated everyone. He made the fifth Dalai Lama the absolute monarch of all Tibet in 1645.

With Tibetan Buddhism there existed a succession by reincarnation. These reincarnations were of many sorts, but primarily of two types of personages. First, there were persons who had reached supreme spiritual enlightenment. They are called Buddhas. Next, there were persons of pure compassion on the verge of becoming Buddhas, but closer to humanity and its suffering. These were called Bodhisattvas. The Dalai Lama was considered to be the incarnation on earth of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara and was called *rGyal-po Rim-po-che* (the glorious king). When he died it was believed that he was reincarnated into the body of a boy born after his death. After a great search and various tests, the Chutuktus, abbots of the monasteries, chose a child as the new incarnation. He was raised and educated in Lhasa, while a regent ruled until his coming of age. This pattern was followed also for the Tashi or Panchen Lama, *Panchen Rim-po-che* (the glorious teacher), who represented an incarnation of the Buddha Amitabha. Despite the fact that one was the incarnation of a Bodhisattva and the other of a Buddha, it was the Bodhisattva that held more secular power in the country. The Tashi Lama at Tashilhunpo, representing the Buddha Amitabha, was only a "spiritual advisor" to the former and had less secular power.

The reign of the Dalai Lama, known to the Tibetans as *Kyam-gon Buk* (the inmost protector), made a giant theocracy of Tibet and covered the areas of Lhasa, Shigatse, Gyantse, the western, eastern and border provinces, and the northern pastures.

This was administered both by lamas and laymen. After the ministers

of state there was the *Tsong-du* (national assembly) that was called on matters of supreme importance. A lesser assembly was always in session. The administrative subdivisions divided into prefectures under the rule of two men, one layman, one lama, who collected taxes which were paid in kind—sheep, meal, wool, etc.—and who were responsible for judicial functions, couriers, etc. The sub-prefectures' rulers had under them the village headmen and elders who were appointed.

There were various degrees of European penetration. The first European, the Jesuit Antonio Andrada, came in 1661. Six years later there was an Austrian, followed by the Belgian D'orville who traveled to Lhasa. In 1774, East India Company agents reached the Tashi Lama at Shigatse. In the Nineteenth Century Europeans were prevented from entering the country and expelled if found in it. They entered anyway. The Indian Sarat Chandras Das obtained Tibetan texts and the American W. W. Rockhill collected geographical information.

In the late Nineteenth Century, Indian officials tried to open trade with Tibet. Not only were they refused by the Tibetans but fighting broke out in Sikkim. The Tibetans were repulsed by the British. The Chinese tried speaking for the Tibetans and a treaty was signed. The Tibetans would not recognize it. A Mongolian Russian, Dorjjeff, interested the Russians in Tibet and the Dalai Lama wanted to play Russia off against England. A Russian treaty was a possibility and Russian arms were arriving in Lhasa. Due to further problems on the Sikkim-Tibetan border, Col. F. E. Younghusband attempted negotiations. After useless discussions, he entered Tibet in December 1903 with armed British troops. He reached Lhasa in August. A treaty resulted with trade market concessions.

Tibetan history is one severe struggle after another with the Chinese who constantly found reasons to interfere in Tibetan affairs, but were never able to overcome Tibet for long. Early in this century, the Russians and the British agreed with each other to stay out of Tibet. The Chinese, however, were not included and soon fighting resulted with Chinese troops taking Lhasa. The Dalai Lama fled to India. In the intervening years Tibet was able to exert its independence again when the Chinese collapsed under their own inadequacies. A dozen years ago the Communists were able to force a treaty which defenseless Tibet could not avoid. The Chinese broke the treaty, moving in great numbers of troops and Chinese settlers. Interference was followed by fighting. Then came the "impossible" escape of the present Dalai Lama.

That ancient Tibetan queen, the Chinese princess Wen Ching, had once discovered through astrology that Tibet was a demoness lying on its back. The princess had monasteries built at the sites of this female spirit's arms, legs and feet. Now, criss-crossing to bind her, are Chinese roads built with slave labor. Fleeing refugees bring dark news of atrocities on the body of that country.

Lamaism is that form of Buddhism which is practiced in Tibet. From the time of the historical Buddha in the Fifth Century B.C. there have been steps of change. The Buddha taught that everything was sorrow and that everyone could become a Buddha (an enlightened one). Then everything that is *sukha* (sorrow) would become *dukha* (bliss). Also there were four

things to be mindful of: beliefs, thoughts, speech and acts. People were to try to make each always valid and not to act differently in one of these as compared to another. Hinayana (the earlier, so-called small boat) Buddhism was a hard lonely road to perfection. Mahayana (the later, so-called large boat) Buddhism agreed with the basic beliefs of the former, but not the methods. It added elements which gave it a more complex appearance, full of multiple Buddhas, demons and celestial creatures, who did not have much place in earlier Buddhism. It had a shift of emphasis. The key figure now was the Bodhisattva, a person on the verge of Buddhahood, on the brink of attaining *Nirvana* (perfect existence), who paused to turn to help others. "Attack *avidya* (blind-stupidity) and a change will follow." The Bodhisattva vows that he will not "cross over" to nirvana until everyone can go.

These changes came about the Third Century A.D. connected with the revelations of the thinker Nagarjuna in India, in his spiritual "iron tower." The powers of the Buddhas were explained by the fact that they were only the outward aspect, the reflection or emanation of innumerable ethereal Buddhas not on the earth. Of these, five received the most attention. Amitabha was one of these.

When Buddhism came to Tibet it was in this form. It came into the country and absorbed the earlier Bon religion into a special form. Later the Tantras connected with Padma Sambhava and others modified it further. Older gods and devils, male and female, were subdued, converted and forced to recognize the Buddha. Those ferocious *K'rag t'un* (blood drinkers) had to act as guardian deities and protectors of the faithful. With this transformation of the shamanism of Tibet and its gods, "magic" powers (*siddhi*), "magic" phrases (*dharani*), and "magic" circles (*mandalas*) began to play a more important role in Buddhism. These were tools. *Yantras* (mental machines) for the subtle elements: light and ideation. *Mantras* (sound machines) for the gross elements: sound and substance. When you "see the sound" (through the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara) you enter a Buddha realm.

The Tibetan believed that by the saying of "magic" syllables that are embodiments in the realm of sound, he could evoke a consciousness that differentiates all the forms and unfolds them as forces. He tried to make manifest a multiplicity formed out of one fluid living substance. He "con-jures" in the inner space of the body the figures of "deity" through the *yantra* and *mantra*. They may be two mountains in intercourse, many faced and covered with a forest of limbs and hands. The thunderstorm reality of the believer's body makes it pure and simple. These conjurations were experiments that often revolved around a transmission of specific energy of the system in a direction opposite to that of its normal function. Tibetan art is connected to these experiments. It is meant to be an agent in this actualization of reality. The Tibetans struggled to keep alive the powers of the pantheon of Lamaism for such use. The works of art are a device to pull people through to the other side of this mystery.

Paintings and sculptures were used in great numbers as ritual objects by the Tibetans, either in the monasteries or in the homes. These came in a variety of sizes. Some grew to the size of special banner paintings the

height of a building. It was felt that merely to look at these images would accumulate good consequences. This was so important to these Buddhists that the great flat tower at the Tashilhunpo monastery was constructed primarily for the display of giant paintings on holy days, allowing them to be seen from miles away.

