

# Tibetan Buddhist Shrine Stop and Chat

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2400 Third Avenue South, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55404

## INTRODUCTION

Stop and Chat carts are hands-on gallery stations outfitted with art objects, props and visual aids related to the museum's permanent collection.

Staffed by Mia Guides, Stop and Chat stations provide visitors with a unique art museum experience where "Do touch!" is the rule.

Guides use the objects on the Stop and Chat as tools for facilitating learning experiences that encourage careful looking, thoughtful conversation, critical thinking skills, and further exploration of Mia's permanent collections. And, they are lots of fun for all ages!

## Stop and Chat Goals

The goal of each Stop and Chat experience is to provide a multi-sensory interaction with art objects during which guides help visitors deepen their interest in and experience with the exhibition and museum's permanent collection. Each object on the Stop and Chat is thoughtfully selected for its connections to the exhibition and its ability to engage the senses and inspire questions and observations. Although there are limitless possibilities, we are constrained by several factors including cost, availability, durability/fragility, and safety and security of art and visitors in the galleries (i.e. most paint/ink are not allowed, nor are sharp objects).

## Best Practices

### **A successful Stop and Chat-visitor interaction**

- Sparks curiosity and inspires exploration in visitors of all ages.
- Involves the visitor in conversation about the objects.
- Allows the visitor to direct the discussion/discovery and explore those things of interest to the individual.
- Provides opportunities for visitors to handle art objects with care and to learn about the museum's role in collecting, preserving, and making accessible outstanding works of art from the world's diverse cultures.
- Stimulates as many of the five senses as possible/practical.
- Encourages visitor exploration in the exhibition and surrounding galleries to seek out related objects (ideas provided in the "Collection Connections" section for each object entry).

### **Each guide is expected to**

- Study the written materials and be prepared to discuss all objects.

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- Arrive on time (20 minutes before the shift begins) and ensure the cart is ready for visitors at the appointed time.
- Exhibit an outgoing, friendly and welcoming attitude while staffing the Stop and Chat.
- Be proactive and invite visitors to explore the Stop and Chat.
- Engage visitors in open-ended discussions about the objects.
- Stress the fragility and authenticity of objects, where appropriate.
- Assist visitors in establishing connections between the objects and the exhibition or permanent collection.

## **Object Storage, Handling and Security**

The Stop and Chat station includes items that can be divided into two main categories:

1. Art objects
2. Props, visual aids and general supplies

The art objects themselves are the main focus. They are generally the most fragile, costly and difficult to replace items. To protect these objects, each is assigned a designated storage container or space, usually on the top shelf of the cart. It is essential each object is returned to its appropriate storage place at the end of each shift.

The props, visual aids and other supplies are intended to support the art objects on each Art Cart, helping visitors to understand or explore certain aspects of the art objects. These ancillary items are usually more easily replaced or repaired than the art objects themselves.

All items (art objects and supporting materials) must stay on or near the Stop and Chat at all times. Visitors are not allowed to walk away from the Stop and Chat with objects and props. (Also, these items are not to be used as tour props.) It is imperative that one guide on duty is present at the Stop and Chat at all times to assist visitors in carefully handling the objects to insure object and visitor safety.

Should a visitor intentionally or unintentionally leave the cart with art objects, props, or visual aids and the guides on duty are unable to recover these items from the visitor themselves, security should be notified immediately. (Locate the nearest guard or call Security Control via a gallery phone at x3225.)

## **Bringing Personal Objects**

Guides must refrain from bringing personal items from home to use on the Stop and Chat. All objects used on the cart a) must be vetted by Learning staff to insure they are appropriate and b) need to remain on the cart/in the museum, so that Security is not put in the position of having to judge whether or not items are guides' personal property or the museum's property. Additionally, the museum cannot assume responsibility for the loss or damage of guides' personal property.



## ***Tibetan Buddhist Shrine Stop and Chat***

The Learning Team is always happy to consider your suggestions for possible additions.

## **Inventory**

At the end of each shift, any damaged or missing objects and/or depleted supplies should be recorded on the inventory and reported to Learning Team staff (Educator or Tour Coordinator).

There is also space on the back of each day's inventory sheet to record any questions, comments or suggestions that guides or museum visitors may have about the Art Cart.

## TIBETAN VAJRA BELL AND VAJRA SCEPTER



### What Are They?

This bell and scepter are used together in worship rituals and spiritual practices of the Tibetan Vajrayana (vaj-ra-ya-na) tradition of Buddhism. They are the most frequently-encountered and most essential ritual objects of this tradition. When blessed or consecrated, they are imbued with spiritual power.

The Art Cart bell and scepter were made in Dharamsala, India, by a Tibetan artist, and purchased locally for the Art Cart. They are teaching objects and have not been consecrated for use in worship rituals or spiritual practices.

As teaching objects, the Art Cart bell and scepter are relatively simple in style and made from bronze. When made for sacred purposes, the bell and scepter usually are sumptuous in style. They typically are made of iron that has been gilded or covered with a thin layer of gold. Iron from meteorites is preferred because of its connection to lightning and thunderbolts. In ancient times, before the Iron Age, meteorites were humanity's only source of iron.

### What Is a Vajra Symbol and What Are Its Origins?

A symbol called the vajra forms the handle of the bell, and two interconnected vajras joined together form the scepter. Some scepters are made with only one vajra, which forms the finial for the handle of a scepter. The vajra symbolizes lightning or a thunderbolt as well as a diamond.

The vajra symbol was adopted from the Vedic religious tradition in India, which is derived from the Indo-European (Aryan) civilization originating in Central Asia, and is the precursor to the Hindu religious tradition. The vajra originally represented lightning or a thunderbolt, and was the attribute of the god Indra who used it as a weapon. Indra parallels the Norse god Thor and other Indo-European thunder-gods, and has parallels with Greco-Roman mythology. Indra's father, the god Dyaus-Pitar, parallels the Greek Zeus and Roman Jupiter, king of the Olympian deities. In Vedic mythology, Indra superseded his father and became the king of the gods (devas), similar to Zeus/Jupiter who superseded his father Chronos/Saturn. Zeus also was a thunder-god and thrower of thunderbolts, and in another parallel with Zeus, whenever Indra had to punish a wrongdoer, fight a superhuman figure such as a demon, or help his followers overcome their enemies and their cities, he threw his thunderbolt.

The veneration of Indra and most of the Vedic deities declined because of the rise of Hindu traditions focusing on the worship of the female deity Shakti Devi as well as the male deities Shiva and Vishnu. In Tibetan Buddhist mythology, however, Indra became a devoted and powerful disciple of the Buddha.

