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***RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART PRESENTS THE FIRST EXHIBITION
EVER DEVOTED TO A HISTORICAL TIBETAN ARTIST***

***Picture Emerges of an Influential Connoisseur and Artist
Who Led a Rebirth in Tibetan Art in the 18th Century***

New York —The same year that Sir Joshua Reynolds painted Samuel Johnson, a venerable lama in the southeastern-most province of Tibet ordered silver finials for a set of paintings on cloth called thangkas. By that time in 1772, the 72-year-old Situ Panchen Chökyi Jungne had already single-handedly revitalized an entire Tibetan artistic tradition.

Situ Panchen's artistic achievement and influence will be explored by the Rubin Museum of Art from February 6 to August 17, 2009 in *Patron and Painter: Situ Panchen and the Revival of the Encampment Style*. As the first exhibition ever, anywhere, to examine the *oeuvre* of a historical Tibetan artist and his workshop, the exhibition paints a picture of a brilliant polymath who greatly influenced the painting, literary arts, and medicine of his time, and served also as the charismatic leader of an influential Buddhist sect during a particularly volatile period in Tibetan history.

It is commonplace in Tibetan studies not to be able to link a work of art with the name of an artist, for artists often labored anonymously within monastery or court settings. Partly for this reason, exhibitions of Tibetan art typically examine objects from the perspective of iconology or religion. Co-organized by Dr. David Jackson, one of the world's foremost authorities on Tibetan culture and history, and Dr. Karl Debreczeny, curator, Rubin Museum of Art, *Patron and Painter*

departs from convention by exploring the influence of a real historical figure from the point of view of artistic style and history.

“Such a path-breaking study is only possible because of tremendous advances in the scholarship of Himalayan art in recent years,” says Dr. Martin Brauen, Chief Curator of the Rubin Museum. “David Jackson’s decades-long research into Tibetan primary textual sources and his dedicated search for and study of far-flung paintings and sculptures have helped to galvanize this effort.”

“Situ’s advocacy of the existing artistic lineage known as the ‘encampment’ style is hugely important in Tibetan art, for his paintings and commissions spread throughout the Himalayas through diligent copying, and continue to be copied to this day, shaping how the Buddhist faithful in the region imagine both stories and doctrine,” says Jackson.

“Distinctive for its embrace of Chinese painting conventions, the encampment style can be said to have opened up Tibetan art, introducing a freer, more fluid way of painting,” Jackson continues. Tibetan painting always had been heavily indebted to Indian art, but, with this movement, figures migrated out of their hierarchical spaces (even as they retained the iconography of eastern Indian and Nepalese art) and began to inhabit landscapes in which details demonstrated a robust interest in the natural world.

On View in the Exhibition

Fifty paintings, sculptures, and illuminated manuscript pages from the 12th to the 19th century are on view in *Patron and Painter*, drawn from collections ranging from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art to the Basel Ethnographic Museum.

Three featured thangkas are attributed to Situ’s own hand—a number are from his workshop, but most are copies of famous images from his multiple thangka sets, copied after the demise of the master and his workshop. A few of the works on view, predating Situ, serve to illustrate the early development of the encampment style.

“We hope to convey the magnificence of the multiple thangka sets of 18th century Tibet,” says co-organizer Karl Debreczeny. “Through David Jackson’s research, we know that 12 sets of thangukas can be firmly attributed to Situ or to his monastery seat.” This exhibition represents ten of these sets, including what many scholars believe to be one of the master’s earliest and greatest

works, a famous set portraying the Eight Great Adepts.

Sketched, colored, and shaded by Situ himself at the age of 26, this set was presented by the master to a local king in a bid to win permission to build his new monastic seat. The exhibition features a lively, delicately colored portrait of the Mahasiddha Ghantapa, executed in the 18th century after one of the paintings in the set—which did indeed win Situ his monastery. On loan from the John and Berthe Ford Collection of the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, the painting shows Ghantapa rising from a flood, legs and arms akimbo, trailing billowing scarves. Also on view is another imagining of this scene from the 19th century, showing the adept flying above craggy rock formations and brilliant pastel-hued blossoms, every element reflecting the inspiration of Chinese painting.