Whatever the size, the *tankas* (banner paintings) were rectangular and the *mandalas* (magic circle paintings) were square. The fabric was usually cotton, although silk, or more rarely leather, was also used. Sometimes they were printed from wooden blocks. A transfer technique for lines was used in eastern Tibet.

The artist was usually a lama of a certain disposition and mental capacity. The task he was involved in was more than physical painting. It was the physical invocation of deities—sometimes of ferocious aspect—as well. He had to be of high moral quality and know the holy scriptures exceedingly well. His entire production was a sacred ceremony. There was a constant recitation, either by himself or for him by his assistants. His own image-making ability would be controlled by this recitation. The paintings became incarnations of certain sounds. Later observers would get mental *mantras* from them, which was felt more valuable than reciting them aloud.

The bodies of the gods are in multiples of certain basic units and the artist must know the particular proportions of the entity sought. Even though the image had been codified in written texts, he had to become one with the essence invoked. There must be a reliving of the revelation of an ancient saint, and a re-invoking of the deity and its details. He had to actually see it or postpone the work.

Since he was making a sacred image, the artist sat with his materials in a place properly clean for a sacred act. Auspicious days were chosen, usually the fifteenth and the thirtieth of the month. His mineral colors were pounded in a stone mortar with a wooden pestle. These could be green, red, yellow, gold, blue and white. The fabric which had been woven by a maiden was stretched tightly on a frame. Its surface already had been covered with a mixture of chalk and glue, and polished to a high finish. It was similar to a blank mirror and akin to the surface of paintings of Nepal which were akin to the surfaces of frescoes in India. Out of this light he pulled his figures. First came the line, followed by the colors, the face and details. He did not paint until he saw these there. The surface of the completed painting is called *me-long* (mirror). It is bordered with woven silk strips. Often there is a prized patch, which is called the "door of the tanka." After consecration the painting becomes the abode of the deity, with the reds and yellows in the "frame" indicating a radiation of rainbow light. The painting is to be used, then rolled up, and put away.

These works have a basic frontality, a full face, which seems to have just turned. The subjects ranged from Buddhas in paradise, Taras, Bodhisattvas, to demons and teachers. Many of the paintings have a structure which is built on a near, but off, symmetrical basis. One might appear in a certain pattern. In the central position is the main figure. To his north, over him, but technically at his back, would be his "virtue-excellence" emanation, to his right would be the body emanation, to his left, speech,

to the bottom-front, mind. At the four intermediary quarters could be *karma* (environmental circumstance) emanations, black and fierce.

There is a problem of dating which arises out of the strict iconographic rules. Two similar pictures might have been painted hundreds of years apart. To compound this confusion, the artist often moved from monastery to monastery, working in different parts of Tibet. They learned from each other and then moved on. This tended further to blur distinctions.

There are a number of visual events which occur in these works. The first element is line whose basic nature is all encompassing and fluid. It gives the form to things and usually is that element first fixed in the work by the artist. Its fluidity relates to a concept of the constant flux of the world. Its encompassing relates to that which contains all colors and form in a temporary state. This state changes in the works as persons watch it. It is partially a matter of double images, but also the effect of the colors on our eyes. The harshness grows softer after a length of time involved in observation. This is the physical response of after-images. The artists were aware of this and used it. The result is that as viewers watch the work, "new" images appear that are hardly possible to codify. Edges demand attention and melt from one form into another. This is sometimes read as confusion. Revealed are trees filling the entire rectangle, or screaming terrors roaring in another time. The painting does not stay still, though nothing ostensibly changes. Much of this is done by the eye wandering in the work under direction. Thus came a unique contribution of individual artists of merit. Despite the tight hold of the icon on their "first" stated painting, here is that which is added through their "re-living" of the vision of ancient saints.

Sometimes the painter repeats "ideas" in an order of progressive difficulty. Notice the one detail that reveals a rock mountain, which "rises" to an offering dish, and again goes up to two hands in a symbolic gesture. Follow this to a serene, yet intense face. They all relate to the same basic idea, showing how it would appear in different states. This is done in the treatment of the paint itself. The so-called rock appears dense, solid and dark, while colors are lightened in the radiance of the face. It has the substance equal to the face of the mountain below, but it is full of light.

Another element is the ability to have the observer turn things inside out in his participation with this painting. That lowest form of rock is so hemmed in by clouds that for a moment it is difficult to discern whether it is concave or convex. First, it is a mountain, bulging out. Then, as eyes take in other available painted clues, it is a grotto with a waterfall falling through it. Then, it is a mountain again. It pulses in and out, moving constantly and changing through the physical devices of the artist. Transfer attention to the Bodhisattva's hands or face, and realize what is there as well. Become aware of the reality and a method for attaining it. In studying that face a greater understanding can be reached of what is meant by the oriental reference to "void." It is an "everythingness." It is not a "nothingness."

Though in evidence in Tibetan art, Indian and Chinese influences move through various points with it, to reveal that breath of inspiration that is particularly Tibetan. These unblended influences are hinted at

only in the fringes of this immensity of ferociousness. This is not a patchwork, but an audacious transformation of the images of neighboring cultures. Here the influences can still be recognized but they are held captive without a self-consciousness of national ego. "Self" and "other" become interchangeable in Tibet. Their forms laugh at this labeling: it is all the same body. The results make something which is a "total" and which opens to reveal a new being. This contains all the rest, without destroying them, but yet destroying all old contexts. So-called contradictions are joined together by understanding the underlying unity of opposites. Both were illusions, but in joining them a joy is realized akin to the play of *Shakta-Shakti*, *Yab-Yum* (father-mother), that allows the universe to continue to be re-born. Thus, this is a world of its own. There are horrifying elements and gentle loving ones side by side. It inspires awe and sometimes terror. The wind blows up a circle of flames to envelop the eye. It burns errors, taking you "out-in" and the flames are flowers of air.

Different paintings may concentrate in specific limitations of fields of power, seeming less total than others of more elaborate construction. But any genuine representation has the totality in any of its parts. In this fashion, observers are able to deal with works of art as "weaker" machines before they face further impossibly strong ones. Lesser elements of the most powerful structures often refer to the total events at the center of lower intensity paintings. When there is a progression to extremely dense works it becomes less esoteric and easier to grasp. The painters are assuming the occurrence of previous experiences before the exposure to a universe of "machines." There it becomes a tremendous thing which operates in many directions and dimensions. It stamps and grinds, melts and bites, molds and scores and hammers and joins. It destroys and it purifies the old image without changing whatever was "real." The noise, smoke and screaming is intense. It frightens some people. However, these are only representations of our own illusions of the functions we would put to use and have operate on ourselves. See only that they exist on the cloth of the mind, where everything is anyway.

The flowing grass-like appearance of Tibetan music notation will help us understand that the paintings can be read. The colors read simultaneously as "words" and "states." These words carry an invocatory process. Thus if a painting is labeled in various parts this is especially valuable and useful. Mingling sound and light, you "see the sound." It goes further, for we get colors as syllables, syllables as words, words as numbers, and numbers as sequential positioning in an "eye-traced" diagram, which works best unseen. Paintings then become "unseen" tools.

The transposition of a vision, and the past circumstances of viewing, involves all the senses with the art, and reverses their natural order. With these works, restrain the hindering senses and shake them in the wind, the air. Transpose them, put them on as flayed elephant skin, tiger skin and wear them to the next events that you forecast.

