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On the Beginning of Contemporary Tibetan Art: The Exhibitions, Dealers, and Artists.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Bachelor of Arts, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia, May, 2006

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May, 2009

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Abstract

ON THE BEGINNING OF CONTEMPORARY TIBETAN ART: THE EXHIBITIONS, DEALERS, AND ARTISTS.

By Martha Kathleen Allison, M.A.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2009

Dr. Margaret Lindauer, Department of Art History

Contemporary Tibetan art has been internationally exhibited since the year 2000, and it continues to receive increasing recognition among international galleries and collectors. This thesis focuses on three major contributing factors that have affected the rising success of the contemporary Tibetan artists. The factors include ways in which popular stereotypes have influenced Western museum exhibitions of Tibetan art; dealers have marketed the artworks; and artists have created works that are both conceptually and aesthetically appealing to an international audience. Drawing from exhibition catalogs, interviews and art historical scholarship, this thesis looks at how the history of these factors has affected the beginning of the contemporary Tibetan art movement.

Introduction

Contemporary Tibetan art, inspired by sociopolitical events and reflecting artists' interest in cultural identity and heritage, has increased in popularity since the turn of the twenty-first century. While there are many factors contributing to this increased recognition, this thesis will consider three major aspects: Western perceptions as they have affected exhibitions of traditional art; major international art dealers who have marketed the art; and of a selected group of artists who exemplify how the art has helped their success.

Historically, Tibet was very difficult to reach because of the treacherous Himalayan mountain range that borders the country. The capitol city is Lhasa, where the Dalai Lama resided in the Potala Palace. Every year Tibetans would travel to Lhasa from Ladakh in western Tibet, Amdo in the east, and other areas of Tibet, to venerate the living incarnate of the Bodhisattva of Compassion Avalokiteshvara. Tantric Buddhism originally was brought to Tibetans in the eighth century by the Indian teacher, Padmasambhava, replacing the indigenous Bon religion. Since that time, the art functionally served to support the religious life of the community. Tibet frequently exchanged goods with the surrounding countries and the artists adopted elements of the Indian Pala period (circa ninth-twelfth century), the Chinese Ming "Blue-Green" school, and styles of the Newar (Nepalese) of the Kathmandu Valley.

A significant historical event was the 1959 mass exodus of 150,000 Tibetans, including the Dalai Lama, into diaspora communities as a result of the forcible takeover of Tibet by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of the People's Republic of China. The

most devastating period was China's Revolution, from 1966-1976 during which the PLA systematically attempted to eradicate most of Tibetan indigenous culture, killing 1.2 million Tibetans, while destroying art as they razed almost 6000 monasteries. Today the population of the Tibetan Autonomous Region is composed of 7 million Han Chinese and only 2.6 million Tibetans. Although Tibet has recently been opened since the mid-1980s, Tibetans who live within the PRC have very limited access to the outside world.¹

The first chapter of this thesis investigates how the West has constructed a misperception of Tibet since the seventeenth-century, influenced by missionary journals, Theosophists, and popular novels that cast Tibet as a lost paradise known as "Shangri-La." The literature ingrained stereotypes of Tibet in popular Western culture, affecting how earlier museum exhibitions presented Tibetan art. The mass exodus of Tibetans in 1959 allowed emigrants to increase the quality of scholarship on Tibetan history and culture. Because of the availability of reputable sources, later catalogs were more informed and exhibitions from the 1990s and 2000s changed the standard in how Tibetan art was presented, offering a new template for future exhibitions.

The second chapter focuses on three contemporary Tibetan art dealers, paying attention to exhibition catalogs, methods of promoting the art, and involvement with other international galleries. This chapter discusses how the dealers and galleries have contributed to the increase in global awareness of the contemporary Tibetan art movement.

¹ Dina Bangdel, "Re-Defining Shangri-La: Modernity and Cultural Identity in Contemporary Tibetan Art," Conference Paper Presented At: *American Council for Southern Asian Art Symposium XIII* Asian Art Museum of San Francisco March 3, 2007.

Finally, the third chapter evaluates the artists, beginning with an introduction of the major events in Tibetan history that inspired the artists' art styles and subject matter. This chapter investigates two contributing facets of what makes the artists' work appealing to an international audience. First, Nortse and Gonkar Gyatso exemplify unique artistic styles that deal with cultural complexities of identity and global events. Second, works by Tsewang Tashi and Tenzing Rigdol maintain visual qualities of traditional Tibetan Buddhist art, giving their works a "taste of Tibet."

For this thesis, I had the opportunity to interview artists Gonkar Gyatso, Palden Weinreb, and Tenzing Ridgol, as well as dealers Fabio Rossi, Ian Alsop, and Jim Aplington. Additionally, I interviewed Clare Harris, who is a prominent scholar on contemporary Tibetan art. Harris's *In The Image of Tibet*, Donald Lopez's *Prisoners of Shangri-La*, Brauen's *Dreamworld Tibet* and Dodin and R  ther's *Imagining Tibet* are among the key scholarship available, aside from the recent catalogs by Rossi + Rossi and the Red Gate Gallery and articles in *Asian Art News* and *Asian Art Pacific*. The scholarship presents this art movement as a new visual expression of contemporary Tibetan culture, focusing on the historic and recent international events that have inspired the artists.

Chapter One:

Western Perceptions and Exhibitions of Tibetan Art

Since the seventeenth-century, Tibet has been regarded as a place of desire. Whether the desire lay in the entering and mapping Lhasa, the “Rome” of the East,² or to preserve a timeless culture from becoming modernized, the West was enamored with the idea of Tibet. As travelers and missionaries began to map the country and scrutinize the culture, art collections were amassed. Paintings and sculptures depicting peaceful and wrathful Buddhist deities indicated a culture far removed from those of the West, reinforcing the presumed exoticism of Tibet.