Indra was transformed into a bodhisattva named Vajrapani, who later became one of the three deities protecting the Buddha. In ancient Gandharan and Central Asian civilizations, which were infused with Greek influences and began the artistic tradition of depicting the Buddha and Buddhist figures in sculptural form, Vajrapani was depicted in the form of Hercules. The thunderbolt was retained and became a symbol of the power of enlightened beings. This power came to be seen as indestructible, and the symbolism shifted from the thunderbolt to a diamond, because diamonds are the hardest known substance in the universe.

## What Does the Bell Symbolize?

The bell (Sanskrit, ghanta; Tibetan, drilbu) symbolizes sacred sounds and voices, such as the speech of one of the five Buddhas (male or female), or the vibrations generated by the repetition of mantras (sacred syllables). It represents intuition because it inspires and activates the enlightenment of the heart, but because its sound dies away quickly, it represents impermanence.

The top of the handle of a bell generally is adorned with a vajra, as in the Art Cart bell, although the handle may terminate in a representation of a stupa (a building that houses a relic of the Buddha). The top, middle and bell sections of this object represent the three zones of the world: the heavens, earth, and underworld. The open space within the bell represents the empty void, and the clapper in the bell represents bliss. When the clapper strikes the bell, the action represents the union of bliss and void and the sound expresses this cosmic union, which is a celebration of the omnipresence of enlightenment.

## What Does the Scepter Symbolize?

The scepter (Sanskrit, vajra; Tibetan, dorje, meaning lord of stones) is one of the most important of all Tibetan Buddhist symbols and usually is referred to as the vajra itself. As such, it has come to symbolize

the indestructible nature of the diamond which, because it cannot be cut, and is impenetrable and incorruptible, symbolizes three features of Buddhism:

- (1) it is the truth that no force and no weapon can destroy;
- (2) it is the victory of knowledge and law over ignorance;
- (3) it is the mastery of spirit over the poisons and passions that tarnish existence.

Some of its symbolism retains its original association with lightning and the thunderbolt: as an irresistible force that destroys the enemies of Buddhist law.

The scepter generally has a shaft or handle that has one to nine points at one end or, as in the Art Cart scepter, has a central shaft that has points at each end. This type of scepter is known as a “double dorje” or “intersected vajra,” and sometimes is interpreted as the Wheel of the Good Law. It symbolizes the indestructibility of the essence of all worldly and cosmic phenomena, and the most complete understanding of diamond-like truths.

The rounded section of the middle of the scepter’s shaft that joins the two vajras together represents Vajrasattva, the primordial Buddha who has been awakened from the very beginning. As such, he holds the position of Supreme Being in Tibetan Buddhism and often is referred to as the Adi-Buddha. Vajrasattva purifies and protects all the other Buddhas, and therefore all the bodhisattvas, and thus all spiritual seekers.

At each side of the middle section is a lotus from which springs, at each end, four prongs. The lotus flower represents spiritual purity. Together with the projecting and pointed central shaft each end becomes five-pronged. The upper set of spokes of a five-pronged scepter symbolizes the five male Buddhas, and the lower set represents the five female Buddhas.

## Depictions of Scepters in Mandalas

The scepter often appears on mandalas (mystic circles representing the spiritual cosmos). In the MIA’s sand mandala in the Himalayan collection, the scepter in the central blue square represents Yamantaka, the terminator of death who ends the cycle of births, deaths and rebirths (reincarnation), or samsara. It represents the spiritual goal of meditation and devotional practices, and thus, the place where enlightenment is reached.

## What Does the Paired Bell and Scepter Symbolize?

The bell and scepter have meanings both as individual objects and as a unified pair. When paired, they represent an inseparable unity of female energy (the bell) and male power (the scepter), and serve as an emblem of the dual unity of absolute and relative truths. They mirror the idea of interdependent

opposites united in combinations that are indispensable for the understanding that needs to develop in order to attain the state of enlightenment.

The bell symbolizes the female sexual organ, female cosmic energy, the immediate wisdom of intuition, and impermanence. The scepter symbolizes the male sexual organ, male cosmic power, the compassion of method and practice to achieve eventual understanding through reflection, and stability.

The bell and scepter may have been adopted from Indian religious traditions focusing on fertility. Symbols of female and male reproductive organs, abstracted into representative forms known as the yoni (female) and lingam (male), have been venerated since ancient times. The vajra-topped bell and scepter may have developed because of their resemblance to the yoni and lingam shapes.

## How Are They Used?

The bell and scepter are used in virtually all solitary meditation, worship rituals and large gatherings of monastic life and activity, as well as in religious ceremonies in public contexts.

Buddhist worshippers are encouraged to have their own set. Each day, worshippers hold the scepter in their right hand and the bell in their left, and unify the two objects by crossing their arms over their chests. This ritual represents the union of female wisdom and male compassion, which is the basis for reaching the understanding necessary to develop an enlightened mind. The bell and scepter also are held during various devotional practices, including the creation of mandalas.

The bell is rung as a musical offering, and the richer the sound of a bell, the more auspicious it is considered to be. It is especially important in rituals for exorcising evil spirits. The sound of the bell sends the message to evil spirits that they must stay away from the consecrated area where the ritual is being performed.

Esoteric spiritual figures of the Vajrayana tradition of the Himalayas (as well as Japan) are often shown in thanka paintings holding a bell in the left hand and a scepter in the right hand. This depiction shows these figures uniting the two forces of female and male, and the complementary nature of wisdom and compassion. The Vajrabhairava, 89.52,, and the Art Cart thanka depicting Vajrasattva are two examples of such depictions.

## Sources and Additional Background

[Brown University](#) | Basic Concepts of Tibetan Buddhism

[Khan Academy](#) | Asian Art Museum, Thunderbolt and bell

[Khan Academy](#) | VIDEO: Sacred Arts of Tibet



[Metropolitan Museum](#) | Dril-Bu and Dorje, 19th century

[Tricycle.org](#) | Himalayan Art 101 (The Tricycle Foundation is dedicated to making Buddhist teachings and practices broadly available, with many brief and informative articles on Himalayan Art.)

[Wikipedia](#) | Vajra

[Wikipedia](#) | Vajrayana

## Questions and Activities

1. How would you describe these two objects? What do you see that makes you say that? What shapes and designs do you see?
2. Listen to the sound of the bell. How would you describe the sound? What kinds of sounds do you find calming? What kinds of sounds do you find energizing?
3. How are bells used in rituals or ceremonies with which you are familiar (personal or family celebrations, religious observances, political activities, etc.)?
4. What are some other instruments you are familiar with that are used for religious (or other) rituals? What is their function in these rituals?
5. What do diamonds, lightning and thunderbolts symbolize in your culture or cultures with which you are familiar?

