

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

Opening August 2, *Count Your Blessings* Showcases the Tremendous Aesthetic and Material Diversity of Prayer Beads from Across Asia

Featuring Nearly 80 Sets of Beads from the 18th Century to the Present, Exhibition Explores Cultural Significance and Uses of Prayer Beads

More Than Half of the Works on Display have been Gifted to the Rubin Museum's Permanent Collection



Coral Prayer Beads
Tibet; 19th century; coral, turquoise, jade, dzi, clay and silk;
Rubin Museum of Art; Gift of Anne Breckenridge Dorsey; C2012.8



Pressed Incense Hand Rosary
China; Pressed incense, rose quartz, and kingfisher;
Rubin Museum of Art; Gift of Anne Breckenridge Dorsey; C2012.38

New York, NY, July 10, 2013 – Created from precious and semi-precious stones, ivory, wood, seeds, and bone, the prayer beads explored in the Rubin Museum's upcoming exhibition, *Count Your Blessings: The Art of Prayer Beads in Asia*, exemplify the aesthetic and material diversity and devotional importance of these objects from across Buddhist Asia. Opening on August 2, 2013, the exhibition examines the origins, uses, and significance of prayer beads in the Buddhist traditions of Tibet, Bhutan, Mongolia, China, Korea, Japan, and Burma. The nearly 80 featured sets of prayer beads come predominantly from the private collection of Anne Dorsey, who gathered them over 20 years while traveling throughout Asia looking for rare and complex examples—approximately 40 of the works on display have been given to the Museum's permanent collection.

On view through March 24, 2014, the exhibition delves into the histories and varied uses of prayer beads, emphasizing how their arrangement, complexity, materiality, and visual attributes reference their symbolic meaning, practical use, or status. The show addresses the importance of the structure and

number of beads in a set to their function in religious practice. *Count Your Blessings* also includes a few select examples of prayer beads from the Christian, Islamic, and Hindu traditions to help orient audiences and provide parallels with more familiar objects of similar purpose, such as rosaries. Tibetan scroll paintings or *thangkas* depicting prayer beads as the prominent attributes of the subjects lend an additional visual experience to the exhibition of predominantly three-dimensional objects.

“*Count Your Blessings* provides us with an opportunity to explore shared cultural approaches to the use of prayer beads in personal devotional practices, chanting, recitation of mantras, and as signs of status, and to highlight their enduring significance from centuries ago to the present day,” said Rubin Museum Curator Elena Pakhoutova. “Prayer beads find expression outside of their immediate cultural context and play a role in our contemporary existence. We are excited to help our diverse audiences find connections between the prayer beads’ traditional meanings and their own lives, and to share the exquisite beauty in their creation.”

The installation will feature interactive components, including a touch screen that will show photographs of contemporary practitioners throughout Tibetan areas of the Himalayas using prayer beads. Various examples of prayer beads made of different materials will allow visitors to experience them in the traditional way, as they would be by Buddhist practitioners. Visitors will also be able to view and read descriptions of select and most representative prayer beads on their hand-held devices and listen to a podcast as well as an audio tour.

Highlights from the exhibition, include:

- A set of turquoise prayer beads from 19th-century Tibet made of turquoise, bone, and silver. Turquoise, considered a jewel and highly regarded by Tibetans, is one of the best materials for prayer beads. Together with beads made of carved bone, which serve as separators, the set is suitable for wrathful deity practices. Its materials denote the high status of its owner. It once belonged to a princess of Derge, in eastern Tibet. The set is among those given to the Museum by Anne Dorsey.
- *Rudraksha* prayer beads from 19th-century Tibet made of *rudraksha*, silver, ivory, amber, agate, carnelian, turquoise, and two copper ear picks. Dried berry of the *rudraksha* tree is named after the wrathful god Rudra, a manifestation of Shiva. In Buddhism, they are employed in the mantra recitations of wrathful deity practices. *Rudraksha*, the "eye of Rudra/Shiva", is said to be especially associated with the Ancient (Nyingma) Tibetan Buddhist tradition. The lore of the legendary Indian master Padmasambhava’s visit to Tibet tells a story of his “rosary,” made of rare six-lobed *rudraksha* beads that broke. When they were picked up, a few of the beads remained on the ground, and these took root, becoming the source of six-lobed beads treasured by Tibetans. The set is among those given to the Museum by Anne Dorsey.
- Wooden prayer beads with six large separator beads from 19th–20th-century Japan. This unusual set consists of 540 beads and belongs to the Japanese Shingon Buddhist School. Six large separator beads have hollowed out interiors and glass "windows" with bronze frames, which contain small wooden sculptures of deities identified by inscriptions.
- A pressed incense hand “rosary” from 20th-century China made of pressed incense, rose quartz, and kingfisher feather. This hand rosary set exemplifies the combination of the aesthetic, medicinal, and symbolic attributes ascribed to the beads. The pressed incense wrapped in kingfisher feathers would emit a faint fragrance while handled, as it would be heated by the warmth of the fingers. The kingfisher bird is a traditional Chinese symbol of well-being and longevity. The set is among those given to the Museum by Anne Dorsey.