The nature of Buddhism in Tibet is severe and harsh. It is to be practiced by people of *virya* (strong-active) nature. In the Kali age only *virya* can succeed. So, in the approach to these works, conceive of self as earth, form, color, light, air, sound in ether, thought and intellect in all creatures.



Then cast these off. Act as the sum of all consciousness. That is the “large boat.” To look in a lightning (*vajra*) and thunder strewn approach is to discover the manipulations of the real.

After assuming identification with the “inside” forces, the resulting question is one of control of the direction of these operations. This is up to each person. Liberty (*moksha*) is for you. The fruit of this purpose is action and the fruit of action is yours. Whatever you wish, get whatever you wish. It is up to you.

You change things by riding on the wind. Throw your whole awareness on a draft of wind. Nothing is impossible if you do it by play. The air will support you. This is due to the thinking behind it, which is limitless form itself. This spreads out—akin to water spreading out—enlarging and enlarging. This is a characteristic of that art belonging to a tradition which is written and non-written.

Tibet and the world have been vanishing all along. In this art we watch pure abstractions that seem to be figures, but they turn and enter us to take other forms. We watch explosions of those cognate erections (*stupas*) come into being and these forces shake us as we discover that the layer of ego is very thin. We are exposed in a fiery flux, on the edge of the events of moment to moment, “vanishing” as we clutch at them “vanishing.”

The idiotic laughter of the Kali age is all around us with roaring flames swallowing countries. We share the extinction the Tibetans face. It would be a mistake to ignore their sometimes puzzling accomplishments, for until now they have survived with laughter and joy. Through their art we can gain benefit and if we turn dusty skins inside out, we will discover strong joyous ones that use belief as language, reality as metaphor and laugh in the shadow of the illusion of inevitable darkness. Then we can help others in the face of avalanches of the spirit and the crumbling of ego-worlds underfoot. Let these works suck in your senses and blow the dust from their mirrors. It will be like death and birth. The world will be strange and unbelievably understandable.

This is where this art takes us.

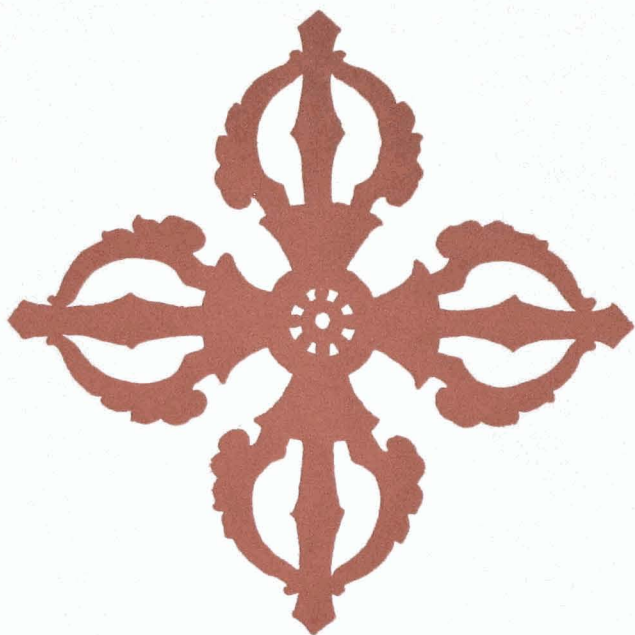
TOP-PAR GYUR-CHI. (*Let it be obtained.*)