## Collection Connections

To come after gallery reinstallation

[Ruyi Scepter](#), late 17th-early 18th century. Unknown artist, China, 95.89.

[Bo bell](#), late 6th-5th century BCE. Unknown artist, China, 97.81. (Other Chinese bronze bells are also on display.)

[Zheng ritual bell](#), 5th century BCE. Unknown artist, China, 50.46.115.

## TIBETAN HOME SHRINE BANNER



### What Is a Shrine Banner?

Altar banners adorn shrines in Tibetan Buddhist homes or temples where they are used for devotional purposes. They usually are made in pairs and are placed on either side of an altar.

### The Art Cart Home Shrine Banner

This brightly colored silk banner probably was made for use during personal devotion in the home setting because of its modest size. It likely was made as one of a pair to be placed on either side of a home altar. (Examples of larger temple banners can be seen in the Himalayan collection).

In many Tibetan Buddhist homes, small altars or shrines are placed in the corner or in a quiet room where family members can meditate and pay homage to their personal guiding deities, who have been selected for them by their lama (monk or priest). The worshipper offers flowers, food, candles, and incense to the guiding deity on the household altar. This altar is an important place in Tibetan Buddhist worship because it is where the worshipper makes a connection with the Buddha, bodhisattvas, or their personal guiding deity.

The banner was made by Tibetan artists in Dharamsala, India, to support themselves and the Tibetan exile community.

It presents eight Buddhist symbols that are considered auspicious, or imbued with the promise of success. These symbols have been embroidered onto the banner with brightly colored thread.

### Artistic Influences

The Art Cart banner illustrates the impact that both China and India have had on the art of Tibet. The silk material, dragons and clouds all show the influence of China, while the bright surfaces, where color is foremost, is closer to the Indian aesthetic.

### How Was It Made?

The creation of a ritual object like this banner is considered a divine act; and the artist is seen as serving as the mortal instrument. To intensify the sense of devotion as well as increase spiritual merit (karma), ritual objects often are made of luxurious materials, such as the colorful silk fabric of this banner.

### Silk in Tibet

Tibetans have had access to silk for centuries because of their long political and religious association with China. Silk was brought to Tibet beginning in the 7th century CE from China. By the 15th century, a great deal of silk had been brought into Tibet by members of the nobility, as well as by Dalai and Panchen lamas returning from visits to China. The Ming emperors in particular, presented the leaders of Tibetan Buddhism with lavish gifts of silk.

Silk thus came to play an important role in Tibetan Buddhist ritual. Images of the Buddha, bodhisattvas (those who have achieved enlightenment but choose to remain in the physical world to guide others to enlightenment) and deities were dressed or draped in costly silks.

Buddhist meditative chanting halls were furnished with a dazzling variety of silk banners, pillar coverings, ceiling cloths, valences, and altar cloths. Every available surface was covered with silk fabric, or painted in patterns imitating these opulent decorative textiles.

In addition to adopting silk, Tibetans also borrowed some Chinese symbols, such as the five-clawed dragons and clouds seen on this banner.

### What Do the Symbols on the Banner Mean?

The Art Cart banner displays the Eight Auspicious Symbols of Buddhism. These symbols represent objects that originally were offerings presented to kings in northern India at their investiture, and are almost certainly of pre-Buddhist origin.

In the Buddhist tradition, these eight auspicious symbols represent the offerings presented to the human and “historical” Buddha, upon his attainment of enlightenment (nirvana). These symbols appear on many Buddhist objects, textiles, and paintings in all of the countries where Buddhism is practiced. In Tibet, they generally are shown in a prescribed order, as seen on this banner.

### The Eight Auspicious Symbols, numbered from top to bottom

#### Parasol (#1)

The parasol (or umbrella) is a traditional Indian symbol of royalty and protection. This association is derived from the practice of people of high rank employing servants to protect them from the heat of the sun (or from rain) with parasols (or umbrellas).

In Buddhism, this symbol of worldly power has been transformed into a symbol of spiritual power. The coolness of the shade created by the parasol symbolizes protection from the painful heat of suffering, desire, obstacles, illnesses and harmful forces. Because the parasol is held above the head, it also symbolizes honor and respect. The white parasol symbolizes the Buddha’s ability to protect all beings from delusions and fears.

#### Coupled Golden Fish (#2)

The coupled fish symbol originally symbolized the two main sacred rivers of northern India, the Ganges and Yamuna. The fish, a paired male and a female, are depicted symmetrically head to head, and symbolize fertility, because fish reproduce rapidly.

In Buddhism, golden fish represent happiness and spontaneity because they have complete freedom of movement in the water. Fish also represent freedom from the restraints of caste and status because they mingle and touch each other readily. Additionally, they are a symbol of salvation from suffering.

There are variations in the meaning of this symbol in different Buddhist countries or cultures. In China, a pair of fish symbolizes conjugal unity and fidelity because fish often swim in pairs.

#### Vase of Treasure (#3)

The golden treasure vase is modeled on the traditional Indian clay water pot, with a flat base, round body, narrow neck, and fluted upper rim. It has lotus-petal motifs radiating around its various sections, and in the middle. The treasure vase symbolizes certain wealth deities, and also is considered a symbol of spiritual abundance. In Buddhism, it represents the fulfillment of spiritual wishes.

A silk scarf is tied around the neck of the vase, and may represent the khata, the sacred scarf offered to deities and exchanged by religious dignitaries as tokens of protection and sharing of spiritual wishes. The upper rim of the vase is sealed with a group of three gems representing the Three Jewels of the Buddha,

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which symbolize the Buddha, the law (dharma) and the monastic community (sangha). The top of the vase is sealed with a wish-granting tree.

### Lotus Flower (#4)

The lotus is a symbol of spiritual purity and the potential of all beings to attain buddhahood, the successful renunciation of the material world and achievement of enlightenment. Just as the pure white lotus flower rises from muddy waters to blossom, the human heart and mind can transcend physical desires and attachments to reveal its essentially pure nature.

The lotus, therefore, represents the blossoming of wholesome activities performed with complete freedom from the faults having to do with existing within the cycle of birth, death and rebirth (reincarnation), or samsara.

### Right-coiled White Conch Shell (#5)

The white conch shell is depicted vertically with a silk ribbon threaded through its lower area. It is a key implement in both Buddhist and Hindu ritual.

In Tibet, it is used as a trumpet in temple music as well as to call the congregation together. Deriving this function from the battle horn, it is an emblem of power, authority, and sovereignty. Its blast banishes evil spirits, averts natural disasters and scares away harmful creatures.

The sound of the conch shell represents the spreading of the law (dharma), and the

voice of the Buddha. It symbolizes the fame and supremacy of the Buddha's teachings, his fearlessness in proclaiming their truth, and his call to humankind to awaken and work for the benefit of others.