As the early twentieth-century began, exhibitions of Tibet were in vogue and the foreign exoticism of the art was highlighted in the catalogues. This chapter begins by chronologically investigating how missionaries from the seventeenth through nineteenth-centuries, Theosophists, and popular novels reinforced romanticized and often pejorative stereotypes of Tibet. This chapter then examines how such stereotypes became infiltrated in popular culture and the earlier scholarship, thus impacting what was written in museum exhibition catalogues beginning with the Newark Museum of Art in 1911 and continuing through the Rubin Museum of Art’s exhibitions in 2006. This chapter also gives attention to the current complexities associated with Tibetan art and politics by comparing the Columbus Museum of Art exhibition *Circle of Bliss: Buddhist Meditational Art* (2003) with the Bowers Museum of Art’s *Tibet: Treasures from the Roof of the World* (2003).

² Peter Bishop, *The Myth of Shangri-La* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 93.

Missionaries & Travelers

In the seventeenth-century, European scholars were originally interested in Tibet for the Sanskrit texts which enabled them to learn more about India.³ After that interest subsided, “Tibet became a landscape to which the soulful imaginings of many Westerns were drawn.”⁴ Since many travelers and missionaries were denied entry through the treacherous Himalayan Mountain range, Tibet was desired to be “conquered.”⁵

The travelogues of Marco Polo in Mongolia inspired Christian missionaries to travel to Asia and catalogue the previously uncharted Tibet. The Portuguese Jesuit Antonio de Andrade traveled into western Tibet on 16 May 1624. His travelogue entries emphasized that Tibetans, though seemingly backwards, were incredibly pious, celibate, and pure.⁶ De Andrade noted resemblances between Buddhism and Christianity which inspired future missionaries to attempt to convert Tibetans.⁷ Thierry Dodin and Heinz Räther said, “This overemphasis on religion . . . came to supersede all other aspects of Tibetan culture, thus distorting the overall image of Tibet.”⁸ De Andrade’s influence went further in creating major misperceptions of Tibetans within the West — reinforcing the loving and gentle nature of Tibetans, and omitting discussion of any violence.⁹ There were innumerable times that indigenous groups would attack one another for power or

³ Donald Lopez, “New Age Orientalism,” *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* 3, no. 3 (1994): 4.

⁴ Bishop, 10.

⁵ Bishop, 16. Bishop referred to this as “Mountain Romanticism.”

⁶ Rudolf Kaschewsky, “The Image of Tibet in the West before the Nineteenth-century,” in *Imagining Tibet*, ed. T. Dodin and H. Räther (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), 4-5.

⁷ Martin Brauen, *Dreamworld Tibet* (Trumbull: Weatherhill, Inc., 2000), 6.

⁸ Thierry Dodin and Heinz Räther, “Between Shangri-La and Feudal Oppression,” in *Imagining Tibet*, ed. T. Dodin and H. Räther, 403.

⁹ Brauen, 4.

goods, and Tibetans were considered violent for the many terrifying images of wrathful Buddhist deities. However, Tibetans were generally portrayed as peaceful.

Ippolito Desideri, an Italian Jesuit missionary who traveled in 1716, was perplexed by Tibetans' pious nature and disbelief in God. He remarked that a statue of Padmasambhava, the Indian teacher who brought Buddhism to Tibet, and his mother held similarities to Mary and Jesus. Desideri's conclusion was that it was pleasing to God that such people, though presumed ignorant, were faithfully looking for enlightenment.¹⁰ This is an example of how Europeans tried to find similarities between their lifestyles and Tibetan lifestyles to support the Christian missions. Though aware of the multifaceted nature of Tibetan people, "[D]esideri fell victim to one 'myth,' the one of the peace-loving Tibetans."¹¹ Desideri, like de Andrade, maintained the belief that Tibetans were peaceful, which illustrates how missionaries perpetuated the misperceptions of Tibetans in Western popular thought.

In addition to European interest in the Buddhist religion, Tibet was also seen as the connection to the civilizations of the past, a spiritual haven above the rest of the world.¹² Alexander Csoma de Koros, a Hungarian traveler-scholar, believed it was the origin of Hungarian people,¹³ and he spent several years in Ladakh in western Tibet, recording scientific information about Tibet to support his belief.¹⁴ In 1763, the Augustinian monk Antonius Georgius published *Alphabetum Tibetanum*, an encyclopedic

¹⁰ Kaschewsky, 12.

¹¹ Brauen, 9.

¹² Donald Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 62.

¹³ Brauen, 16.

¹⁴ Dodin and Räther, 392.

book on Tibet. Though this text was supposed to be a scholarly resource covering Tibet's religion, language and history, it was supplemented by myth and speculation.

The aforementioned travelers and missionaries epitomized the European desire to map the world and discover the unknown as means to characterize themselves in terms of a self/other dichotomy. Europeans defined themselves by what they were not. In this case the "other" was cast as primitive and the European "self" was modern. Though eighteenth-century journals sought to understand Tibetan Buddhists, their portrayal of Tibetans as the "other" through sensationalized myths became a popular format for later travelers.

During the nineteenth-century, travelers began exoticizing Tibet as a primitive and sinful place, further engaging and fascinating Europeans with Tibetan culture. In the nineteenth-century, thoughts shifted to two opposing perceptions of Tibet (the second discussed further below). The first was a belittling of Tibetan Buddhism, as the attitude of European travelers in the nineteenth-century "reflected the European arrogance . . . local culture was generally seen as backward and primitive compared to European superiority."¹⁵ Missionaries began to focus on the darker side of Tibet to reinforce the need for Christian enlightenment. Written accounts stressed "alien qualities" of Tibetans, such as lack of hygiene, strange sexual customs, and hostility.¹⁶

It was not only missionaries who used stereotypes in their writings, but adventurers and scholars also used sensationalism in their works. Austin (Lawrence)

¹⁵ Dodin and Räther, 393.

¹⁶ John Bray, "Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Missionary Images of Tibet" in *Imagining Tibet*, ed. T. Dodin and H. Räther, 22-33.

Waddell was one of the first reputable scholars of Tibet, having published *The Buddhism of Tibet*. He popularized the word Lamaism, which connoted “devil-worship,” perpetuating misperceptions of Tibet, perhaps to appeal to a mass audience.¹⁷ For example, he wrote in 1895 that Tantric Buddhism was nothing more than “devil-worship” and “sorcery.”¹⁸ He wrote that the art was idolatrous and later stated that he could not make sense of the demoniacal pantheon of deities.¹⁹ This implies a significant contradiction because the Western public was offered sensationalized material written by legitimate scholars. Once realizing this, it is understandable why there was a perpetuation of stereotypes and gross misperception of Tibet.

