

Wrightwood 659 Showcases Art of the Himalayas, Past and Present

Reimagine: Himalayan Art Now

Nov 8, 2024 – Feb 15, 2025

. Media Preview: Friday, November 8 at 10am CT



(CHICAGO, IL) October 7, 2024 — This Fall, **Wrightwood 659** demonstrates its commitment to Asian art—past and present—with a major exhibition pairing contemporary art from the Himalayas and its diaspora with traditional Buddhist and Hindu objects. Organized and curated by the Rubin Museum of Art, ***Reimagine: Himalayan Art Now*** presents new insights into the art of the global present as well as the forms, symbols, and narratives of sacred Himalayan art. This landmark exhibition is on view from November 8, 2024, through February 15, 2025.

Reimagine brings together recent work by 28 living artists rooted in the culture of Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, and the surrounding areas, who live and work around the world. The contemporary works in the exhibition span a wide range of media, from painting and sculpture to sound, video, and installation. Among these, 18 were commissioned by the Rubin especially for the exhibition. Paired with each contemporary work are traditional religious art objects, ranging from an intricate gilded figure of the Hindi sun bird Garuda to Buddhist prayer beads fashioned from a sheep bone, which have been drawn from the Rubin's permanent collection of nearly 4,000 Himalayan art objects spanning more than a millennium.

Reimagine: Himalayan Art Now is presented at Wrightwood 659 by Halsted A&A Foundation.

Reimagine: Himalayan Art Now premiered at the Rubin Museum of Art earlier this year as the final exhibition at its Chelsea location in New York City before the Museum transformed to a global model this month. It was organized by Michelle Bennett Simorella, Director of Curatorial Administration & Collections, Rubin Museum of Art, with guest curators Roshan Mishra, Director of Taragaon Next in Kathmandu, Nepal, and Tsewang Lhamo, Creative Director of Yakpo Collective, a Queens based non-profit devoted to showcasing contemporary art from Tibet. The Wrightwood 659 presentation of the exhibition is curated by Ms. Simorella.

According to Ms. Simorella, “What connects the artists in *Reimagine* are symbols and stories from Himalayan cultural heritage that the artists reframe or reinterpret. In doing so they highlight important topics such as displacement, migration, technology, and identity. *Reimagine* is testimony to the urgency behind contemporary art making in the Himalayas and its diaspora and the ways that these artists battle cultural erasure.”

Exhibition Overview

Upon entering Wrightwood 659, visitors will encounter hundreds of cascading red, green, blue, white, and yellow prayer flags with emerging horses, bound together from the museum’s third floor to its atrium. *The Windhorse*, created especially for *Reimagine: Himalayan Art Now* by the Bhutanese artist Asha Kama Wangdi and artists from the collective known as VAST (Voluntary Artists Studio) from Bhutan, channels a pre-Buddhist myth about a creature who combines the speed of the wind and the strength of the horse to carry prayers from earth to the heavenly realm.

As the exhibition continues onto the second, third and fourth floors, other works evidence Buddhist narratives and teachings about the nature of human existence. One is LuYang’s *Binary Wheel*, a video installation accompanied by a bank of four backlit photographs, tableaus in which the artist performs as avatars engaged in a dance, unable to escape the Wheel of Life. Another is the Kathmandu-based artist Roshan Pradhan’s hyper-realist painting *New World*, which reimagines the union between male and female in Buddhist art as an embrace between a robot and a human woman set amid robotic bees and human babies.

In another installation, the Brooklyn-based artist Chitra Ganesh places a gilded bronze figure of the bodhisattva Maitreya in front of a digital animation loop flashing news clips of war, protest, drought and other contemporary calamities. Maitreya is the Buddha of the future who is expected to usher in a new age at a time when the terrestrial world has lost its way. In another installation, artist Charwei TSAI, who lives and works in Taipei and Paris, illustrates chaos and order by combining thousands of mirrors, diamonds and pieces of handblown glass. Each womb-like glass shape was blessed with a mantra for the interconnectedness of all things.

Humor is also part of the toolbox for a number of the featured artists, including Shushank Shrestha, who is represented by a large glazed ceramic figure of the Hindi god Ganesha. Here, the god’s trusty vehicle, the rat, is conceived as a snarling Uber vehicle on wheels, with fangs bared, wearing an AirPods. Shushank Shrestha was born in Nepal, but now lives in Marion, Massachusetts.

Gender equality and fluidity emerge as themes in a video commission by Tenzin Mingyur Paldron, who draws from their own experience of coming out as transgender in order to explore how such Tibetan sacred figures as Manjushri, the bodhisattva of wisdom, embody gender fluidity.

Prithvi Shrestha, a Nepalese artist, considers the Buddhist concept of attachment in a very personal painting depicting himself and his wife in a dream-like reverie amid floating pink blossoms. A tiny Shiva and Parvati form

floats on his wife's long, sweeping black hair. Nearby, a gilded figure created in Nepal in the 13th century shows the same reclining divinities.

Memory and its preservation are concerns for many of the artists, including New York-based Losel Yauch, whose riderless cavalry of silk-clad horses bears witness of her grandfather's recollections and stories of protecting freedom in Tibet. Memories of involuntary or voluntary exodus inspire other artists as well, including the Tibetan-born, Bern, Switzerland-based artist Sonam Dolma Brauen. The artist's installation centers an exquisite copper and stone-studded stupa from 13th-century Tibet amid circular rows of small white clay funerary mounds (*tsatsas*). The small stupas were hand-cast after a mold the artist's family was able to rescue during their escape from Tibet in the 1950s. Tsatas are conventionally made of clay and the ashes of the dead. Those in *Reimagine: Himalayan Art Now* were hand-cast at the Rubin Museum and as part of workshops in the surrounding community and, at the artist's request, filled with hand-written wishes by the maker of the tsatsa.