Because the conch shell comes from the water, it is believed to have power over rain. Monks stand on the temple roofs and blow the conch in all directions to stop the heavy rains or hail storms which endanger Tibetan crops.

The conch also serves as an offering vessel. Filled with curd or a sacred elixir, it is one of the Offerings of the Five Senses, representing the sense of smell. (The conch can be seen on the Yamantaka Sand Mandala.) Some shells in their natural state are used as containers for consecrated water and often are placed on top of a water pot on an altar.

### Endless Knot (#6)

The endless knot is an auspicious drawing, a simple, balanced form, with no beginning and no end. It may have originated as two intertwining snakes, and as such, signifies long life, eternal love, and the interconnection of all things.

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In Tibetan Buddhism, it symbolizes the Buddha's mind, standing for his infinite knowledge and compassion. It also symbolizes the mutual dependence of religious doctrine and secular affairs.

### Victory Banner (#7)

The victory banner represents the victory of the Buddha's teachings, and the victory of knowledge over ignorance and evil. It may have its origins in a military banner.

This victory banner is a traditional representation. It is fashioned as a cylindrical ensign mounted on a long wooden axle-pole. The top of the banner is a small, domed white parasol topped by a central wish-granting gem. It is rimmed by an ornate golden crest-bar with amphibious mythological animals (makara) on either end, from which hangs a billowing yellow or white silk scarf. The cylindrical body of the banner is draped with overlapping vertical layers of multicolored silk valances and hanging jewels. A billowing silk apron with flowing ribbons covers its base.

### Wheel (#8)

The wheel is one of the most important symbols in Buddhist art and iconography. It is an early Indian solar symbol of sovereignty, protection, and creation.

It represents the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (reincarnation), or samsara, as well as the teaching and law of the Buddha (dharma), which is in constant motion. It provides a path towards spiritual enlightenment (nirvana) and eventual release from this cycle. The Sanskrit term for the "wheel of law," dharma chakra in Tibetan has come to mean the "wheel of transformation" or spiritual change.

The Buddha's first discourse at the Deer Park in Sarnath, where he first taught the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Noble Path, is known as his "first turning of the wheel of dharma."

Some Buddhists believe that the three main sections of the wheel represent the three kinds of training of Buddhist practice. The hub represents the training in ethical discipline, which supports and stabilizes the mind. The sharp spokes symbolize wisdom, which cuts through and defeats ignorance. The rim represents the training in concentration, which holds the whole practice together by encompassing and facilitating the motion of the wheel.

The wheel with eight spokes, like the one on this banner, symbolizes the Buddha's Eightfold Noble Path, and the transmission of these teachings towards the eight directions, while the perfect circular form is associated with the completeness and perfection of the Buddha's teachings.

### The Border of the Banner

The Eight Auspicious Symbols are surrounded by a colorful yellow and red silk border which has been embroidered with five-clawed dragons cavorting in the clouds. In China, Japan, and Southeast Asia the

dragon is a benign creature that inhabits the seas, rivers, lakes, and clouds. It is associated with the emperor in China and is valued for its ability to bring rain.

## Sources and Additional Background

[Learn Religions](#) | Barbara O'Brien, The Eight Auspicious Symbols of Buddhism, Images and What They Mean

[The Rubin Museum](#) | The Tibetan Buddhist Shrine Room

[Tricycle.org](#) | Himalayan Art 101 (The Tricycle Foundation is dedicated to making Buddhist teachings and practices broadly available, with many brief and informative articles on Himalayan Art.)

[Wikipedia](#) | Ashtamangala (Auspicious Symbols)

## Questions and Activities

1. How would you describe this banner? What do you see that makes you say that?
2. How would your impression of the banner change if it were black and white? What do the bright colors of the silk and threads contribute to the overall effect of this banner?
3. If you were going to design a banner to represent your values, your interests, or your beliefs, what would it look like? What colors, designs, and format would you use?
4. Symbols have been used throughout the world in many ways. What are some symbols that are important to Americans (such as the American flag, symbol of the nation)? What are some symbols that are important to you, personally?
5. The lotus, in particular, is used widely in the arts of China, Japan, and South and Southeast Asia. Find examples of the lotus in the galleries and compare and contrast them. How does the lotus change from one country or culture to another? From one medium to another?
6. Dragons appear frequently in the arts of Asia. Compare the dragons on the Art Cart banner with the dragons on Chinese textiles and other objects. How are they the same? How are they different?
7. To get an idea of how this banner would have been used, look at the banners on either side of the ancestral shrine in the Wu Family Reception Hall (which is set up in this configuration). What is different about these banners? What is the same?

## Collection Connections

Additional connections to come after the S/SE Asia gallery reinstallation.

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- [Buddhist Reliquary in the Shape of a Wish-Granting Jewel](#), 16th-17th century. Unknown artist, Japan, 2006.42
- [Amida, the Buddha of Infinite Light](#), 12th century. Unknown artist, Japan, 78.20.
- [The Wu Family Reception Hall](#), early 17th century. Unknown artist, China, 98.61.1.



## VAJRASATTVA THANKA PAINTING



### What Is a Thangka Painting and How Is It Used?

A thangka is a painting made for use in worship ritual or as an aid in meditation by followers of Tibetan Buddhism. Thankas depict the Buddha, important spiritual figures such as male and female bodhisattvas (those who have achieved enlightenment but remain in the physical world to guide others towards enlightenment), deities and other elements of the Vajrayana Buddhist spiritual universe. They are characterized by intense colors and fine detail.

Thankas are conceived and designed as objects of religious devotion or spiritual meditation, and are valued as sources of miraculous power.

Monasteries and lay patrons commission thankas for worship or to commemorate certain events. They may be commissioned to help in time of sickness or trouble, death in the family, or the need for an image for the performance of certain rituals. Thankas are hung in monasteries or at family altars. They also are carried by monks during ceremonial processions on holy days.

## The Art Cart Thangka Painting

The Art Cart thanka was painted on cotton and mounted on a silk brocade hanging scroll. It depicts Vajrasattva, the primordial Buddha who has been awakened from the very beginning of time.

It was made by the Venerable Jamyang, a Tibetan monk and artist who lives in Dharamsala, India. It was made for sale to support the artist and the Tibetan exile community.

## Who Makes Thangka Paintings?

The creation of a thanka is a religious act that brings spiritual merit (karma) not only to the person who commissions it but also to the artist. Most Tibetan thanka artists, however, do not sign their works. Painting a thanka is considered a divine act; and the artist is thought of as a mortal instrument of divine power, making his own identity inconsequential. This artistic anonymity also relates to the Buddhist belief in eliminating the individual ego.