Within the same decade, traveler Perceval Landon wrote about Tibet as a part of the Younghusband expedition in 1904. Landon contradicted himself by writing that he was both fascinated and perplexed by Tibetan Buddhists. While in Tibet, he took few notes and photographs yet declared himself an authority on Tibet; becoming an enormous influence on the negative myths that pervaded the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²⁰ There were numerous travelers that could not speak the language yet represented themselves as authorities on Tibet in their writings misinforming those who read their published works.²¹

The content and quality of the above travelogues impacted upon on Western perceptions of Tibet. Peter Bishop writes,

¹⁷ Lopez, 1998, chapter 1.

¹⁸ Dargyab Kyabgon Rinpoche, “Buddhism in the West and the Image of Tibet” in *Imagining Tibet*, ed. T. Dodin and H. Räther, 383.

¹⁹ Heather Stoddard, “The Development in Perceptions of Tibetan Art: From Golden Idols to Ultimate Reality,” in *Imagining Tibet*, ed. T. Dodin and H. Räther, 241.

²⁰ Stoddard, 239-240.

²¹ Lopez, 1998, 62.

[T]hese accounts are singularly lacking in a number of crucial areas. The context within which these journeys were made is either ignored ... [or] the travel accounts have usually been analysed on a simplistically literal basis, valued only in terms of their apparent factual truth, their contribution to a supposedly evolving empirical knowledge about Tibet.²²

Missionaries' writings became the principle scholarship even though they misinterpreted Tibet through an ethnocentric perspective. Missionaries selected literature that appealed most to their audiences, and "tended to highlight the exotic nature of the environment . . . describing what were seen as the eccentricities of the Tibetans while at the same time stressing their need for spiritual salvation."²³

Some travelers borrowed or copied information from earlier popular travel accounts before they journeyed to Tibet. Bishop writes that traveler accounts were essentially fiction, a collage of ideas and comic dialogues, which reinforced sensationalized myths.²⁴ Few accounts painted a sophisticated image of Tibet, and European publishers knew exoticized materials were most marketable. Therefore editors would select sections of travelogues that were biased, "Bigotry, priest-craft, idolatry, and 'devil-worship' were the leitmotifs that thus came to dominate the image of Tibet."²⁵ In hindsight, though the repetition of stereotypes weakened the credibility of the authors, the travel accounts were enormously popular.

²² Bishop, 2.

²³ Bray, 42-43.

²⁴ Bishop, 3.

²⁵ Dodin and Räther, 392.

The Theosophists

Tibet's inaccessible location contributed to Western perception that it is a "dreamland," and an escape from reality.²⁶ This romanticism constitutes the second popularized belief during the late nineteenth-century. Experienced travelers began to take people on the Grand Tour of the Himalayan Mountains to experience the pure air and unique beauty.²⁷ People began to look at the country as a sacred utopia free of violence and modernity. This romanticism became the driving force for the Theosophists, a group co-founded by Russian emigrant Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and American Henry Steel Olcott who met each other in New York City during 1875.²⁸

Theosophists adopted the "peaceful nonviolent" myth originally found in writings by De Andrade and Desideri. Such fanciful depictions of Tibet and Buddhism were projections of longings and desires, "What they labeled as 'Tibetan wisdom' rather exposes their almost complete ignorance of Tibet. Historically, the Theosophists were the first Westerners to deliberately use Tibet as a glamorous vessel."²⁹

Blavatsky wanted to create a lifestyle that combined American and Tibetan thought, though she romanticized Tibet as a place of mystery that offered new spirituality, which released Theosophists of Western religious constraints. Blavatsky's books *The Secret Doctrine* and *Tibetan Teachings* and journal *The Theosophist* romanticized Tibet as the isolated repository of ancient wisdom.³⁰ Blavatsky suffered

²⁶ Brauen.

²⁷ Bishop, 97.

²⁸ Poul Pedersen, "Tibet, Theosophy, and the Psychologization of Buddhism" in *Imagining Tibet*, ed. T. Dodin and H. Räther, 151-152.

²⁹ Pedersen, 396-406.

³⁰ Brauen, 39.

bouts of schizophrenia and believed that she was an heir to the secret ancient wisdom of Buddhism. She claimed to have gone to India and stayed near the Tashilhunpo Monastery at Shigatse in southern Tibet. She searched for entry to Tibet after having visions of “Master Morya,” a *mahatma* of a Tibetan Brotherhood who “provided her with a direct link to the divine wisdom that was the basis of the Theosophical movement and legitimized her claims.” The “master/*mahatma*,” who supposedly wrote her letters and materialized in a temporary body over far distances, was a character she fabricated in her mind. Blavatsky used drawings and written descriptions of Indian men from earlier travel accounts to physically compose her “Master,” and her “sacred wisdom” were distorted versions of adages not even related to Buddhism.³¹

Blavatsky claimed she returned from India to Paris before traveling to America in 1873 to bring the secret wisdom to others.³² However, she had only traveled between Paris and Cairo performing as a snake charmer and a medium, before moving to America. In 1884, Blavatsky was exposed as a fraud.³³ Nonetheless, Theosophy remained popular in America, Europe, and India during the twentieth-century because of their self-claimed connection to the so-called source of ancient wisdom. Martin Brauen explains that Blavatsky initiated a new age, a time of adoration and enthusiasm of Tibet where ideas about Tibet were imagined, casting it as a place remarkably different from the Victorian and Christian West.³⁴ The Theosophists directly influenced and perpetuated

³¹ Brauen, 24-26.

³² Pedersen, 155.

³³ Pedersen, 156.

³⁴ Brauen, 212-234.

misinterpretations about Tibet while considering themselves a part of the exotic Tibetan culture.