JOHN BRZOSTOSKI





THE RIVERSIDE MUSEUM COLLECTION OF TIBETAN ART

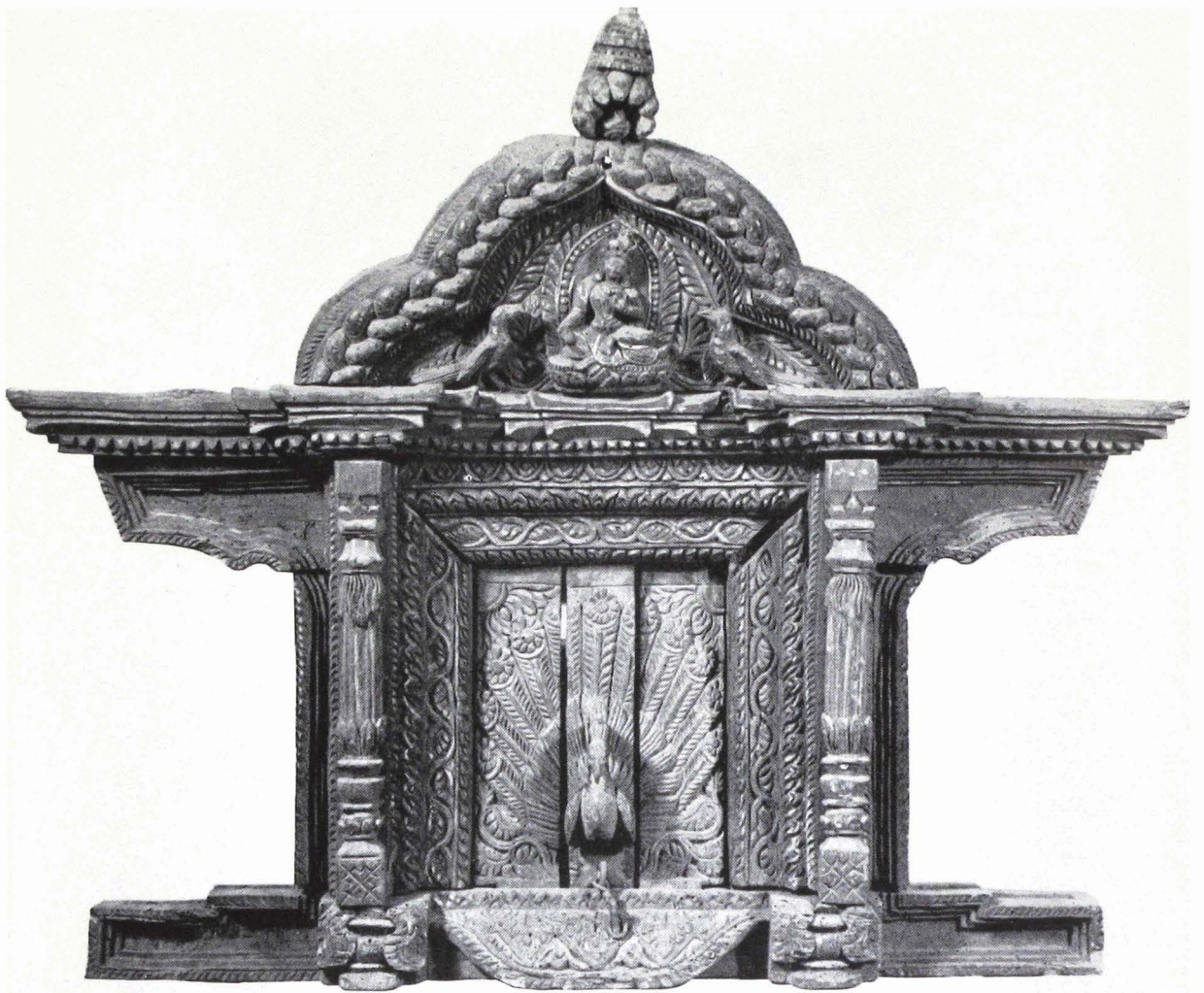


A SELECTION OF PAINTINGS AND SCULPTURE

MAYADEVI *Nepal*

In the earliest forms of Buddhism there were no representations of the Buddha image. Usually the idea of his presence was indicated by symbols, such as the lotus or the wheel. With the coming of Mahayana Buddhism there came a changing of attitudes leading to the eventual creation of works such as this. Not only does it show the Buddha figure, but it shows him at the moment of his birth coming out of the right side of the lady Maya. This scene of the nativity is extraordinary in many ways: it successfully combines, in its charged appearance, the qualities of both sculpture and painting. It rings with a richness that is unbelievable, with Mayadevi seeming to dance on a celestial stage under that bejeweled tree of light whose branch she holds to steady herself. There never was a more jubilant depiction of a birth. As she rhythmically moves in that space created by the device of the conceptualized tree, there is a great onrush of potential music surrounding her. All of this the sculptor accomplishes with a combination of great simplification side-by-side with an almost overly ornate treatment of details. There is the extreme feeling of order and equilibrium in this view of a royal and divine birth.

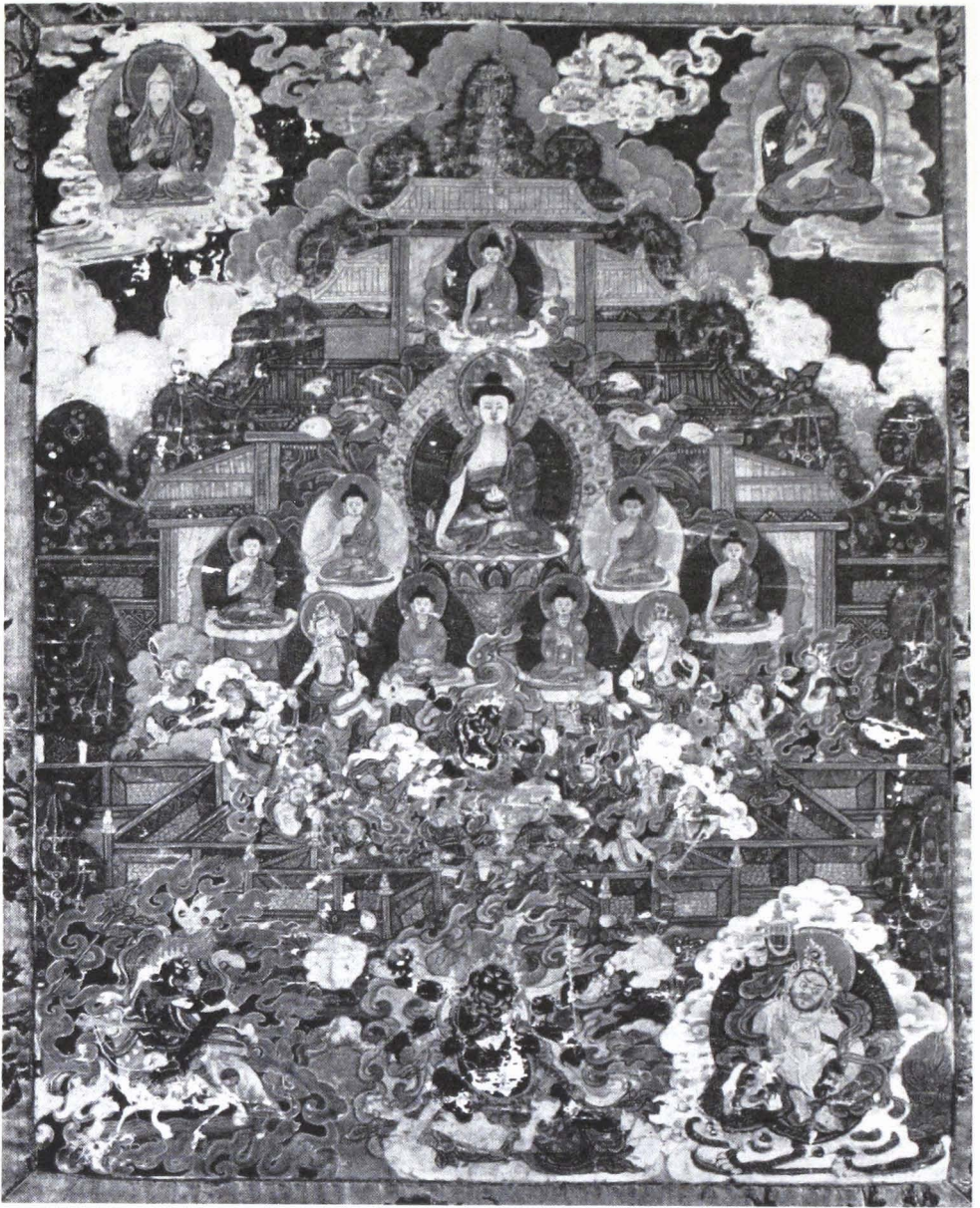




TEMPLE PORTICO *Nepal*

This Tibetan object from a temple is rarely found in a museum. The wood carving with its multiple joined sections shows how philosophical ideals permeate even the designs on buildings. The central peacock is an appropriate image at the opening, with its spanning of both in and out. The area it stands on is similar to the draperies at the base of seated Buddhas in many paintings and sculptures. Here the fold flows down from the bird with the long intertwining rhythms rising along the sides. Buddhist ideas are here and, with close attention, a translation can be made. Out of the geometric, hard bound world, at the base of the side columns, is found the progressive growth of the lotus. This

blossoms out and verbalizes itself into an action of "evaporation." It lifts up to an inverted flame-flower which supports the series of platforms for the domed complex of the upper layer. The peacock's feathers flare out, first in a simple feather halo about the bird and then in steps to the tips which contain lotuses. Above, the Bodhistattva is enclosed in the sliced flame halo which relates to the feather halo below. The bird may be three dimensional, but its world is flat compared to the elaborate x-ray view of that complex knotted vibrant design above. This leads to the parasol-like, fruit-like top knot which is opened so that a whirling gem spiraling upwards can be seen within. Here is shown the fact that intensity of design can go into areas other than those known as the fine arts.



#### BUDDHA IN PARADISE

In many ways Tibetan paintings, such as this one of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni, attempt to reveal and define the nature of Buddhahood. By showing him in his paradise the painter tried to relate the growth of a Buddha. The artist did this through the use of curious technical and aesthetic devices.

The Buddha was supposed to be a being that existed in more conscious dimensions than ordinary everyday persons. How could an artist show such a multi-dimensional world on the two-dimensional surface of a canvas that existed in the world of three dimensions? He had to speak of a larger sphere with very limited means. He had no models to work from. The objects in the painting were abstractions given form to act as metaphors which might aid a viewer in an expansion of his consciousness of the everyday world. The work has no one fixed vanishing point. The artist meant for the viewer to use his two eyes as he does in reality, not one as in Western perspective. This allowed a great deal of shifting emphasis and perspectives in different parts of the

painting. When this two-eyed vision is painted it depicts a slightly distorted figure which is closer to what human eyes really see—as has been discovered by twentieth century painters.