Traditionally, the creation of a thanka was a joint effort of three people: a lama (monk or priest), a religious worshipper, and a thanka artist. The worshipper sought the counsel of a qualified lama, and learned which deity image of the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon was the most beneficial for his or her spiritual practice. The worshipper then invited a thanka painter to the home to create a painting of that deity image. The artist was provided with the best possible hospitality for the duration of the painting process, as well as all the necessary materials.

## How Are Thangka Paintings Made?

The process of making the painting is a form of meditation and devotion requiring great mental capacity and concentration. Work on the thanka must begin on an auspicious day that promises success.

Thankas are usually painted on sized cotton canvas with water-soluble pigments. Their creation is a five-step process:

1. Preparation of the painting surface. The cotton panel is set up in a wooden frame. If the artist does not have a single piece of cloth long enough for the painting, he sews on additional strips, which are barely noticeable in the finished work. The cotton panel is treated with a thin layer of gelatin to prevent the paint from getting absorbed into the fabric, from cracking, and from turning dull. A mixture of chalk or white clay is then placed on both sides of the cotton panel. When dry, the surface is polished with a smooth stone, which makes the texture of the cloth barely visible.

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2. Transferring the drawing to the canvas. Painters begin by drawing eight major lines of orientation. A painter learns the precise proportions from iconographic manuals and achieves precision in his own drawing with the help of a thin string saturated with chalk. After the lines are drawn, the rough drawing of the deity is created with charcoal or graphite. Finally, the artist goes over the drawing with a brush dipped in black ink.
3. The application of the paint. Paints are made from minerals. The pigments are ground in a small mortar, dissolved in water, and then bound together by a glue substance. The right amount of glue is very important so that the pigments are the ideal consistency. The artist applies the paint with a series of goat and rabbit hair paint brushes differing in size and texture. There is a definite, specific sequence to color application, and in general, the thanka is painted from top to bottom.
4. Shading and color gradations. After laying the initial coats of color, the painter applies thin coats of dyes diluted in water. He creates shading is done to add volume and dimension to the form. He then makes outlines to set off objects from the background, to mark the subdivision of certain forms and to emphasize specific features.
5. At the fifth and final stage, the painter finishes the facial features and paints the eyes of the deities. **This is the most sacred stage of thanka painting when, traditionally, the Buddha is said to enter the image.** To prepare for this sacred act, the artist bathes and makes offerings to the Buddha's body, speech, and mind. When the eyes have been painted, prayers are inscribed on the back of the thanka to awaken the image's energy.

### How Is a Thangka Painting Completed?

A thanka painting may take weeks, months, or even years to complete the details. It then is mounted on silk. To protect the painted surface from dust and smoke, a thanka usually is draped with curtains of silk and a contrasting square of silk brocade serving as a "door to meditation" is added to the mounting below the painting. The Art Cart thanka does not have these elements, but they can be seen in the thankas on view in gallery 212. Two wooden rollers are attached at the top (from which the painting is hung) and at the bottom (for stability).

### What Do the Colors Mean?

Colors are important in Tibetan Buddhist art. Buddhist thought places much emphasis on the spiritual meaning of colors, and this emphasis has influenced the development and practice of Buddhist aesthetics. Some examples of Buddhist color symbolism are:

- Blue – the concept of loving kindness and peace.

## *Tibetan Buddhist Shrine Stop and Chat*

- Yellow – the Middle Path: the complete absence of form and emptiness. Red – achievement, wisdom, virtue, fortune, and dignity.
- White – for purity and emancipation.
- Orange – the essence of Buddhism: full of wisdom, strength and dignity.

## Who Is Vajrasattva?

Vajrasattva's Tibetan name is Dorje Sempa (dor-je sem-pa). In Tibetan Buddhism, Vajrasattva is seen as the primordial Buddha who has been awakened from the very beginning of time. As such, he holds the position of Supreme Being in Tibetan Buddhism and often is referred to as the Adi-Buddha. Vajrasattva purifies and protects all the other Buddhas, and therefore all the bodhisattvas, and thus all spiritual seekers. In the Art Cart vajra scepter, his role as purifier and protector is represented by the rounded center section joining the "double-dorje" or "intersected vajras."

As the source of spiritual perfection and knowledge of the true nature of the self, Vajrasattva is the focus of meditation and the basis of all forms of spiritual practice in Tibetan Buddhism. One major form is the visualization and recitation of the hundred-syllable mantra addressed to Vajrasattva. This mantra calls on Vajrasattva's aid to purify actions, lift barriers of the mind, and allow his light and all the energies of enlightened beings to enter the body, speech and mind of the meditator. The spiritual goal is to become one with the body, speech and mind of Vajrasattva, and become a holder of the vajra thunderbolt and diamond.

## How Is Vajrasattva Depicted?

Vajrasattva is identifiable by his lotus-white skin and in this thanka painting, Vajrasattva is seated in a special yoga position of repentance. He holds a vajra scepter representing compassion in his right hand before his heart, and a vajra bell representing wisdom in his left hand. (See entry on the Art Cart bell and scepter.) He is richly adorned with gold and jewels in the form of a crown, earrings, bracelets, and necklaces.

The objects in front of Vajrasattva's lotus throne are traditional offerings to deities. They are a part of a complex symbolism relating to the attributes of a universal monarch, chakra vartin, or "wheel-turning king," with the king referring to the Buddha and the wheel to Buddhist Law (dharma). The objects are:

- two pairs of elephant tusks (representing the precious elephant);
- interlocked round earrings (representing the precious queen);
- interlocked square earrings (representing the precious minister);

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- a heap of multicolored gems (representing the precious jewels). While these gems symbolize worldly treasure and royal power, they actually refer to the qualities of spiritual wealth and divine kingship embodied in the universal monarch; which are topped by
- the wheel (representing the precious laws of Buddhist teachings).