Popular Novels

Since the seventeenth-century, stereotypes of Tibet ranged from fascination to repulsion. By the twentieth-century, general attitudes turned into desire and longing. The Theosophists were a major influence on the Western perceptions of Tibet, reinforcing the above myths, and inspiring popular culture. Two examples of such inspiration are novelists James Hilton and Tuesday Lobsang Rampa. “One of the final and most complete embodiments of Tibet as a sacred place in the Western imagination was the utopia of Shangri-La described in Hilton’s famous 1933 novel *Lost Horizon*.”³⁵ Hilton, who had never been to Tibet, cast Tibet as “Shangri-La,” a peaceful, spiritual and primitive place. His main character, Father Perrault, was a compilation of sages, mahatmas, gurus, and Theosophists. One of the many stereotypes Hilton used was of Tibet as a fountain of youth, an idea introduced earlier by Blavatsky.³⁶ Hilton’s book reinforced the belief that Tibet is Shangri-La, “[T]ibet has become an imagined locus of spirituality, an ‘empty vessel’ into which Western dreams could be poured.” Bishop noted that Shangri-La had an essential authenticity because it conformed to the contemporaneous fantasies of Tibet.³⁷

³⁵ Bishop, 19.

³⁶ Brauen, 85-87.

³⁷ Bishop, 216.

Tuesday Lobsang Rampa's novels had a considerable impact on popular culture, despite the fact they too were based on embellished myths.³⁸ In his autobiography, *The Third Eye*, published in 1956, he claimed to be the son of a Tibetan nobleman and to have attended school in Tibet. Rampa asserted that at age eight his third eye opened on his forehead, which enabled him to see people as they were, creating for himself a reputation as a modern sage with the esoteric knowledge.

Like Blavatsky, Rampa had created a fictitious identity.³⁹ His real name was Cyril Henry Hoskins, and he lived his whole life in Britain, without ever traveling to Tibet. After newspapers exposed him as a fraud, Rampa claimed he was possessed by a Tibetan Lama. His fans wrote consolations and letters of hope and courage, reassuring him that despite what newspaper articles declared, his books were the most pure and uplifting literature available, offering proof that Shangri-La did exist.⁴⁰ These books are still popular and considered by some to be truthful. Tibetan culture has also been also portrayed as an exotic place filled with treasures in movies, comics, advertisements, and material goods such as T-shirts.⁴¹

Twentieth-Century Exhibitions

As romantic idealization of Tibet became widely dispersed, collectors and curators in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century began to acquire Tibetan art, while Lamaist temples were recreated for the 1933 Chicago and 1939 New York World

³⁸ Lopez, 1998, 86.

³⁹ Bishop, 230.

⁴⁰ Brauen, 91-93.

⁴¹ Lopez, 1998, 5.

Fairs, which inspired collector Jacques Marchais to have a replica of the Potala Palace in Staten Island named “Potala of the West.”⁴² Similarly, the Newark Museum was one of the first museums to amass a collection. Its first exhibition featured 150 objects and attracted 17,724 visitors between February and June 1911.⁴³ By 1950, the collection had increased to more than 1200 objects. The Newark Museum’s 1961 *Catalogue of the Tibetan Collection and other Lamaist Articles* used few Tibetan literary resources and travel journals as bibliographic resources. The “Explanatory Notes” in the first of the five-volume catalogue noted, “Statements of the Western authorities cited in our Bibliography are often in conflict owing to the fact that each was familiar with a limited area only, or with a somewhat limited strata of society.”⁴⁴

Generally, the first museum exhibition catalogues emphasized artistic technique, aesthetic quality and type of medium, because there were few extant publications on Tibetan art history. For example in *Catalogue of the Tibetan Collection* (1961), the human skull rosary, “Four sections of black beads and two strings of brass counters each ending in a large, flat, irregularly oval ornament.”⁴⁵ In contrast Giuseppe Tucci’s 1949 *Painted Scrolls* offered a critical study of art *in situ* and identified the scriptures and specific deities represented in the scrolls.⁴⁶ Tucci’s seminal book allowed for scholars and museum visitors to appreciate the art in relationship to its original context. Without knowing the original context for which artworks were produced, viewers project their

⁴² Clare Harris, *In the Image of Tibet* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 17-34.

⁴³ Valrae Reynolds, et al., *From the Sacred Realm* (New York: Prestel Publishing, 1999), 13-15.

⁴⁴ Eleanor Olson, *Catalogue of the Tibetan Collection* (Newark: Newark Museum of Art, 1961), iii.

⁴⁵ Olson, 11.

⁴⁶ Stoddard, 245-248.

own fantasies or misperceptions of Tibet onto the artwork.⁴⁷ As Lopez states, artwork does not simply lose its context when it is transported from monasteries to museums but also when it is under the gaze of misguided Westerners.⁴⁸

Tucci's book was an exception among early twentieth-century publications. Before the 1960s, few scholarly books were published about Tibet and Tibetan art.⁴⁹ Once the People's Republic of China occupied Tibet in 1959, thousands of Tibetans fled to live in other countries. While Tibet was closed to outsiders until the 1980s, Tibetans in diaspora communities continued to practice Buddhism and some wrote about the history, culture, and religion of the country they fled.⁵⁰

Between 1966-1976, during the Cultural Revolution, the People's Liberation Army destroyed monasteries and temples, tortured monks and nuns, and burnt and stole art from the Potala Palace, which they also appropriated. The Western perception of Tibet changed from being an inaccessible dreamland to being a damaged and potentially lost world. Therefore scholars and museums became interested in the preservation of traditional Tibetan culture and art.⁵¹ By the late 1960s, major art museums including, but not limited to, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Freer-Sackler in D.C., Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, and the Cleveland Museum of Art began to acquire Tibetan art.

⁴⁷ Dodin and Räther, 408.

⁴⁸ Lopez, 1998, 136.

⁴⁹ Dodin and Räther, 394.

⁵⁰ Pedersen, 161.

⁵¹ Donald Lopez, *Curators of the Buddha* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 251.

