

For Immediate Release

Minneapolis Institute of Art Announces the Unveiling of a Tibetan Shrine Room Featuring More than 200 Buddhist Devotional Objects from the Collection of Alice S. Kandell

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MINNEAPOLIS — The Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) announces the unveiling of a Tibetan shrine room on Saturday, September 14. Located in the Himalayan Art Gallery, the shrine room comprises over 200 historical devotional objects that are promised gifts to Mia from New York collector Alice S. Kandell. Arranged in a specially constructed room, these remarkable objects evoke the sacred space and focus of Buddhist religious rituals for members of a wealthy Tibetan family.

"This gift is truly transformative", said Katherine Crawford Luber, Nivin and Duncan MacMillan Director of the Minneapolis Institute of Art. "Mia has long been recognized for its strength in Chinese and Japanese art. Alice Kandell's collection, for which we are tremendously grateful, recognizes that Tibetan art and culture deserves a prominent place within our narratives of Asian art—and provides us with the means to share part of this history, making us a destination for the study and appreciation of Tibetan art in the United States."

While a graduate student at Harvard (where she would eventually receive a Doctorate in child psychology) Alice Kandell became interested in Tibetan culture and art when her friend, Hope Cooke, married the Crown Prince of Sikkim, an independent Buddhist country bordering Tibet. When the King died, Dr. Kandell received an invitation to the coronation of her friend who was to be crowned Queen and her husband King. Inspired by the beauty of the country, she returned many times. A skilled photographer, Kandell documented some of her journeys and, in the early 1970s, published two photographic books: *Sikkim: The Hidden Kingdom* (Doubleday) and *Mountaintop Kingdom: Sikkim* (Norton).

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has written, "I am very happy to know that some of our sacred images have survived and are being treated with appropriate respect elsewhere. I am grateful to Alice Kandell not only for collecting and carefully preserving the objects... that approximates the way they would have been revered in Tibet, but also for sharing them with the general public."

The Kandell shrine room in Minneapolis contains over 200 objects—gilt bronze Buddhist statuary, thangkas (paintings of spiritual realms), ritual implements, painted furniture, and textiles, including carpets, wall hangings and canopies. Created in Tibet and Mongolia between the 14th and 19th centuries, these objects represent Kandell's deep interest in Tibet and nearly 40 years as a passionate collector. This is the second time this collector has given a significant collection to a public institution; The Tibetan Buddhist shrine room at The Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art was a gift in 2010 from Ms. Kandell.

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Minneapolis, MN 55404

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"The extensive use of ritual implements, painted and sculpted deities, and diagrams of Buddhist realms (mandalas), is a defining characteristic of Tibetan Buddhism," said Pujan Gandhi, Mia's Jane Emison Assistant Curator of South and Southeast Asian Art. "Individual objects displayed in museum cases—while beautiful—often fail to suggest this interrelated complexity. From this perspective, this gift is more than the sum of its parts and gives our visitors insight into the complex role of art in Tibetan religious practice."

Kandell first encountered a shrine on her initial visit to the Tsuklakhang Royal Palace Chapel in Sikkim where the coronation took place. "I had never seen anything like it," she recounts. "This began my life's long journey of collecting. I fell in love with the people, Lamas, religion, air, mountains. Years later in New York she began collecting beautiful objects from families who came to America as refugees from Tibet. None of her collections were purchased in Sikkim or Tibet."

Professor Robert A.F. Thurman, a leading Tibetan scholar and the first Westerner Tibetan Buddhist monk ordained by the Dalai Lama, recalled his initial encounter with the collection, "When we first entered the shrine room of Alice Kandell, we were thunderstruck by her arrangement of the beautiful and valuable sculptures and paintings into an authentic Tibetan shrine... My wife Nena, upon walking into the shrine room, experienced a visual flash of energy that was so powerful, she nearly fainted. Without being a practicing Buddhist one can be deeply moved by the spiritual atmosphere the Tibetans had created."

"Minneapolis is home to over 5,000 Tibetans, the second largest population in the United States, outside of New York City," said Matthew Welch, the Mary Ingebrand Pohlad Deputy Director and Chief Curator at Mia. "Alice Kandell's commitment to preserving and to presenting these works, in a manner that evokes a private shrine room of a Tibetan aristocrat of another era, gives us unique insight into Tibetan culture and spiritual practice in all its hierarchical complexity. We look forward to working with Minneapolis' Tibetan community to host special events and activities designed to introduce our diverse audiences to Tibet's rich cultural heritage."

The unveiling of the Shrine takes place at 10:30am on Saturday, September 14, followed by a full day of related activities including lecture by the Dalai Lama's translator, Thupten Jinpa Langri, dance performances by the Tibetan American Foundation of Minnesota, a live sand mandala demonstration and ceremony by visiting members of the Jangchub Choeling Nunnery in Karnataka, India. Additional programming around the Shrine is being organized over the coming twelve months.

For more information on the opening of the historical Tibetan shrine room at Mia, visit <https://new.artsmia.org/event/celebrate-tibet-opening-of-tibetan-buddhist-shrine-room-the-alice-s-kandell-collection>

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About the Minneapolis Institute of Art

Home to more than 100,000 works of art representing 5,000 years of world history, the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) inspires wonder, spurs creativity, and nourishes the imagination. With extraordinary exhibitions and one of the finest art collections in the country—from all corners of the globe, and from ancient to contemporary—Mia links the past to the present, enables global conversations, and offers an exceptional setting for inspiration.

General admission to Mia is always free. Some special exhibitions have a nominal admission fee. For more information, call +1 612 870 3000 or visit new.artsmia.org

Press Contacts

Carmichael Lynch Relate for Mia
mia@clynch.com

Minneapolis Institute of Art
press@artsmia.org
+1 612 870 3013

PAVE Communications & Consulting
Sascha D. Freudenheim
sascha@paveconsult.com
+1 917 544 6057

