WHEN MY WIFE, Shelley, and I purchased our first Himalayan painting in 1975, depicting White Tara, we had no idea that our love for that particular object would develop into years of collecting art from that region, and to founding a non-profit museum to preserve and celebrate this art and culture. We have referred to our appreciation for art as a “heart connection”, and it is what motivated us to acquire many paintings and sculptures primarily from Tibet and Nepal. We were very moved by the beauty of the objects, and then we learned more about their meaning and significance and we travelled to the region. The more we learned, the more committed we became to preserving this art and making it accessible for greater appreciation and study.

Our original donation of more than a thousand works of art has been augmented with additional gifts and purchases to form the museum’s collection. It includes paintings, sculptures, textiles, ritual objects and prints from the 2nd to 21st century. We founded the museum with the help of many talented individuals including dedicated architects, designers, administrators and curators to whom we remain grateful. What had been a mecca for fashion,
(Below) From Wutaishan: Pilgrimage to Five Peak Mountain
Map of Wutaishan
Sino-Tibetan, circa 1846
Painted and coloured xylograph
56 ¾ x 76 ¾ in
(144.1 x 194.6 cm)
Rubin Museum of Art
C2004.29.1 (HAR 65371)
the original Barneys department store in the Chelsea neighbourhood of New York, has been transformed into a serene environment for Himalayan art. Creating the museum took six years of planning and building, and it has been open to the public for five years. The Rubin Museum of Art (RMA) has a broader and fuller scope than one might expect of such a young institution. In addition to a vigorous exhibition and publication schedule, the museum offers a wide range of public programs, on-site education programs almost every day of the week, and hundreds of in-school visits by RMA educators each year.

From its inception, the exhibition program aimed at placing Himalayan art, unfamiliar to most Western viewers, in the context of other world art and cultural traditions. This strategy continues. In its first season the museum presented Demonic Divine: Himalayan Art and Beyond curated and accompanied by a catalogue by Rob Linrothe and Jeff Watt. It was followed by Paradise and Plumage: Chinese Connections in Tibetan Arhat Painting, and Tibet: Treasures from the Roof of the World, a travelling exhibition organized by the Bowers Museum of Cultural Art of more than a hundred stunning objects selected from the Potala Palace, the Tibet Museum, and the Norbulingka Summer Palace.

The museum’s core collection-based exhibition, What is It? Himalayan Art, provides answers to the basic questions: Where is it made? Why is it made? How is it made? What is going on? On view since October 2005, it has been updated with rotations of works in each section. In 2010 it will be entirely reconfigured while retaining its role as an introduction to the art of the region.

In 2006, RMA presented Holy Madness: Portraits of Tantric Siddhas by Rob Linrothe and I See No Stranger: Early Sikh Art and Devotion by B.N. Goswamy and Garon Smith. Also that year, RMA presented Take to the Sky: Flying Mystics in Himalayan Art. In 2007, a featured exhibition was Wutaishan: Pilgrimage to Five Peak Mountain with a centre-piece six-foot wide woodblock print, a panoramic view of Mount Wutai, a transnational pilgrimage destination. The summer exhibition that year was BIG! Himalayan Art, presenting the largest sized works in the museum’s collection. In fall 2007, we presented the first exhibition of art to illuminate the Bon, a religious and cultural group living in the Himalayas and Central Asia whose beliefs predate Tibetan Buddhism. From the Land of the Gods: Art from the Kathmandu Valley features fine examples of Nepalese art from the RMA collection and has been extended through 2011. RMA was the only east coast venue for The Dragon’s Gift: The Sacred Arts of Bhutan, organised by the Honolulu Academy of Arts in cooperation with the Royal Government of Bhutan’s Department of Culture and the country’s Central Monastic Authority. It was a highlight of 2008, and our close work with the material in the exhibition has shed light on our own collection of Bhutanese art, which Ariana Maki explores in an article in this issue.

When the museum opened, on October 2nd, 2004, strings of flags designed by more than a hundred leading contemporary artists were raised in celebration, filling the air with good wishes in the style of Tibetan prayer flags. In subsequent years, contemporary art has been primarily represented in the museum by photography exhibitions. Photography was identified as a focus of the museum’s attention in the first year, with Kenro Izu: Sacred Passage to Himalaya. It was followed by an exhibition of historical photographs by Janet Wulsin, Vanished Kingdoms: The Wulsin Photographs of Tibet, China, and Mongolia, 1921–1925. Since then, the Rubin Museum of Art has presented Matthieu Ricard: The Compassionate Eye Collections, Parts I and II, Humanitas: The Photographs of Frederic Roberts; Photographs of Mongolia by Builder Levy and Elaine Ling; Illumination: Photographs by Lynn Davis; Nepal in Black and White; Photographs by Kevin Bubriski; The Last Nomads: Photographs from Inner Mongolia by A Yin; and Nagas: The Hidden Hill People of India, featuring the colour photographs of Pablo Bartholomew.

Visitors to the museum have also been introduced to contemporary Tibetan art through an artists’ residency by Pema Rinzin, whose works in progress could be observed as he worked on one of the gallery floors. The artist welcomed questions about his process and traditional methods. Two exhibitions of contemporary Tibetan art are planned for 2010.