The 1978 Newark Museum exhibition catalogue followed the sentiment of the 1960s with its title, *Tibet: A Lost World*. The catalogue stated, “Though originally collected to demonstrate the richness of a living culture, they have now become artifacts of a ‘lost world’. . . which no longer exists.”⁵² The introductory essay alluded to the loss of culture and memorialized traditional Tibet. *Tibet: A Lost World* included photographs of rickety brides and nomadic families that connoted a primitive and beautifully remote place. This exhibition catalogue focused on how Tibet existed prior to the Cultural Revolution. Captions that accompanied photographs presented more information than what the earlier catalogues had offered, including the purpose of artworks. For example, the label for the Mandala of the Fierce and Tranquil Deities describes its attributes and states, “The ferocious energy of the assembly of animal and human form protectors is interwoven with the calm beneficence of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas arrayed over a mountain and sky landscape.” The label implicitly invokes past stereotypes of Tibet as both “sinful and terrifying” and “peaceful and non violent.” *Tibet: A Lost World* exemplifies how museums in the 1970s reflected the increased quantity and quality of scholarship on Tibet yet also perpetuated earlier stereotypes with its title and some captions.

During the first half of the twentieth-century scholars were focused on the task of identifying deities.⁵³ While the second half of the twentieth-century was a time of increased interest in preserving traditional Tibetan culture and of increased scholarship in Tibetan art history and production of museum exhibition catalogues.

⁵² Reynolds, 9.

⁵³ Lopez, 1998, 137.

Exhibitions from the 1990s-2000s

Later exhibition catalogues exemplified the improved quality and quantity of available Tibetan art historical scholarship. This is seen with the San Francisco Asian Art Museum and Tibet House's 1991 exhibition *Wisdom and Compassion*. This exhibition catalogue was the first to include essays by multiple authors with various backgrounds, and was created by Marilyn Rhie, an art historian with a specialty in Chinese art, and Robert Thurman, a religious historian of Tibetan Buddhism. This catalogue was a fundamental breakthrough in scholarship because it discussed aspects of daily life, religious narratives, and history with artistic technique.

Though *Wisdom and Compassion* was groundbreaking, it has been criticized for being too theological and imbued with adulation.⁵⁴ The introduction reads, "Tibetans create art to open windows from the ordinary, coarse world we know onto the extraordinary realm of pure wisdom and compassion."⁵⁵ This sentence reflects the earlier stereotypes of Tibet as an escape from reality to an exotic place untainted by the ills of modernity. However, both scholars use an analytical academic tone throughout the catalogue. For example, Thurman explains the fascination with yabyum, literally the "father-mother" figures shown in sexual union, without using sexualized interpretations but rather emphasizing its metaphorical serious purpose. In their overview, the curators exclaim that they are trying to expand the readership, ranging from scholars to the

⁵⁴ Stoddard, 223.

⁵⁵ Marilyn Rhie and Robert Thurman, *Wisdom and Compassion: The Sacred Art of Tibet* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum of San Francisco and Tibet House, 1991), 17.

general public. The image plates offer informative art historical text, investigating the history, subject, style, technique, and with some pieces, purpose.

Rhie and Thurman applied traditional museological methods of exhibition and at the same time introduced a new way to look at Tibetan art—one that considered both the aesthetics and historical context for each individual piece.⁵⁶ *Wisdom and Compassion* situated the art within specific historical practices of Tibetan Buddhism, highlighting the relationship between subject imagery, iconography, and meditative practices. *Wisdom and Compassion* was a foundational catalogue because it was the first comprehensive contextualization of significant facets of Tibetan Buddhist art, history, and culture. Therefore, it is an important contribution to art historical scholarship.

Pratapaditya Pal, a prolific art historian and accomplished curator at LACMA, published numerous exhibition catalogues between the 1960s and 2000s. His earlier catalogues focused on the so-called primitivism and ferocity within the art, following popular exoticized themes from the early to mid twentieth-century.⁵⁷ However, Pal's exhibitions from the 1990s shifted to pay attention to style, technique, and religious purpose. Pal has been largely responsible for helping international collectors and dealers build an aesthetic understanding of Asian art, and it has informed museums that are building large collections of top quality.

His catalogue *Art of the Himalayas: Treasures from Nepal and Tibet* published by the American Federation of Arts in 1992, focused on Tibetan painting and textiles that

⁵⁶ Stoddard, 225.

⁵⁷ See NYC Asia House Gallery's 1969 exhibition catalogue: Pratapaditya Pal, *The Art of Tibet* (New York: HNAbrams, 1990). Donald Lopez, who is not an art historian, counters Pal's earlier exhibition catalogue in the fifth chapter of his book, *Prisoners of Shangri-La*.

were chosen as examples of high quality art. Pal wrote in his introduction that despite the fact that artworks were being seen in a context drastically different from its original, viewers could still appreciate the aesthetic quality.⁵⁸ Pal noted that Tibetan artists were inspired by a hybrid of Chinese and Indian styles. This informs readers that Tibet was not a closed esoteric country, therefore such Western romantic perceptions have no validity. Pal's work exemplifies the style of later twentieth-century exhibition catalogues by emphasizing the issues of connoisseurship and provenance.

From the Sacred Realm, the third major catalogue of Tibetan art published by the Newark Museum in 1999, offers readers significantly updated scholarship that contextualized Buddhism, Tibetan culture, and art. Images in the catalogue show the daily lives of Tibetans engaging in various activities such as farming and social events. While plate captions for artworks pay attention to medium and technique, the second half of the catalogue explains spiritual incarnations of sculptures and the importance of touching the works. For example, the Newark Museum has a permanently installed Buddhist altar that was ritualistically consecrated by the Dalai Lama himself. Many Tibetans make a pilgrimage to the consecrated altar. Thus the Newark Museum acts as a bridge between cultural history and art museums—displaying the Tibetan art in a consecrated ritualistic, yet aesthetic, context.