The beings in the lower portions of the painting are supposed to exist closer to the normal world and are depicted with a seemingly more realistic manner. But there is less spatial treatment around these figures. Working up through the picture, the balustrades' lines are completely inverted, growing larger instead of smaller as they move away from the viewer. This gives a strange orientation. Just past the barrier is a very active area of dancing flames, figures, musicians and clouds that are like a boiling pot of water. Rising out of that are the Bodhisattvas, ethereal Buddhas and the Buddha Shakyamuni. They are not drawn with naturalism but, due to the simpler style that is distinctive in this portion of the painting, they seem wrapped in a greater thickness of dimensions. There seems to be more air around the central figure due to its greater clarity. There the artist shows a serenity in the midst of the surrounding ferocious activity.





BUDDHA AND THE SIXTEEN ARHATS (Deserving Ones)  
*Central Tibetan School*

The arhats are men who have not become Buddhas but have attained a commendable level of accomplishment in rigorous mental disciplines. They are worthy of keeping company in a painting with the Buddha and here we have them presented with a gemlike crispness of focus. Although none of them are depicted alike, these are not portraits. The figures still remain the crystallization of various mental essences as far as the artist was able to go. But he does so well that we are convinced of the essential differences of these men at the same time that we are sure that behind their eyes they are all alike. Beyond that lower portion of emotion and tumult, the entire painting seems to represent spheres of compact control. The painter does not lose control of the painting by putting figures off in the clouds above mountains and with more mountains above them. This is all quite

natural. But whatever strengths are revealed by the tightly painted lines forming the contours of the arhats, it is the figure of the Buddha that shows the real power. Despite the thin edges and delicate delineation of that central figure, one thing piles upon another, causing sparks of energy to emanate from that calmness. The Buddha figure has a great reserve of strength in the broad shoulders and massive chest. The right arm is completely gentle with its evenness of paint, yet the dark edge of a thicker outline causes a powerful sculptural density while accentuating the glow of the entire halo.

The arhats about him have accomplished great mental concentration and fixity on one point, but they are nothing in comparison with the rainbow body of the Buddha. He is depicted here in a variety of stages. His robes exist in very flat two dimensional design, his torso in three dimensional space as you go up in the figure, and the face in a radiating multi-dimensional time and form.



#### THE BODHISATVA AVALOKITESVARA

The point of belief and worship for a figure such as this Bodhisattva was easy to reach for the Tibetans. Avalokitesvara is one of the major figures often depicted in Tibetan art because of his basic nature of mercy. His was the vow to save all sentient beings before becoming a Buddha himself.

A strong feeling of a genuine character saturates this painting. With fewer but larger figures treated in a combination of both razor sharp and bold brushstrokes, this comes across as an absolutely cool painting. By making a plain statement it is contemptuous of emotional excitement. It avoids emotional tone, violent ecstatic yearning and the intense feelings which fall into pettiness. It is calm and contains an ease and a blending of various consciousnesses. This is accomplished by combining a

variety of treatments of the paint and the placing of incompatible figures next to each other. These images reveal a unity by their symbolic decorative handling which permeate and interlock one with the other. The figure of the thunder god in the lower right hand corner and the giant delicate petals of the lotus nearby do not jar each other because both are transformed from the appearance of real objects to the same degree. The fire is almost as floral as the petals are full of light. There is also the unique style differences in the left and right mountain landscapes. The left one is crisper in treatment with its section-view of water inside a mountain covered with snow. The same mountain on the right, in summer, is softer and full of a moist treatment almost as if done by a different artist. But as the seasons merge into a larger year, these landscapes also merge around the Bodhisattva.



CANDRAJOSA SITA TARA

This Tara of "white moon brightness" is a representative of that sort of semi-divine personage of which the two princesses, Wen Ching and Bribsun, were believed to be incarnations. There are twenty-one taras of the earth, the moon, the wind and the elements. As the incarnations of the consort of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara they are associated by the Tibetans with mercy and charity. These figures would be approached by worshippers using special turquoise rosaries repeating the seemingly non-sensical *mantra*: "Om! Ta-re tut-ta-re ture svaha!"

The figure shares a distinctive characteristic with many other Buddhist deities in the strangeness of proportion. Eyes on the forehead or in the palms of the hand are less surprising than the transitions in the anatomy of the body. Though fluidly treated, the stylized garments and hands seem to follow proper proportional

relationships until the eye of the observer travels upward on the figure. Step by step the anatomical structures are correct, but they do not agree with each other. There is a progression in size. The waist is exceedingly small and the shoulders, in comparison, extremely broad for a female figure. However narrow the neck, the head seems to belong more to the shoulders than the shoulders do to the waist. Here is an effect in sculpture working as the reversed lines of perspective do in the paintings. Things get larger as they move away and approach the face of the deity. This strangeness vanishes as the eye follows the flow of the figure downward again, seemingly to adjust the proportions of the body to the true scope of that other-worldly face. When, after viewing these flowers, jewels and ribbons, the Tibetan felt that the figure was correctly formed, he knew he had finished the work that the artist had left open for him to complete.



SAMANTABHADRA BODHISATTVA *Nepal*

Despite its actual dimensions this work assumes a size that goes beyond anything that could merely be designated as *monumental*. This is because of the presence of a very conscious placement. The flowers, touching hands, and looping strands of jewelry are framed by the falling rhythms of the scarves. The figure is almost immediately lost in the knowledge that the entire sculpture is a criss-crossing diagram. The work's transformed sensuality will not allow this to remain abstract. There is a side-stepping of conscious understanding in favor of a participation in the experience of looking. The excited edges of the sculpture, up and down the figure, make the outer contours all seemingly part of one creature. Fabric, vegetation and flesh become extensions of each other with a propriety and gentleness that excludes any thought of conflict between their opposite characters.



#### SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION OF OFFERINGS

The wrathful deities are given sacrificial objects and offerings to disarm them. In this wild painting is depicted the extent of these offerings. This is unlimited. Not only are there sacrificial cakes on the long center table, but every animal known, skulls, bodies and banners. The eight glorious emblems in Buddha's footprints, running across the upper center, including the lucky diagram known as Buddha's entrails; flayed enemies, weapons, the universe (the island at lower center); the human senses arranged first in skulls and then in several versions on the table; your ego and the Buddhist religion itself; all of these are offered in symbolic sacrifice. But because of the complete act of sacrifice nothing is lost to the one who offers.