EXHIBITION CREDITS:

Most of the featured objects come from the private collection of Anne Dorsey, largely donated and partly loaned to the Rubin Museum. Two complementing sets of beads are lent by Alice S. Kandell. A few select loans of Christian, Islamic, and Hindu prayer beads were borrowed from the collections of the Mingei International Museum in San Diego and Robert J. Del Bontà.

RELATED PROGRAMS:

Mala-Making Workshop

Wednesday, August 7 at 7:00 PM

\$65/\$58.50 for members.

Create your own strand of sacred prayer beads in the tradition of Tibetan Buddhism under the guidance of Geshe Lobsang Ngodup and bead experts from the Chelsea bead shop Beads of Paradise NYC.

Participants will learn the symbolism and proper use of their own strand of 108 beads and will have the opportunity to have their new mala blessed by Lama Ngodup.

Materials, including beads made of eco-friendly mango wood, are included in the price of the workshop. The workshop will be preceded by a tour of the exhibition *Count Your Blessings*.

Cabaret Cinema: *Say A Little Prayer* series

This weekly classic film program is inspired by the *Count Your Blessings* exhibition

Friday nights, July 5 – August 30

Free with \$7 bar purchase

Friday, July 5 at 7:00 PM

The Treasure of the Sierra Madre

1948, USA, John Huston, 126 min.

Starring Humphrey Bogart, Walter Huston, Tim Holt

Friday, July 12 at 9:30 PM

Ace in the Hole

1951, USA, Billy Wilder, 111 min.

Starring Kirk Douglas, Jan Sterling, Robert Arthur

Introducer TBA

Friday, July 19 at 9:30 PM

Django

1966, Italy and Spain, Sergio Corbucci, 92 min.

Starring Franco Nero, José Bódalo, Loredana Nusciak

Introduced by *Vanity Fair* deputy editor Bruce Handy

Friday, July 26 at 9:30 PM

A Man for All Seasons

1966, UK, Fred Zinnemann, 120 min.

Starring Paul Scofield, Wendy Hiller, Leo McKern

Introduced by Prof. Euan Cameron

Friday, August 2 at 9:30 PM

The Magician

1958, Sweden, Ingmar Bergman, 100 min.

Starring Max von Sydow, Ingrid Thulin, Gunnar Björnstrand

Introduced by Prof. Sam Cruz

Friday August 9, 2013 at 9:30 PM
The Steel Helmet
1951, USA, Samuel Fuller, 85 min.
Starring Gene Evans, Robert Hutton, Steve Brodie
Introduced by Prof. Al Auster

Friday August 16, 2013 at 9:30 PM
Johnny Belinda
1948, USA, Jean Negulesco, 102 min.
Starring Jane Wyman, Lew Ayres, Charles Bickford
Introduced by Prof. Chung Hyun Kyung

Friday August 30, 2013 at 9:30 PM
Black Narcissus
1947, UK, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 100 min.
Starring Deborah Kerr, Flora Robson, Jenny Laird
Introduced by Prof. John McGuckin

ABOUT THE RUBIN MUSEUM:

The Rubin Museum of Art's immersive environment stimulates learning, promotes understanding, and inspires personal connections to the ideas, cultures, and art of Himalayan Asia. The only museum in the U.S. dedicated to the Himalayan region, the Rubin has welcomed more than one million visitors since its founding in 2004. Its outstanding collections of Tibetan, Chinese, Indian, Afghan, Bhutanese, Mongolian, Nepalese, and Pakistani art, which include photography, are complemented by a diverse array of films, on-stage conversations, concerts, and special events. The Museum's education, community, and access programming is dedicated to providing audiences of all ages and backgrounds with multidimensional experiences that foster dialogue and active engagement with the traditions and cultures of the Himalayas. The Rubin Museum's Café Serai and shop are also inspired by the region and serve as a natural extension of the gallery and programming experience.

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