In 2003, *Circle of Bliss: Buddhist Meditational Art*, curated by John C. Huntington and Dina Bangdel, was exhibited at LACMA and the Columbus Museum of Art. The comprehensive 600+ page catalogue “[presented] a far more panoramic insight

⁵⁸ Pratapaditya Pal, *Art of the Himalayas: Treasures from Nepal and Tibet* (Manchester: Hudson Hills Press, 1992), 23.

into these Indo-Newar-Tibetan meditational systems and their true relevance within a Buddhist context,”⁵⁹ giving information on how different countries have different artistic styles and iconography. This catalogue gave etymological definitions of Buddhist terms and contextualized Vajrayana (Tantric) Buddhist art within the broad spectrum of Buddhism. This is accomplished with chapters and images that illustrate the Vajrayana path, deities of significance, and differences in meditation. Bangdel wrote,

We have had the immense fortune to encounter some of the great Tantric teachers in the contemporary tradition, who . . . have allowed some of the esoteric secrets to be revealed to generate a global understanding of their profound messages.⁶⁰

In the twenty-first century Buddhism became a major pillar of nationalism for contemporary Tibetans and developed a following within the West among people who characterized it as a rational undogmatic spiritual path.⁶¹ Scholars consider the catalogue to be a landmark of modern Buddhist scholarship. Robert Beer, scholar and artist, stated that this catalogue focused primarily upon the socioreligious context of the imagery, which has always been the real purpose and reason for the creation of the art.⁶² The Director’s statement read,

In recent years there have been several museum exhibitions presenting the rich artistic tradition of Tibetan art. . . . Most have discussed the religious meanings of the works of art in varying degrees. In contrast, *The Circle of Bliss: Buddhist*

⁵⁹ Robert Beer, “Book Review: The Circle of Bliss: Buddhist Meditational Art” *Orientalism* Jan/Feb, (2004), 79.

⁶⁰ John Huntington and Dina Bangdel, *The Circle of Bliss: Buddhist Meditational Art* (London: Serinda Publications, 2003), 35.

⁶¹ Toni Huber, “Shangri-La in Exile,” in *Imagining Tibet*, ed. T. Dodin and H. Räther, 360-361.

⁶² Beer, 79.

Meditational Art seeks to exceed those earlier attempts at interpretation by explicating the raison d'être of the works of art by means of detailed analyses. This sophisticated level of interpretation provides viewers with a unique opportunity to understand the communicative visual language of Himalayan Buddhist art in its original socioreligious context.⁶³

Indicative of the later twentieth-century exhibition style, this catalogue did not include romantic or pejorative stereotypes of Tibet. Huntington explains, “[This] exhibition is part of an emerging trend to design exhibitions along thematic lines that reflect the cultural concerns and values that they represent rather than Western-based art historical taxonomies.”⁶⁴ *Circle of Bliss* presented each individual plate with consistent detail on the mythological, art, and cultural histories. The catalogue has photographs of the art *in situ*, and for objects like mandalas, each section, color, character and gesture is enlarged and thoroughly examined. This catalogue gives the reader an in-depth treatment of the art as it fits within the Buddhist narrative.⁶⁵

At the same time that *Circle of Bliss* was on display, the Bowers Museum of Art opened their controversial exhibition, *Tibet: Treasures from the Roof of the World*. The exhibition toured from 2003 until 2005, showing at four museums: the Rubin Museum of Art, the San Francisco Asian Art Museum, the Bowers Museum, and Museum of Fine Arts Houston. *Tibet: Treasures from the Roof of the World* was comprised of the highest quality of art, including pieces from Tibet’s Potala Palace museum. Because the Cultural

⁶³ Huntington and Bangdel, 9.

⁶⁴ Huntington and Bangdel, 19.

⁶⁵ Suzanne Muchnic, “Buddhist Bounty” *Los Angeles Times*, October 5, 2003.

Administration of Tibet and the U.S. museums had organized this exhibition, it was protested at all three locations because some art pieces were previously of the Dalai Lamas personal collection and because of political implications.⁶⁶ Because of the tense politics surrounding such Chinese controlled exhibitions, the catalogue was brief, focusing on technique with minimum attention on cultural significance.

The Rubin Museum of Art, which is solely dedicated to the arts of the Himalayas, has significantly contributed to the scholarship on Tibetan art history. Its first exhibition was *Tibet: Treasures from the Roof of the World*, and later exhibited *Demonic Divine in Himalayan Art* and *Holy Madness: Portraits of Tantric Siddhas* in 2006. The catalogues curated in-house for the latter exhibitions were quite unlike that of the controversial exhibition. They are scholarly in approach and contribute to art historical, religious and historical studies scholarship. *Demonic Divine* focused on the dangerous protectors, enlightened protectors, and wrathful buddhas, who, through fierce means, compassionately aid Buddhists in their path. *Holy Madness* exhibited images of “spiritually accomplished” teachers whose stories and legends are represented through paintings and sculptures.⁶⁷ This exemplifies the shift to create catalogues of Himalayan art that include essays by multiple authors ranging in backgrounds; investigate aspects of artworks within Buddhism; and appeal to a general audience with catchy titles referencing, but not perpetuating, sensationalized representations of Tibetan Buddhism.

⁶⁶ “Tibet: Treasures from the Roof of the World”; available from <http://www.asianart.com/exhibitions/bowers/intro.html>; Internet; accessed February 25, 2009.

⁶⁷ Rubin Museum of Art, “Past Exhibitions”; available from <http://www.rmanyc.org/exhibitions/past.xml?context=exhibitions/past.xml>; Internet; accessed February 25, 2009.

Conclusion

Exhibition catalogues from the later twentieth-century are significant contributions to Tibetan art historical scholarship. As seen in the 1990s and 2000s, exhibition catalogues offer a scholarly discussion of Tibetan art that includes art historical data, cultural significance, and examinations of art in-situ. Critically evaluating the exhibition catalogues that spanned the twentieth-century enables an understanding of the changes that have coincided with the expansion of knowledge about Tibet. Though some later exhibition titles are romanticized, there is an increased availability of accurate art historical and cultural information. These later catalogues show a push to educate audiences on Tibetan art and culture, while not perpetuating the stereotypes found in popular novels by authors like Rampa or Blavatsky, and travelogues from early missionaries which have reinforced the exoticized perceptions of Tibet.⁶⁸

This chapter has addressed the manner in which, over time, museum exhibitions have reflected both the availability of accurate information on Tibet, and in some cases, the popular misperceptions of their times. The following chapters focus on dealers who have contributed to the increase in international recognition and success of the contemporary Tibetan artists, whose work addresses ingrained stereotypes and questions their identity within today's global community.