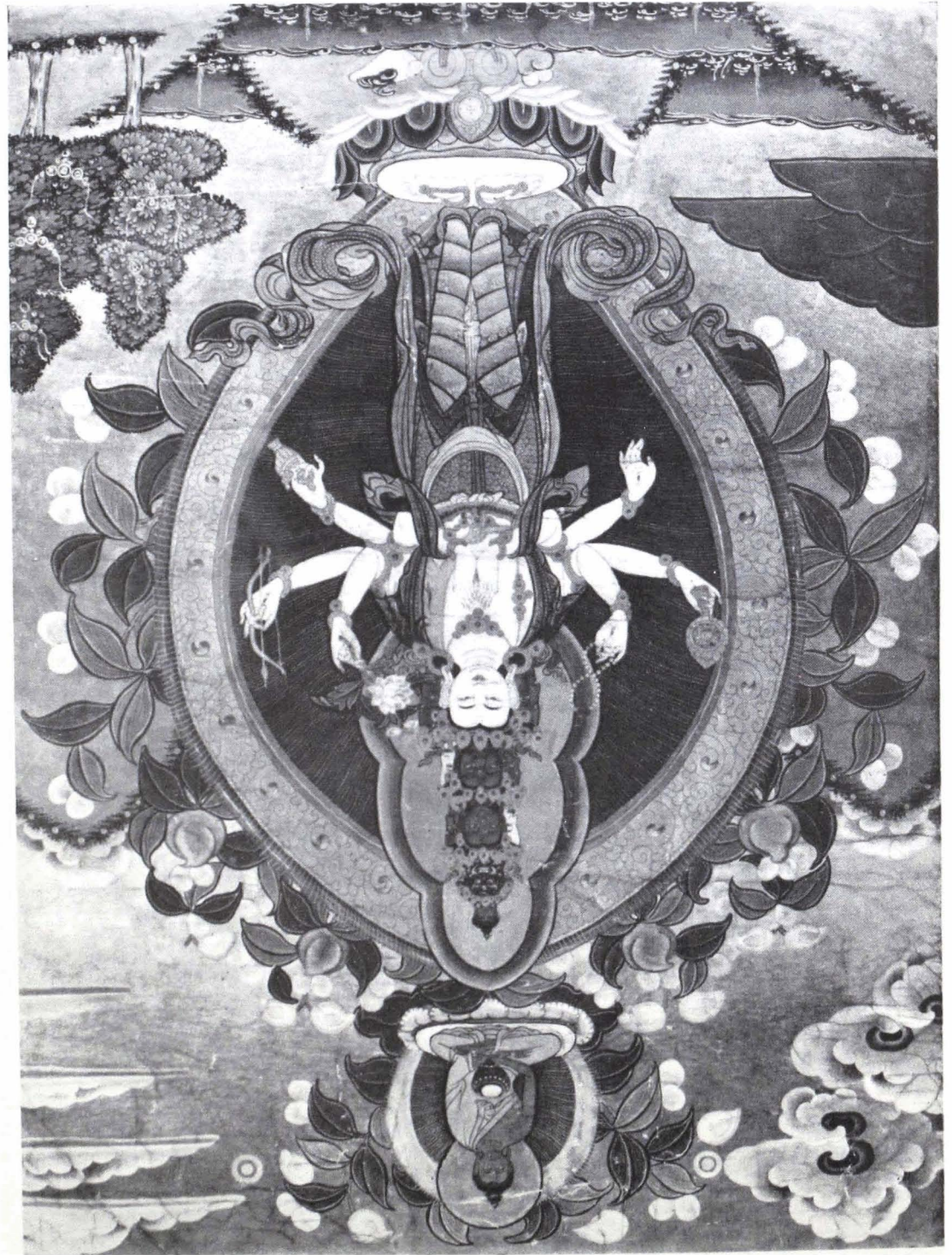


#### PARADISE OF PADMASAMBHAVA

Padmasambhava was the Indian scholar who laid the foundation for Lamaism, the Tibetan form of Buddhism. The fact that he made only two trips to Tibet and did not remain, did not prevent a mythology from growing about his person. He converted the demons of ancient Tibet into defenders of the faith and emphasized spells and magic. The Tibetans regard him as a mythological second Buddha; hence, a great number of paintings of his paradise and his miracles. This painting depicts his pure earth, a spiritual sphere of mind. His entire paradise is built on a continent which rises like a great rocky island. All of the approaches are through terrible regions of man-eating cannibals and other ferocious creatures. The difficulties can be understood when the foreground mountains are studied in contrast with the island itself. The distances are tremendous. Even if

it were possible to reach the delicate bridges there would still be many other hinderances in the shape of protective deities.

The artist has managed very well to reveal a complex structure. This painting is a series of x-ray cut-aways. Actually if he depicted the continent in its simplest form it would be one giant rock. But he has sliced it so the inside can be seen. There is the series of Chinese-styled buildings which, with their wandering walls can very easily be read as concave or convex alternately. This allows a view inside where the huge figure of the saint himself is sitting. Surrounding him are interlocking halos, also presented in cut-away views. Everywhere about the palace are jeweled trees, flying angels and various emanations. The rainbows end in clouds which are painted in the peculiar manner of Lhasa artists. Assuming the mountains to be of normal size, the extent of this paradise state will be realized.



BOHISTATIYA VALOKITESVARA (11-headed)

The Bodhisattva is of tremendous size. The viewer may note the jeweled trees for a point of reference. Upon the lord of mercy's forehead is balanced the universe with all the varieties of thought that are contained in those heads. This is done as play: the universe for him is as light as a poppyseed. Lightness is created by the artist through the use of the curved lines that loop upward to the Buddha figure (Amitabha) above. The lights and darks create a chain of brilliant spots which equal a visual poetry, the chain also serving as a body of sound and light.

Tibetans would look at this painting as if it were cracked open. That is, as if the halo were a flower-encrusted seed that has at this very instant split open. As it separates, it exposes the figure of the eight armed and eleven-headed Avalokitesvara. This is one of the simpler paintings in this collection but also one that reverberates with intensity. Here is a view of the shifting of light and sound through these alternately thick and thin lines, light and dark tones.







LHA-MO

This great *Shakti* (energizing force) is the patron Goddess of the Dalai Lama. She is worshipped always, but especially during the last seven days of the year. She has many names, one of which is Kali, the destroyer. She is terrible and merciless and she destroys wildly, without regard for any past conditions. Everything falls before her through flame, or flood or chaotic accidents. She is found superbly actualized in this painting. It is one of those precious banners which is labeled throughout to aid in the invocation of the deity herself. Inside the flame-shield halo she is solidified. The similarities amidst some of the sharp flame areas make the eyes move to and fro, jumping from one form to another. Sometimes there are detours as a body sinks into a dark pool. The great number of diagonal eye movements seem to whip up the flames to a jabbing fierceness. There is another thing that happens—even without the knowledge of the icons—as the eye dashes darkly across the figure of Lha-mo in her central position. The flames seem to flicker faster and faster, as if we were piling one subliminal image of flames on top of another. In this intensity she keeps growing larger for, as the eye crosses over her, there is a disorientation and all notion of size is lost. Whatever size the viewer first imagined her to be is constantly being doubled: as smaller flame-enwrapped figures are

LHA-MO (7" gilded) above

It might be felt that Tibetan sculpture is at a disadvantage in relation to painting. However, even though the painted surface is more receptive to illusionary devices with wisps of smoke, or leaping flames, the sculptures hold their own. No matter what the size, the sculpture's workmanship is on a grand scale. This Lha-mo shows that. All the necessary details of great fangs, pendulous breasts, jewelry made of human bones and the great mass of flaming hair stand out and speak as sculpture as well. The great hollow scoops of her sleeves work best here in real space, whipped by some hot wind. The transferral of size is also present, triggered by the range of miniature mountains over which her mount is trampling. Since we constantly adjust our idea of the size of these mountains, she is always changing.

seen, they assume her size. Looking back, she is larger still—always larger and larger, as the eye crosses from flame shield to flame shield. She becomes so great that the painting does not seem to be able to contain her image, yet she continues to grow. As long as there is someone looking this will happen to the point of infinity. This is a fact of the optics of this painting.