Now under the curatorial leadership of Dr Martin Brauen, a pioneer in the exhibition of Tibetan art and a
leading expert on mandalas, we are building on our excellent exhibition history. We are continuing to focus long overdue attention on art that has been little understood in the West, within the context of even broader themes that are universal and familiar. One of the museum’s current exhibitions, for example, *Visions of the Cosmos: From the Milky Ocean to an Evolving Universe*, presents a cross-cultural comparison of the creation of the universe and our place in it. Our presentation of *The Red Book of C.G. Jung* provided the first public look at the art and ideas of one of the most important people in the history of psychology. Jung’s exploration of universal symbols, including mandalas, neatly complemented our concurrent exhibition, *Mandala: The Perfect Circle*, and the catalogue of that exhibition by Dr Brauen. Another recent exhibition, *Victorious Ones: Jain Images of Perfection*, guest curated by Dr Phyllis Granoff of Yale University, and accompanied by a catalogue with contributions by leading scholars, showcased powerful paintings and sculptures depicting the Jinas, the founding figures of that ascetic faith.

In 2010, in addition to exhibitions of contemporary Tibetan art and the newly reconfigured *What is It?: Himalayan Art* exhibition, we plan exhibitions that will address cross-cultural artistic depictions of death and the Tibetan Buddhist concept of the Bardo. In addition, Dr David Jackson has curated *The Ancient Nepalese Legacy*. It is the second in a series of eight exhibitions researched and presented by Dr Jackson for RMA that are known as the *Masterworks of Tibetan Painting* series. Dr Jackson has also contributed an article to this issue. The first exhibition in the series, *Patron and Painter: Situ Panchen and the Revival of the Encampment Style*, co-curated by Dr Karl Debreczeny,
From Female Buddhas: Women of Enlightenment in Himalayan Art
The Red Yogini
Eastern Tibet, 19th century
Mineral pigments on cloth
19½ x 14¾ in
(49.5 x 37.5 cm)
Rubin Museum of Art
F1997.19.2 (HAR 290)

From Bhutan: The Sacred Within,
Photographs by Kenro Izu
Tamshing Lhakhang Bumthang, Bhutan, 2006
Carbon pigment print
52 x 36 in
(132.1 x 91.4 cm)
Collection of Kenro Izu, Druk # 432

which will travel to the Freer & Sackler Galleries at the Smithsonian this year is also described in this issue. Continuing in the museum’s cross-cultural thematic explorations, late in the year, the museum will open Russian and Tibetan Icons.

The museum organizes exhibitions to travel outside its own walls to develop broader appreciation for the art of the Himalayan region and shared scholarship. Before opening in 2004, the museum toured Female Buddhas: Women of Enlightenment in Himalayan Art to Oglethorpe University in Atlanta. It was curated, and accompanied by a catalogue, by Glenn Mullin. RMA has also toured exhibitions to the Bruce Museum in Connecticut, the Michael C. Carlos Museum at Emory University, the Trammell and Margaret Crow Collection of Asian Art in Dallas, the Robert Hull Fleming Museum at the University of Vermont, the Phoenix Art Museum, and the University Art Museum at the University of California, Santa Barbara. We are actively seeking additional venues in the US and abroad.

Three years before opening to the public, RMA began in-school education programs. Our education staff has sustained relationships with elementary schools, high schools and colleges, through which we hope to share the joy and wonder of art, develop understanding about Himalayan art and culture, and specifically cultivate future scholars in the field. One particularly noteworthy relationship has developed, over the last eight years, with Lib-
From Harlem in the Himalayas, a jazz series; Naked Soul, an acoustic series; and a film series known as Cabaret Cinema. Highlights include ten concerts by singer/songwriter Rosanne Cash; a poetry festival hosted by John Giorno with readings by Patti Smith, Thurston Moore, and Meredith Monk; Chigilchin, the throat-singing champions from Tuva. Weekly family programs and numerous celebrations of Himalayan culture are offered by the museum such as Mongolian New Year which included scavenger hunts through the galleries, horse roping and masked dancing; Bhutan, Nepal and Tibet Family Day, as well as Indian festivals. The museum offers older children an opportunity to learn about mountaineering from Everest climbers and sherpas in Peak Experience, the museum’s annual sleepover for nine to twelve-year-olds. In 2008 the museum initiated Brainwave, a series of conversations in the theater exploring the effects of art, music and meditation on the brain. The programs pair prominent neuroscientists with artists such as Paul Simon, Tom Wolfe and Laurie Anderson. Brainwave is now an annual series.

Now in the museum’s sixth year, we are excited to see that a spark ignited by a single painting in 1975 has grown ever brighter and stronger. A heart connection that Shelley and I made has encouraged thousands of others to make similar connections with an incredibly rich and fascinating art and culture. We are grateful to Mrs Tuyet Nguyet for featuring the Rubin Museum of Art in this beautiful magazine. We hope that this introduction to the museum’s collection and the work of our curators and scholars will encourage you to visit.