Participating Artists

- Asha Kama Wangdi, VAST Bhutan (b. 1958, Punakha, Bhutan; lives and works in Thimphu, Bhutan)
- Bharat Rai (b. 1990, Bung, Nepal; lives and works in Kathmandu, Nepal)
- Charwei TSAI (b. 1980, Taipei, Taiwan; lives & works in Paris, France, and Taipei, Taiwan)
- Chitra Ganesh (b. 1975, Brooklyn, NY; lives and works in Brooklyn, NY)
- Jasmine Rajbhandari (b. 1980, Birgunj, Nepal; lives and works in Kathmandu, Nepal)
- John Tsung (b. New York, NY; lives and works in Houston, TX)
- Jupiter Pradhan (b. 1977, Kathmandu, Nepal; lives and works in Kathmandu, Nepal)
- Kabi Raj Lama (b. 1989, Kavrepalanchok, Nepal; lives Highland Park, NJ; works Kathmandu, Nepal)
- Kunsang Gyatso (b. 1988, Helambu, Nepal; lives and works in New York, NY)
- Kunsang Kyirong (b. 1991, Toronto, Canada; lives and works in Toronto, Canada)
- Losel Yauch (b. 1998, New York, NY; lives and works in New York, NY)
- LuYang (b. 1984, Shanghai, China; lives and works in Tokyo, Japan)
- Manish Lal Shrestha (b. 1977, Patan, Nepal; lives and works in Patan, Nepal)
- Meena Kayastha (b. 1985, Bhaktapur, Nepal; lives and works in Bhaktapur, Nepal)
- Monsal Pekar (b. 1964, Atro, Yushul, Tibet; lives and works in Chengdu, China)
- Pema ("Tintin") Tshering (b. 1985, Thimphu, Bhutan; lives and works in Thimphu, Bhutan)
- Prithvi Shrestha (b. 1977, Lalitpur, Nepal; lives and works in Lalitpur, Nepal)
- Roshan Pradhan (b. 1977, Bhojpur Bazar, Nepal; lives and works in Kathmandu, Nepal)
- Salil Subedi (b. 1976, Terhathum, Nepal; lives and works in Kathmandu, Nepal)
- Shraddha Shrestha (b. 1988, Lalitpur, Nepal; lives in Lalitpur, Nepal; works in Kathmandu, Nepal)
- Shushank Shrestha (b. 1993, Kathmandu, Nepal; lives and works in Marion, MA)
- IMAGINE (a.k.a. Sneha Shrestha) (b. 1987, Kathmandu, Nepal; lives in Boston, MA; works in Kathmandu, Nepal, and Boston, MA)
- Sonam Dolma Brauen (b. 1953, Kongpo, Tibet; lives and works in Niederwald, Switzerland)
- Tenzin Gyurme Dorjee (b. 1987, Himachal Pradesh, India; lives and works in Himachal Pradesh, India)
- Tenzin Mingyur Paldron (b. 1984, New Delhi, India; lives and works in New York, NY)
- Tsherin Sherpa (b. 1968, Kathmandu, Nepal; lives in San Francisco, CA, and Kathmandu, Nepal; works in Kathmandu, Nepal)

- Uma Bista (b. 1990, Kathmandu, Nepal; lives and works in Kathmandu, Nepal)
- Yangdzom Lama (b. 1997, London, England; lives and works in London, England)

Also on View this Fall at Wrightwood 659

This Fall Alphawood Exhibitions at Wrightwood 659 presents John Akomfrah: *Four Nocturnes*, an exhibition comprised of two installations by London-based artist and filmmaker, Sir John Akomfrah. Installed in the second-floor galleries, the exhibition is currently on view through February 15, 2025.

About the Rubin Museum of Art

The Rubin is a global museum dedicated to presenting Himalayan art. Founded in 2004, the Rubin serves people internationally through exhibitions, participatory experiences, a dynamic digital platform, and partnerships. Inspired and informed by Himalayan art, the Rubin invites people to contemplate the human experience and deepen connections with the world around them in order to expand awareness, enhance well-being, and cultivate compassion. The Rubin advances scholarship through a series of educational initiatives, grants, collection sharing, and the stewardship of one of this country's most important collections of Himalayan art—providing unprecedented access and resources to scholars, artists, and students across the globe.

www.rubinmuseum.org

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About Wrightwood 659

Founded in 2018, Wrightwood 659 is a private institution located at 659 W. Wrightwood Avenue. It is envisioned as a new kind of arts space devoted to presenting exhibitions on architecture and socially engaged art, including issues facing the LGBTQ+ community, and Asian art and architecture. Wrightwood 659 was designed by Pritzker Prize winner Tadao Ando, who transformed a 1920s building with his signature concrete forms and poetic treatment of natural light. Acclaimed as one of Chicago's "hidden treasures," Wrightwood 659 offers visitors a chance to engage with the pressing issues of our time in an intimate and beautiful space.

Wrightwood 659 Hours of Operation

Fridays 12 noon-7 pm; Saturdays 10 am-5 pm.

Tickets

Admission is \$15 and is available online only at <https://tickets.wrightwood659.org/events>. Please note, admission is by advance ticket only. Walk-ups are not permitted.

For additional information, please visit wrightwood659.org.

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Images:

Installation view of Shushank Shrestha's *Uber Rat*, 2023, part of "Reimagine: Himalayan Art Now" presented by the Rubin Museum of Art, March 15 – October 6, 2024. Photo by Dave de Armas, courtesy of the Rubin Museum of Art

Roshan Pradhan, *New World*, 2021. Acrylic on canvas, 183 x 152.5 cm. Photo courtesy of Sangeeta Thapa, Founder Director Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu, Nepal.