## Sources and Additional Background

[Folklife](#) | VIDEO: Painting the Sacred: Tibetan Thangka (Video and article)

[The Asia Society](#) | A Guide to Decoding Buddhist Symbolism in Tibetan Art (including a Video: A Closer Look at Tibetan Thangkas)

[The Rubin Museum](#) | Art That Celebrates the Earth

[Wikipedia](#) | Thangka

[Wikipedia](#) | Vajrasattva

[Wikipedia](#) | Buddhist symbolism

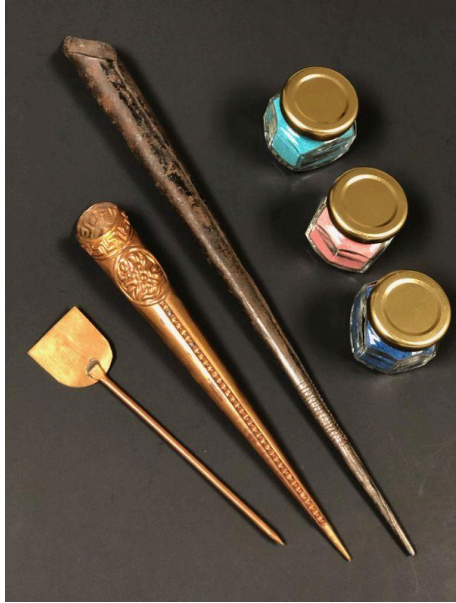
## Questions and Activities

1. Look closely at the figure in the painting. What do you see? How would you describe the figure in the painting? What do the clothes tell us about the figure?
2. Compare Vajrasattva with the Southeast Asian Buddhas and the Mughal emperor Humayun in the Indian miniature painting on the Art Cart. How are they similar and how are they different?
3. Find other figures like Vajrasattva in the Asian galleries. How are they similar and how are they different from the one on the Art Cart?
4. Where would you hang this painting? Why? What types of things do you hang on your wall at home?
5. (Watch a minute of the video on painting the sacred, to see the detail and time spent on such paintings.) What is one question you would have for the artist?

## Collection Connections

To come after gallery reinstallation.

## CHAK-PUR (Sand Mandala Funnel) AND COLORED SAND



### What Is It?

Chak-pur are metal funnels used by Buddhist monks to create Tibetan sand mandalas. The funnels typically have ridges on the side. Another chak-pur or other tool is brushed along the ridges, creating small vibrations which allow small amounts of sand inside the funnel to be dispensed. Chak-pur can also be tapped to dispense sand. By only allowing a small amount of sand to be deposited at a time, chak-pur help users create very intricate designs.

### What Is a Sand Mandala?

A mandala, or circle, is a representation of the Buddhist universe. These cosmograms represent in symbolic color, line, and geometric forms, all realms of existence and are used in Tantric meditation and initiation rites. A mandala represents an invitation to enter the Buddha's awakened mind. Tibetan Buddhists believe there is a seed of enlightenment in each person's mind that can be uncovered by visualizing and contemplating a mandala. The complex symbols and exquisite combination of primary colors are considered a pure expression of the principles of wisdom and compassion that underlie Tantric Buddhist philosophy.

Mandalas constructed from sand are unique to Tibetan Buddhism and are believed to effect purification and healing. Historically, the mandala was not created with natural, dyed sand, but granules of crushed coloured stone. In modern times, plain white stones are ground down and dyed with opaque inks to

## *Tibetan Buddhist Shrine Stop and Chat*

achieve the same effect. The monks use a special, extremely dense sand in order to limit interference by things like wind or sneezes.

Typically, a great teacher chooses the specific mandala to be created. Monks then begin construction of the sand mandala by consecrating the site with sacred chants and music. Next, they make a detailed drawing from memory. Over a number of days, they fill in the design with millions of grains of colored sand using the chak-pur. At its completion, the mandala is consecrated. The monks then enact the impermanent nature of existence by sweeping up the colored grains and dispersing them in flowing water.

Sand mandalas traditionally take several weeks to build due to the large amount of work involved in laying down the sand in such intricate detail. It is common that a team of monks will work together on the project, creating one section of the diagram at a time, working from the center outwards. (An example: a seven-foot-square mandala could take twenty monks working in shifts two weeks to complete.)

## How Do Mandalas Heal?

According to Buddhist scripture, sand mandalas transmit positive energies to the environment and to the people who view them. While constructing a mandala, Buddhist monks chant and meditate to invoke the divine energies of the deities residing within the mandala. The monks then ask for the deities' healing blessings. A mandala's healing power extends to the whole world even before it is swept up and dispersed into flowing water—a further expression of sharing the mandala's blessings with all.

## Tibetan Buddhism

The historical Buddha, founder of Buddhism in India during the fifth century B.C.E., taught the impermanence of existence. Tibetan Buddhism, which developed in the seventh century, draws its main tenets from Indian Buddhism: individual enlightenment, the liberation of all beings, and the development of compassion and insight into the nature of reality.

## Sources and Additional Background

[Blanton Museum of Art](#) | **VIDEO:** Highlights from the Sand Mandala Project at the Blanton Museum of Art, January 9-13, 2013

[Freer Sackler](#) | Tibetan Healing Mandalas

[Frist Art Museum](#) | Sand Mandala Painting

[Gustavus Adolphus College](#) | **VIDEO:** Traditional Tibetan Sand Mandala Time Lapse

[Wikipedia](#) | Sand Mandala

[Wikipedia](#) | Chak-pur

## Questions and Activities

1. Creating a sand mandala using chak-pur requires a great deal of patience and concentration. What is a project you've worked on that required a high level of continued patience and concentration?
2. After many hours of work go into creating sand mandalas, they are destroyed, which is a representation of the ephemeral nature of life. How would you feel about intentionally destroying something you had spent hours creating? Can you relate this to the concept of "letting go" in aspects of your life?

## Collection Connections

(To be updated after gallery reinstallation.)

- [Mia Collection \(G212\)](#): *Yamantaka Mandala*, 1991, Monks of the Gyuto Tantric University, Tibet. Read more about the mandala and its preservation [here](#).
- [Mia Collection \(G212\)](#): *Chakrasamvara and Vajravarahi Mandala*, 1400-1500, Unknown artist, Western Tibet
- [Mia Collection \(G212\)](#): *Taima Mandala*, early 14th century, Unknown artist, Japan



## TIBETAN PRAYER WHEEL



### What Is It and How Is It Used?

A prayer wheel is a cylindrical wheel on a spindle made from metal, wood, stone, leather or coarse cotton. The Art Cart prayer wheel has a wood handle and a copper and brass top. The movement on the metal top is fueled by a ball-and-chain governor connected to the center of the cylinder. Also known as “Mani” (jewel) wheels, prayer wheels are used by Tibetans of all classes as a common meditation and prayer aid. The prayer wheels exist to purify negative karma and add positive karma.

Prayer wheels are associated with the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Avalokiteshvara, and his Six Syllables Mantra, “om mani padme hum,” which can be translated as “hail the jewel-lotus” or “hail to the jewel in the lotus.” Traditionally, the mantra Om Mani Padme Hum is written in Newari language of Nepal, on the outside of the wheel.. The mantra is also enclosed within the wheel cylinder. It is printed on very thin tissue paper as many times as possible, in some cases numbering in the millions! The paper is wrapped around a spindle and covered with the protective cylinder. In recent years, microfilm technology has allowed billions even trillions of prayers to be invoked with just one turn of the wheel.