A brocade framed thangka of Situ in his 60s, painted during his lifetime by a court painter and one of the few known portraits of the master, is a centerpiece of *Patron and Painter*. Situ is depicted holding a book and wearing a red ceremonial crown-like hat, which, like those of all the teachers in his lineage group, was carefully designed to convey his learning and status—his badge of office.

Another highlight of the exhibition is a monumental thangka thought to portray the Ninth Karmapa, a towering figure in Tibetan history and Situ's revered predecessor. A partly effaced inscription indicates that the thangka was painted during its subject's lifetime, around the time the encampment style was born (1555-1603).

During his course of research, Jackson discovered that Situ commissioned a set of thangkas based on tracings of paintings in the court of the Ninth Karmapa. Three will be on view in *Patron and Painter*. In one, a standing bodhisattva, draped in flowing robes, is depicted riding a fish whose tail flaps up from blue waves and foam. In another, a single figure is pictured languidly reclining on a throne of rock and blossoming green foliage: a new acquisition by the Rubin Museum of Art, this portrait of Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, will be newly reunited with other images from the set for this exhibition.

Scholarly Conference

The Rubin Museum of Art will host an international conference on Situ Panchen on Saturday, February 7, and Sunday, February 8, 2009. *Situ Panchen: Creation and Cultural Engagement in*

18th-Century Tibet convenes nine scholars who will address different aspects of the master's life. Among the presenters are *Rémi Chaix*, Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Paris: "Situ Panchen and the House of Derge: A Demanding but Beneficial Relationship"; *Nancy Lin*, University of California, Berkeley: "Situ Panchen and the Re-enactment of Buddhist Origins"; *Frances Garrett*, University of Toronto: "Medical Literature in the Situ Panchen Tradition"; and *Kurtis Schaeffer*, University of Virginia, Charlottesville: "Situ the Scholar."

Recordings of the conference proceedings will be made available to a wider public through www.thirteen.org and iTunes University.

Accompanying Catalogue

A fully illustrated and comprehensive 304-page catalogue will present new research on the work of Situ Panchen and the revival of the encampment style painting tradition as well as biographical details of Situ's life. Contributing authors include Dr. David Jackson and Dr. Karl Debreczeny. *Patron and Painter: Situ Panchen and the Revival of the Encampment Style* will be sold in the Rubin Museum's shop and distributed by the University of Washington Press to bookshops worldwide. (\$45.00 paper/75.00 hardcover)

Rubin Museum of Art

RMA holds one of the world's most important collections of Himalayan art. Paintings, pictorial textiles, and sculpture are drawn from cultures that touch upon the arc of mountains that extends from Afghanistan in the northwest to Myanmar (Burma) in the southeast and includes Tibet, Nepal, Mongolia, and Bhutan. The larger Himalayan cultural sphere, determined by significant cultural exchange over millennia, includes Iran, India, China, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia. This rich cultural legacy, largely unfamiliar to Western viewers, offers an uncommon opportunity for visual adventure and aesthetic discovery.

Admission to RMA is \$10 for adults; \$7 for seniors, students and artists (with ID); \$2 for college students (with ID); \$7 for neighbors (zip codes 10011 & 10001 with ID); free for seniors the first Monday of every month; and free for children under 12 and for museum members. Gallery admission is free to all on Fridays between 7 p.m. and 10 p.m.

Open Monday 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Wednesday 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., Thursday 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Friday 11 a.m. to 10 p.m., Saturday and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; closed on Tuesday. To reach the museum by subway, visitors may take the A, C or E to 14th Street; the 1 to 18th Street; 1, 2, 3 to 14th Street; F and V to 14th Street; N, R, Q, W, 4, 5 and 6 to 14th or the L to 6th Avenue. By bus, visitors may take the B20 to the corner of 7th Avenue and 17th Street.