

## **Object #2 Yamantaka Mandal, Monks of Gyuto Tantric University (North India), 1991, Colored Silicate and Adhesive on Wood**

Please take some time to look at this complex art work, looking closely.

Questions:

1. What shapes do you see (triangles, circles squares, etc)?
2. What colors do you see?
3. As you look closely what figures do you see?
4. Please describe the objects in the corners.
5. How does this Mandala make you feel as you look at it?
6. What shapes do you know of in other religious objects?

Key Points

1. A mandala, or circle, represents the Buddhist universe, a protected place where the mind frees the imagination. This is the Yamantaka Mandala, a cosmic blueprint of the celestial palace of the deity Yamantaka, or Conqueror of Death. His symbol is the blue vajra or thunderbolt in the center of the mandala.
2. Each element of the design has specific meaning. The lines, colors, and geometric forms symbolize different realms of existence moving from the earthly to the celestial. Even use of sand (crushed limestone) has meaning, representing the transience of nature. In the 4 corners are the attributes of the five senses – smell, sight, sound, taste, and touch (ribbons). They remind us of the illusory nature of our perceived reality. The outermost band represents the earthly realm with death and suffering. You can see various animals, figures and landscapes. Next is a colored band, then a band of flames, and a band of thunderbolts. Finally the band of lotus petals signifies spiritual purity. The lotus is a beautiful flower that emerges from the muck of mud.
3. In the center there is a quadrangle and four gates facing the four compass points, suggesting the realm of form without desire. In Buddhism the ultimate goal of enlightenment includes the absence of all desire. In the inner circle different deities are represented. The blue thunderbolt or vajra, representing Yamantaka, is the realm of absolute formlessness and perfect bliss.
4. Mandalas represent an invitation to enter the Buddha's awakened mind. Tibetan Buddhists believe there is a seed of enlightenment in each person's mind. It can be uncovered by visualizing and contemplating a mandala. The symbols and primary colors are a pure expression of wisdom and compassion that are cornerstones of Tantric Buddhist philosophy. This mandala was created by Tibetan monks from the Gyuto Tantric University in northern India at the Mple Institute of Arts. First there was a ceremonial blessing, and then

the work started with drawing an outline of the design on the wooden platform. The monks were seated cross-legged on the platform as they used small metal funnels and other tools to pour, sprinkle and arrange the grains of colored sand. They worked together in silence over a period of four weeks. This mandala was created to honor the ½ million Tibetans who have lost their lives to political or religious persecution during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As we read in the news now there is still persecution of the Tibetans in their own land.

5. Traditionally after a mandala sand painting is finished it is swept up and deposited in flowing water, a metaphor of life's impermanence. However, with a unique collaboration between the monks and 3M scientists, this is the first mandala preserved for future generations. With much experimentation the scientists discovered that silicate particles in asphalt shingles could be permanently pigmented in acceptable colors. After completion and the blessing of the mandala a special 3M adhesive was applied through a mist and then an eyedropper for 3D areas. The MIA now has an art object that preserves Tibetan cultural traditions.