⁶⁸ Brauen, 208.

Chapter Two:

The Dealers

In the early twenty-first century, renowned dealers of traditional Asian art Steven McGuinness, Jim Aplington, Ian Alsop, and Fabio Rossi began working to increase global awareness of contemporary Tibetan art. Today, these dealers represent the artists and promote their work through exhibitions and publishing scholarly texts. This chapter describes some of the gallery exhibitions and marketing techniques that these dealers used to increase international awareness of contemporary Tibetan art.

Each dealer was originally invested in selling Tibetan traditional paintings and antiquities. After meeting contemporary artists in Tibet, each dealer “became enamored with the personalities and talent of the artists.”⁶⁹ Jim Aplington, co-founder of Lotus Gallery in Kathmandu, Nepal, was the first dealer to show contemporary Tibetan art. His first exhibition in December of 2000 featured aesthetically beautiful conceptual art by numerous artists from Lhasa. Aplington introduced Ian Alsop to the artists in 2000, which in turn sparked Alsop’s interest in contemporary Tibetan art.

Alsop, an expert in Nepali and Tibetan antiques, has traveled to Tibet since 1986 to buy art for his Peaceful Winds Gallery, located in Santa Fe, New Mexico. In 2003, he bought works by artists from the Gedun Choepel Guild in Lhasa. Peaceful Winds was the first Western gallery to exhibit contemporary Tibetan art through *Contemporary Painting from Tibet* in 2004. Having sold pieces on the opening night of the exhibit, Alsop recounted

⁶⁹ Jim Aplington, email interview by author, 17 February 2009.

that the audience was, “gripped by the art, in a positive way.”⁷⁰ The brief exhibition catalogue described the art as distinct from other modern art expression, conveying a vibrancy that engages viewers in the artists’ complex social situation.

During 2003, Alsop introduced Fabio Rossi to artists in Lhasa. At that time Rossi purchased multiple artworks for the gallery in London, Rossi + Rossi, which he co-directs with his mother, Anna-Maria Rossi. The Rossi + Rossi gallery was already renowned for representing high-end traditional Asian art. Today, the gallery exhibits traditional and contemporary Asian art. Gonkar Gyatso, a diaspora artist represented by Rossi + Rossi, said,

Before Fabio got involved, the movement [of contemporary Tibetan art] was already extant. It was waiting to launch yet somehow never really found the platform gallery for an exhibition. We had initiatives in Lhasa, . . . but Fabio has been dealing for many years and he has the connections. He really came at the right time.⁷¹

In 2004, Rossi and Gyatso co-curated *Visions From Tibet: A Brief Survey of Contemporary Painting*, an exhibition displayed at Rossi + Rossi Gallery and Gyatso’s Sweet Tea House in London. With fifty-one paintings, the exhibition presented a survey of contemporary Tibetan art to Western audiences accustomed to looking at traditional Tibetan works.

Before the 1970s there was minimal scholarship on traditional Tibetan art and even less that focused on contemporary art. Rossi + Rossi produced an exhibition

⁷⁰ Ian Alsop, phone interview by author, 17 February 2009.

⁷¹ Gonkar Gyatso, interview by author, 19 June 2008, London, England.

catalogue for *Visions from Tibet* that provided an introduction to contemporary Tibetan art, accompanied by scholarly essays about the significance of the Cultural Revolution to artists. The catalogue describes theoretical, historical, emotional, and personal aspects of the art in relationship to modern Tibet and its diaspora communities. *Visions from Tibet* cast Tibetan artists as modern creative individuals producing significant conceptual work, whereas an exhibition review in the *Financial Times* stated that because of stereotypes about Tibet, it was thought to be the last place for culturally complex contemporary art.⁷² Rossi noted that, “People came away pleasantly surprised by the eloquence of the artists and by how aware they are of their position in the present history.”⁷³ Gyatso recalled that this show “was the first time Tibetan artists were exposed to a mainstream art world.”⁷⁴

Three years later, a symposium, *Waves on the Turquoise Lake: Contemporary Expressions of Tibetan Art*, was held at the University of Colorado at Boulder Art Museum. It accompanied a museum exhibition of contemporary Tibetan art, which, in Dina Bangdel’s words,

Provid[ed] the first dialogue among these artists to explore what modernity means within the context of Tibetan art. For the artists, this was . . . a historic event as this was the first time that the Lhasa artists had traveled outside of Tibet to participate in an international exhibition.⁷⁵

⁷² Clare Harris, interview by author, 20 June 2008, Oxford, England.

⁷³ Fabio Rossi, interview by author, 24 June 2008, London, England.

⁷⁴ Gonkar Gyatso, interview by author, 19 June 2008, London, England.

⁷⁵ Dina Bangdel, “Re-Defining Shangri-La: Modernity and Cultural Identity in Contemporary Tibetan Art,” Conference Paper Presented At: *American Council for Southern Asian Art Symposium XIII* Asian Art Museum of San Francisco March 3, 2007.

The catalogue discussed the various qualities that make the art visually and conceptually compelling. The catalogue noted that while contemporary Tibetan art includes aspects of tradition, it is modern. “Many of the artists capture this transformation [from traditional style to modern expression] and the concerns it brings for the future—indeed, the survival of Tibet,”⁷⁶ with some artists using their work as a platform for analyzing their Tibetan cultural history. The catalogue notes that diaspora artists do not have a romanticized longing for traditional Tibet but rather want to have a sense of their indigenous Tibetan identity. This catalogue expands on earlier catalogues by explaining how various personal issues affect each individual artist and how such complexities manifest in the art.

