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ALICE KANDELL DONATES MAJOR COLLECTION OF TIBETAN BUDDHIST ART TO THE MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ART

Fully Installed Kandell Shrine Room To Be Unveiled at Mia in August 2024
Interviews and private visits are available

MINNEAPOLIS (August 23, 2023)— The Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) announced today that Alice Kandell, a New York collector, has made a major gift of Tibetan Buddhist art to the museum. More than two hundred objects that comprise a historical Tibetan shrine room will be installed together in Mia's Himalayan art galleries. The shrine room will exist as it would have in an aristocratic family home or small temple in Tibet's past.

"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."



Alice Kandell

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, a Tibetan Buddhist, 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 will contain 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. As part of the process of bringing these works to the museum, Mia's team will conduct research on each piece—after which they will be placed in a specially prepared room within the museum's Himalayan gallery. The fully installed Kandell shrine room is expected to be unveiled to the

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public in August 2024. 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.

"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 will give 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 collection was 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 Pohlade 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."

About the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia)

Inspiring wonder through the power of art, the Minneapolis Institute of Art enriches the community by collecting, preserving, and making accessible outstanding works of art from the world's diverse cultures. Mia holds its collection in public trust. As stewards of these artworks, we follow core standards set by the larger museum community to responsibly preserve, document, and exhibit them, ensuring they remain in good condition and are accessible to the public for generations to come. Mia is committed to continuously assessing the collection and expanding it responsibly to ensure it reflects our values of inclusivity and equity.

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