#### VICTORIOUS GODDESS

The goddess is surrounded at various points of the compass by a variety of emanations. Almost all of these smaller figures have many arms which contribute an element of minor visual agitation in a lesser key. The central figure, with red, green and white rows of her thousand heads and a great halo of blurred hands, makes these smaller figures look quite normal with their six arms. The Tibetan artist utilized here the same size-multiplying device discussed in connection with the Lha-mo painting. In this case the results are not terror but a feeling of the invincibility of the goddess who seems to pervade everything. In their different groups of colors, each of her heads has supernormal capacities.

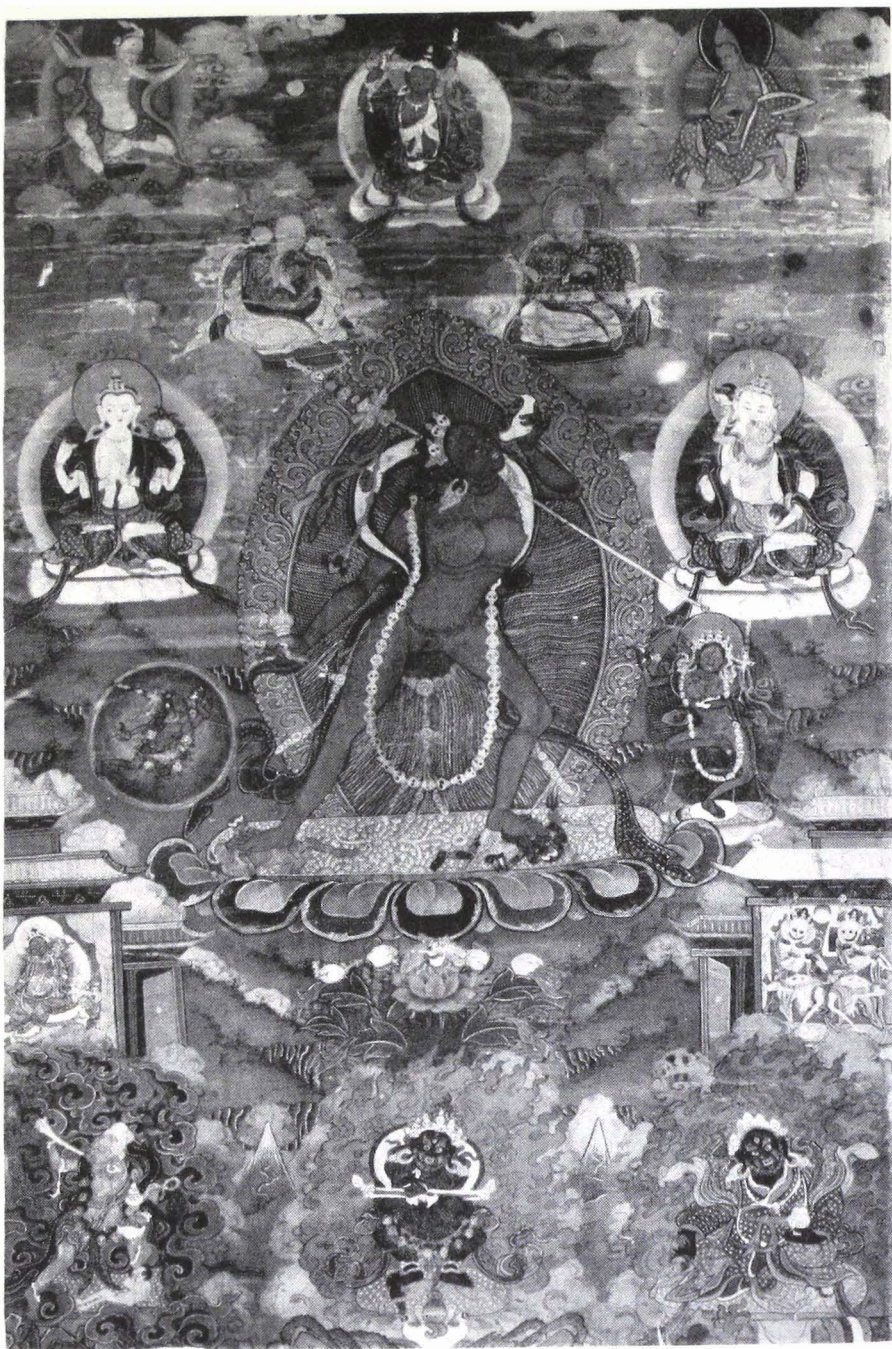
Each of them opens third eyes on the world. In that shell of error-burning flames, each of those many acting hands also contains cosmic eyes. The more the figure of the goddess is observed the more eyes jump forward. They are everywhere: on arms, body and soles of the many feet. They are in motion with the tilting pillar of heads and great striding stance of the feet. Nothing escapes their all-seeing scrutiny. The viewer is convinced of this by the great circles bubbling on the lower fabric. The hap-hazard smaller designs contribute to this, leading up to a blending with the halo of eyes. The hands move out to the boiling flames and the smaller figures, all of whom act in other forms for the Goddess. These connecting shapes all contribute to the idea of the supreme clairvoyance innate in this deity.



#### VAJRAPANI

This god of thunder is a form of Mahakala, the consort of Lha-mo. He takes many forms in his equally violent activities in the Tibetan pantheon. Because Lha-mo is an energizing force, Mahakala would be absolutely nothing but inert matter without her. It is her force that activates him and this can be seen in the similarity of basic forms: the proportions of bulbous body and leaping flames. He, however, is basically the destroyer of

time, for the Buddhists felt that this was a great illusion and fiction. Through this destruction it was revealed to the Tibetans that what they felt was the true nature of time. This centered around conceptions of a great moment, where there were no imaginings or thoughts but a knowledge free of these. To approach this realization, the Tibetans had to have Lha-mo and Mahakala available for constant destruction of anything that might interfere.