Though the practitioner recites mantras while spinning the wheel, it is believed that turning the wheel is also the same as reciting the prayers and mantras. Thus, the mantras written around the side of the wheel and enclosed inside the wheel multiply the number of prayers sent into the universe every time the wheel is spun, benefitting countless beings. The benefit of spinning the wheel with a concentrated mind is said to be one hundred thousand times greater than spinning it with a distracted mind.

Believed to go back to the famous Indian master Nagarjuna, this common practice is often combined with circumambulation around a sacred site or temple. The wheels are spun clockwise so the mantras inside can be read correctly, from left to right.

Wheels vary in size—they can be hand-held like the one on the Art Cart or very large on the side of buildings (see the video “Benefits of Prayer Wheels” below for an example).

When the wheels are outside temples, practitioners can turn them while circumambulating, multiplying the effect of their prayers in a sacred space. In addition to stationary wheels, which people turn themselves, there are different methods of spinning, including by water, fire, wind, and electricity. Tibetan Buddhists believe that if wind and water touch the wheels, they also become sacred and that wind/water will have the same effect of purifying negative karma in everything they touch.

This prayer wheel was purchased in Nepal by CIF guide Manju Parikh.

## Sources and Additional Background

[Beauty of Nature](#) | VIDEO: Benefits of Prayer Wheels

[WildFilmsIndia](#) | VIDEO: Tibetan worshipper spins a hand-held prayer wheel at Bodhgaya

[Rubin Museum of Art](#) | Prayer Wheel

[Gardner Museum](#) | Hand Prayer Wheel, 19th Century

[Met Museum](#) | Prayer Wheel and Xylographic Folio Page

[Khan Academy](#) | Prayer Wheel

[BBC](#) | A History of the World: Tibetan Prayer Wheel

[National Museum of Scotland](#) | Tibetan Prayer Wheel House

## Questions and Activities

1. How would you describe the sound of the prayer wheel? What kinds of sounds do you find calming? What kinds of sounds do you find energizing?
2. If you could ask a question of the artist who made this, what would you ask?

## Collection Connection

(To be updated after gallery reinstatement)

[Mia Collection](#) (G212): Prayer Wheel, 18th-19th century, Unknown artist, Tibet

## TIBETAN SINGING BOWL



### What Is It and How Is It Used?

Singing bowls, also known as Himalayan bowls and standing or resting bells, are sometimes used in Buddhist rituals to accompany meditation and chanting. They are essentially inverted bells that produce noise when a padded or wood mallet is rotated around the rim. They have become popular with yoga practitioners and music therapists due to their calming sound.

Standing bells originated in China, and Tibetan singing bowls like the one on the Art Cart have become popular in the last few decades. According to Tibetan oral tradition, the existence of singing bowls dates back to the time of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni (560-480 BCE). The tradition was brought by the tantric master Padmasambhav in the 8th century CE. Others believe that the manufacture and use of bowls specifically for the purpose of 'singing' (as opposed to standing bells/bowls that are intended to be struck) is a modern phenomenon.

Singing bowls produce sounds which invoke a deep state of relaxation which naturally assists one in entering into meditation, the ultimate goal being enlightenment. They are a quintessential aid to meditation and can be found on private Buddhist altars, as well as in temples, monasteries and meditation halls throughout the world.

In Buddhist meditation in Nepal and other Himalayan areas, singing bowls are widely used to either start or end the meditation session. They also act as an anchor to signal the mind to get ready for the meditation; this in return deepens the level of meditation at each session.

In addition to their traditional usage for meditation, Tibetan singing bowls are used for deep relaxation, stress reduction, holistic healing, Reiki, chakra balancing, and World music. Many people find that the rich blend of harmonic overtones which the bells produce have a direct effect upon their chakras. Playing

the bells usually causes an immediate centering effect. The tones set up a “frequency following response” that creates a balancing left/right brain synchronization. Meditating on the subtle sounds of the Tibetan singing bowl tunes one into the universal sound within and without.

## How Is It Made?

These bells are historically made in Nepal, Japan and China. It is thought that traditional singing bowls were made of seven metals (gold, silver, mercury, copper, iron, tin, and lead) that each produced an individual sound and together harmonized to create the “singing” sound that is produced when the bowls are rubbed with a mallet. The amount of each metal used in the traditional bowls is unknown, and not all bowls contained all seven metals.

Each bowl produces its own unique sound based on size, shape, and the metals used. The singing bowls made in the past forty years or so have not been produced in the traditional way, although there are still older singing bowls in circulation. It is thought that traditional bowls served a dual purpose and were used for both meditation and eating.

The usual manufacturing technique for standing bells was to cast the molten metal followed by hand-hammering into the required shape. Modern bells/bowls may be made in that way, but may also be shaped by machine-lathing.

The finished article is often decorated with an inscription such as a message of goodwill or with decorative motifs such as rings, stars, dots or leaves. Bowls from Nepal (such as our Art Cart bowl) sometimes include an inscription in the Devanagari script.

The Art Cart singing bowl appears to be made of brass, and it has a wood mallet. There is an inscription around the side of the bowl as well as on the bottom. The inscription on the bottom of the bowl looks to be the OM Mani Padme Hum, sometimes translated as the jewel in the lotus. This famous chanted prayer can be found etched or engraved on Tibetan singing bowls. The mantra is also repeated on the side of the bowl four times. Inside the bowl is a raised relief of the Wheel of Law (Dharmachakra).

This bowl and mallet were purchased in Nepal by CIF guide Manju Parikh.

## Sources and Additional Background

[Binaural Meditation Music](#) | **VIDEO:** Tibetan Singing Bowls: Pure Tone, No Background Music, Meditation

[Glessner House Museum](#) | The Singing Bowl (Japanese)

[BBC](#) | Tibetan singing bowls give up their chaotic secrets

[University of Copenhagen](#) | BBB lecture series: The 'Tibetan' Singing Bowl

[Wikipedia](#) | Standing Bell

[Heaven of Sound](#) | Symbols on Singing Bowls and Tingsha

## Questions and Activities

1. Demonstrate how the bowl works, then give to the visitor. How does it feel to hold the bowl and mallet, to produce the sound?
2. What sounds do you find relaxing or helpful for reducing stress?
3. What sounds do you find helpful for concentration?

## Collection Connections

To come after gallery reinstallation

## TIBETAN AMULETS (GA'U)



### What Are They and How Are They Used?

These amulet containers from Tibet are called “ga’u” in Tibet, “gahu” by Tibetan groups in Nepal, and “jantar” in Nepali. An amulet is an object that is worn somewhere on the body in the belief that it will help give the wearer some protection against evil, danger, or disease. Amulets come in many forms, but typically are small objects or ornaments, or prayers on paper which are placed in boxes or containers.