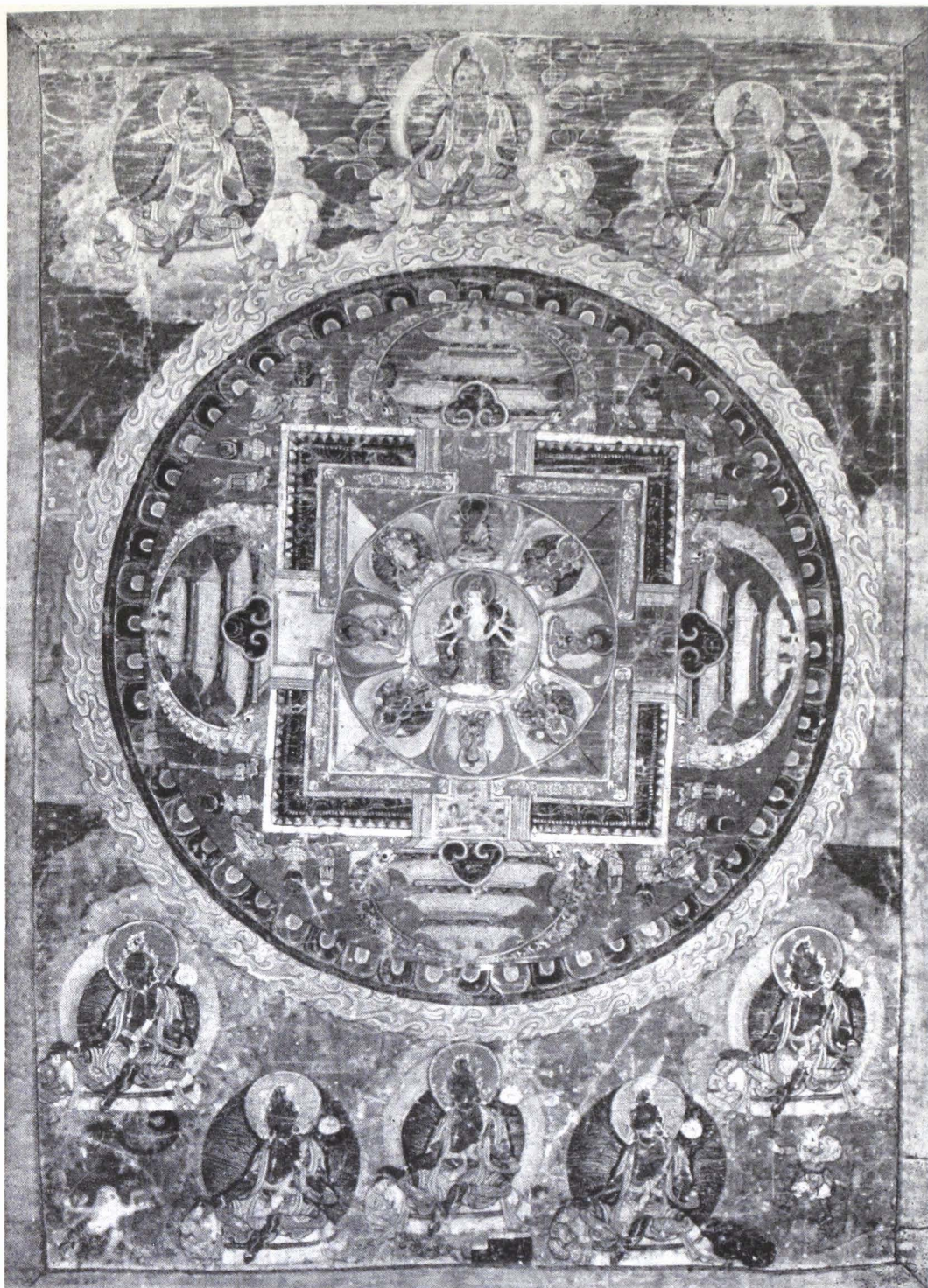
#### DAKINI NA-VRO

This nude female figure is a "sky-goer" that is revealed here in her many emanations. She helps the monks of Sa-skya by giving them insights. Her skull necklace represents a purified sanskrit alphabet and in her hands are a skull cup and a chopper which will do away with ideas concerning the difference between material and immaterial.

Here is how a Tibetan would approach this painting:

First there is a blind apprehension of color. Expedient and accumulated tendencies of observation take on color-form and certain groups of colors are perceived. This leads to a discerning of particular types of colors, following which begins discrimination. Then, while perceiving a major color group, there follows acts of depos-

iting and responding. His experiences make him question the presence of another consciousness. This is all preparation. Then his own consciousness imagines it is outside of himself. In the contact with the art, there is invention on the part of the observer with deposits and references for future use, a sum of experiences, which will act again as time goes on. Then there is a limitless number of conscious instances with never a repetition of anything. Because of his attachment to old ideas, all this produces a sting and craving, now that he sees the thing in its true form. With the actual sight of it comes cessation of eagerness for it. In this circle he faces his own impossible dreams with grief and despair. He may discover that the best way to unravel the painting is to observe everything without liking or disliking.



#### MANDALA OF AMOGHAPACA

This magic circle is meant to invoke the Bodhisattva. If used, which means to look upon it, there will be the actualization of another place which is a place of power. It should be noticed that in this particular painting is a complicated series of exploded and cut-away views. There are a series of shells one within another, akin to a sequence of skins. The outer one here is of fire. The next, of lotus petals. Then there is an architectural creation called a ch'orten which here is shown quartered and laid down akin to a

blueprint. Within this opened form is also seen the split versions of an elaborate palace. The major square shape in the painting is that building's interior. Eight figures on lotus petals surround the Bodhisattva, representing other emanations, or sides of a split seed, which is seen in its entirety in the central figure. The point here is to try to put this all back together again into its other form while looking at the painting. Penetrating through the rings the center is attained. This is left to the viewer. This also would be an example of an "unseen" painting.



#### SAMVARA

At one time or another almost all the gods of Tibet are shown in intercourse in sculpture or painting. Here is one of the best of those *Shakta-Shakti, Yab-Yum* (father-mother) paintings. The subject of these paintings are very recondite and not about sex at all. The artists have translated a discussion of spirit and matter—or object and subject, or verb and noun—into terms that might be understood by human beings. This example is one of the most powerful images of this force that exists. It strikes a living center and its grasp of the essentials is immediate. Any viewer will know this, for it is dynamic and moves with a wind and a sound of its own. There is another kind of heat that is unknown and this the Tibetans felt would allow a cosmic fluidity to flow. This

would be both venom and nectar, which would result in a complete involvement resulting in an explosive change, a change in the midst of storms and lightning. These crackle through this painting. There, in this kind of revelation that the Buddhist felt could come from meditating on this art, he would discover infinite bliss and realize the basic *vajra* (lightning) nature of himself and his beliefs. This he shows with these flame circles containing god figures wrapped in elephant and tiger skins. Opposites are united—how difficult it is to see where one figure begins or ends!—and in this intensity a stillness is created and a oneness. The ferocity of Tibetan art was in pursuit of this moment when being and non-being exist simultaneously as the sum of all things and all circumstances. The artist wanted to grasp that point where man was in complete unity with the universe.



OM! HRIH HA-HA HRIM HUM PHAT!



## NOTES

The cover decoration is the mantra "Om Mani Padme Hum," sometimes translated as "Hail to the Jewel in the Lotus"—which in itself is not translatable.

Frontispiece is handprinted directly from an original ancient Tibetan woodblock on Japanese Okawara paper.

The title page imprint is a mirror-image version of an inmost seal which is the closest graphic representation of a central protective position relating to spiritual qualities of insight.

Dimensions given are of actual areas reproduced; those in parentheses are overall dimensions, including the woven or embroidered border. Figures are in inches, with height preceding width. Height of sculpture includes the base; the third dimension, depth.

17¼ x 9	Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara ( <i>detail</i> ) (55½ x 35½)
23 x 11 x 8	Mayadevi
25¼ x 32¼ x 3	Temple Portico
19¾ x 15¾	Buddha in Paradise (39 x 23¾)
20 x 13½	Buddha and the Sixteen Arhats (39 x 22½)
18 x 12½	The Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (34 x 21)
14¾ x 12 x 8¼	Candrajosa Sita Tara (18 x 12 x 8¼)
14¼ x 6¼ x 5	Samantabhadra Bodhisattva
26 x 37½	Symbolic Representation of Offerings
24¼ x 17	Paradise of Padmasambhava (46 x 26)
19¾ x 14¾	Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (11-headed) (40½ x 23¼)
48 x 31¼	Lha-Mo ( <i>painting</i> )
7 x 6¾ x 3	Lha-Mo ( <i>sculpture</i> )
28¾ x 19½	Victorious Goddess (52 x 29)
8 x 7 x 3½	Vajrapani
26¼ x 17¾	Dakini Na-vro (47 x 25½)
26 x 18	Mandala of Amoghapaca (54½ x 29¾)
35 x 26¼	Samvara (52 x 26¼)