In the Himalayan region, amulet boxes generally contain an amulet (called “ten” in Tibetan) in the form of a protective diagram or formula written on paper by a lama and consecrated. Amulet boxes also may contain objects that have come into contact with revered religious figures, especially bits of clothing or silk presentation scarves called “katag”). Auspicious multi-colored threads often are wrapped around the paper or fabric, which further enhances the potency of the amulet. It may be wrapped in a simple cloth or leather covering before being placed in the amulet box, which is then kept closed with a cord of some type. The purpose of the amulet is protection from evil spirits. (The Art Cart examples do not contain any amulets, so may have been for sale as cultural display objects.)

The purpose and function of an amulet box is for protection when traveling. Objects such as this were generally carried when traveling some distance away from home, such as on pilgrimage, or for extended business trips. Amulet boxes are often plain and utilitarian, but when financial ability allows, the art of the metal smith transforms the amulet box into a piece of jewelry. This gives the amulet container the additional aesthetic purpose of adornment, and also helps enhance social status by displaying wealth, which is thought to have been attracted by the amulet.

Men's and women's ga'u differ in their stylistic depictions, size, and shape. Men's ga'u are typically shrine-shaped oblong boxes with flat base on which they can stand. There is an opening at the center of the box for viewing the sacred image inside. The surface of the cover is embellished with Buddhist motifs, usually by embossing. A common design on the cover of the men's ga'u is the eight auspicious emblems. The ga'u is typically suspended from the neck.

For women, the ga'u doubles as jewelry and tends to be more ornate with elaborate filigree work and decorated with precious and semi-precious stones, such as turquoise as on our example. They are worn as necklaces and also as hair ornaments (which is possibly why one of these is not strung on a necklace). There is a greater range of shapes as well, in contrast to the men's ga'u. For men and women alike, the ga'u also serve as an indicator of social standing, with the quality and characteristics of workmanship marking the owner's status and wealth.

In addition to being a source of protection, the ga'u is also the symbolic seat of the Buddha, a case in which an image of the Buddha was carried when not placed on the altar.

## How Are They Made?

Most amulet boxes are made of silver of varying alloys or base metal alloys containing no silver. Gold containers are relatively rare because of their expense. The back section of the amulet boxes are usually made of brass, copper or mild steel. The Art Cart examples appear to be made of silver alloy (in the front) and brass (in the back).

Amulet boxes come in many shapes: round, square, trapezoid, oval, hexagonal, mandala-like, or in a rectangular form with elegantly curved points at the sides. The oval shape of the Art Cart examples is based on a stylized kidney shape, and is a type worn by women in Tibet, eastern Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan.

The Art Cart examples display the two elements most amulet boxes have in common: firstly, the top loop, a tube with puffed up segments that in their roundish shapes imitate beads; and secondly, the bottom decoration, a stylized dorje (a representation of a thunderbolt in the form of a short double trident or sceptre, symbolizing the male aspect of the spirit and held during invocations and prayers).

The faces of the amulet box lids, although they rarely show representational imagery, are always very elaborate, and may include stamped elements, scrolls, pieced cut-outs, wire borders, and inlays of metal and precious stones.

The Art Cart's larger amulet box is set with a red coral and is strung on a necklace composed of red coral and silver beads. The corals most likely originated in the Mediterranean region, from which they were traded into all parts of Asia, but there may be some Pacific corals as well as imitation corals used.

The smaller amulet box is set with a green turquoise, which most likely originated in Tibet, which is a source of green turquoise. Although turquoise is found in Tibet, the Tibetans much preferred the bluer shades that came from turquoise in Afghanistan and especially Iran. Those boxes with blue turquoise would have been quite expensive, so the one on the Art Cart is more of the budget version.

Floral designs are the most commonly used decorative motifs in Nepalese and Tibetan jewelry, and we see these in the Art Cart amulet boxes. Floral designs are often abstracted down to dot shapes, but there are rosette shapes apparent in the larger amulet box (set with red coral), which represent marigolds. This flower (genus *Calendula*) grows well in the lower mountain regions of the Himalayas, and is used widely in herbal medicine to treat a variety of illnesses. Marigolds are used by Nepalese Hindus (and Hindus throughout South Asia generally) in religious ceremonies. The deep yellow-orange color also is reminiscent of saffron dye used to color Buddhist monks' robes.

Floral designs represent femininity and fertility. The use of a red stone (in this case the red coral) emphasizes ideas of fertility as it represents life forces present in blood and is a common design element in amulet boxes worn by Himalayan women. The Art Cart examples are similar to elaborate silver amulet boxes worn by Lhomi women, members of a Tibetan-Nepalese ethnic group living in eastern Nepal. Much plainer versions of this type of amulet box were worn by Buddhist nuns throughout Tibet.

Amulet boxes are often strung on bead necklaces, and besides coral and silver beads, the most commonly used stones are turquoise and amber which, similar to coral, are believed to have many auspicious and protective qualities. Turquoise is worn to attract good luck, support health and longevity, absorb sin, and help keep the soul attached to the body. The bluer the color of the turquoise, the more auspicious and protective its qualities are believed to be. Green turquoise is thought to be blue turquoise that has begun to age, and is considered to be less powerful, but is widely used because of greater availability and lesser expense as it is commonly found in the Himalayas. Amber, which was mainly imported from the Baltic region, is worn to protect against illness, especially eye disease, and evil generally, but also to attract good luck, purity, peace and wealth. Imitation beads are freely mixed with the precious stone beads, as the value lies in the deep colors and their symbolic meanings. Also, when glass and plastic beads became available, they were appreciated as exotic novelties that added to the powers of the other beads made from natural stones.

## Sources and Additional Background

[Liverpool Museum](#) | Amulet box/ga'u and

[Himalayan Art Resources](#) | Ritual Object: Amulet Box (Ga'u)

[Koelz Collection of Himalayan Art](#) | AMULET BOXES (GA'U)

*Jewellery of Tibet and the Himalayas*, by John Clarke. London and New York: V & A Publications and Harry N. Abrams, 2004.

*The Jewelry of Nepal*, by Hannelore Gabriel. New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1999.



## ***Tibetan Buddhist Shrine Stop and Chat***

*Gold Jewelry from Tibet and Nepal*, by Jane Casey Singer. London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1996.

*Tibetan Amulets*, by Tadeusz Skorupski. Bangkok, Thailand: Orchid Press, 2009. Focuses on the amulets (design and content) rather than the amulet boxes.

## Questions and Activities

1. Spend a moment looking at the amulet containers and touching them. What details do you notice visually? What details do you notice from touch?
2. What kind of designs or patterns do you notice?
3. What question would you ask the artists who made these?
4. Do you have any objects that you feel offer you protection or good luck while you travel?

## Collection Connections

To come after gallery reinstallation