Recent museum exhibition catalogues of traditional Tibetan art have paid attention to art *in situ* and its cultural significance, whereas galleries in the West have recently published catalogues of contemporary Tibetan art that addressed the social and political issues that inspire the artists. Private galleries in China, such as Red Gate Gallery in Beijing and Plum Blossom Gallery in Hong Kong, have recently begun annual exhibitions of contemporary Tibetan art that focus on the aesthetics within the art. There are censorship laws that can affect the amount of offered information about the art’s subject matter, which in turn can have an effect on how the art is portrayed. However, exhibitions in China reflect Chinese assertions that Tibetan artists are free to create such conceptual works of art. Plum Blossoms Gallery’s 2008 *Fragile Mandala* exhibited works by artists Nortse and Gade. Their art addresses the consumerist culture that is

⁷⁶ Lisa Tamiris Becker, “Waves on the Turquoise Lake: Contemporary Expressions of Tibetan Art,” *Waves on the Turquoise Lake* (University of Colorado at Boulder, 2006), 8.

ubiquitous in urban Tibetan society, however the catalogue emphasized the aesthetic detail instead of investigating the subject matter.⁷⁷

Another example is the Red Gate Gallery's *Lhasa — New Art from Tibet*, which noted that Tsering Nyandak's "Dandelion," represents a "response to the turmoil during the first half of 2008," an implicit reference to the Tibetan riots for independence that occurred before the 2008 Beijing Olympics. *Lhasa — New Art from Tibet* was the Red Gate Gallery's first annual exhibition of contemporary Tibetan art, and *Return to Lhasa*, its second exhibit, was held in 2007.⁷⁸ *Lhasa — New Art from Tibet* was published in Tibetan, English and Chinese and addressed the basic history of contemporary Tibetan art. The catalogue discussed the urbanization of Lhasa, the artists' inspirations, and the artists' new depictions of Buddhist themes. As such, *Lhasa — New Art from Tibet* was informative but did not include a discussion of subject matter regarding perceptions of Tibet as "Shangri-La" or Sino-Tibetan politics. Red Gate Gallery's second annual catalogue, *Return to Lhasa*, expanded the basic information offered in the first catalogue and described the artists' signature styles.

According to Rossi, it is a challenge for dealers to adjust their approaches to marketing in relationship to political and social situations in different countries.⁷⁹ Rossi + Rossi Gallery contracted a series of solo exhibitions for Tibetan and Chinese artists from 2008 to 2011, which have been advertised in *Asian Art Pacific Magazine: Today's Art from Tomorrow's World*. This magazine has promoted contemporary Tibetan artists with

⁷⁷ Ian Findlay, "Nortse and Tsering Nyandak," *Asian Art News* May-June (2008), 149.

⁷⁹ Fabio Rossi, interview by author, 24 June 2008, London, England.

advertisements and articles such as “Tibetan Contemporary Art: Beyond the Cultural Mask,” which transcribed a discussion about defining contemporary Tibetan art held between several artists, Rossi, and scholar Clare Harris, challenging.⁸⁰

Another important part of being a dealer is reaching a wide international audience. Rossi constantly travels between Hong Kong, London, and New York to stay abreast of new artists, exhibitions, and market trends. Rossi says,

It's a daily exercise. . . you have to make sure that information about our exhibitions and programs get in the right hands of journalists and publicists, keep the website updated, publish catalogues, and frankly, I talk to people a lot and tell them why I am so passionate about the art.⁸¹

Rossi + Rossi has participated in various international art fairs such as the highly selective Dubai Art Fair in 2008 where he sold Gyatso’s signature sticker-on-paper works.⁸² While artists appreciate each dealers’ passion, Rossi + Rossi is the only gallery that has developed contracts as a sole representative for many of the Tibetan artists. According to Rossi, contracts prohibit any buyers who “flip” the art to auction homes for a large profit. Rossi + Rossi wants to ensure a clientele that is not only passionate about the art but also agrees to not resell the works within five years of purchasing. Anytime thereafter the buyer must consult the gallery. Rossi believes this will help build the artists’ career on a strong foundation. Rossi’s clientele includes private collectors, public institutions,

⁸⁰ *Art Asia Pacific* 57 (2008).

⁸¹ Fabio Rossi, interview by author, 24 June 2008, London, England.

⁸² *Art Asia Pacific* 58 (2008), 94.

universities, and large museums. University of Kansas has purchased works by Gyatso and invited him to speak there. Museums, such as the Newark Museum of Art and the Rubin Museum of Art, and private institutions in Australia, India and the United States have enhanced their Asian collections with acquisitions of contemporary Tibetan art.

Aplington and Alsop do not use contracts because of the pressure it can place on artists and collectors to participate in a consistent routine of creating, selling, and buying. In Kathmandu, Aplington relies on word of mouth to promote his gallery and the art. In his ninth year of business, Aplington has consistently sold work to private collectors from Europe, America, and three Nepali clients: a bank, a hotel, and a coffeehouse franchise. Aplington is assured of his clients connection with the art because they often say, “We would not sell this art for any price.”⁸³

In New Mexico, Alsop predominantly focuses on selling traditional art, though he notes that clientele for contemporary art enjoy the new stylistic expression. Alsop’s clients include private collectors from the West and China, many of whom are second-generation collectors whose interests have shifted from collecting traditional to contemporary art. In lieu of giving his clientele catalogues, Alsop created the prestigious website Asianart.com which is accessible by a large audience and has published articles by scholars such as Pratapaditya Pal. Alsop is opening a second gallery in Santa Fe

⁸³ Jim Aplington, email interview by author, 17 February 2009.

named PW Contemporary, where he will exhibit and sell works of contemporary Tibetan and Nepalese art.

Artist Palden Weinreb attributes this international appreciation of contemporary Tibetan art to the “opening of the Asian umbrella,” meaning the success of contemporary Chinese and Indian art has allowed for other Asian countries to participate in the global art market.⁸⁴ The dealers agree that the art market has helped further interest in contemporary Tibetan art, but argue that collectors are more interested in the new unique artistic expressions. It is possible some collectors are interested in the art because of the relationship it has with Tibet. Though there is no exoticization or sensationalism of Tibet, there are visible traditional Tibetan icons within the art that appeal to buyers.⁸⁵ However, some clients purchase the art for its social or political content.

Donald Rubin, owner and director of the Rubin Museum of Art (RMA) in New York City, which houses an extensive collection of high-end traditional Tibetan art, also has a private collection of contemporary Tibetan art. Rubin is invested in preserving the past while cultivating the future of Tibetan art culture. His collection of contemporary art is composed of work by diaspora and Lhasa based artists. In his words, “It is great to put money in the hands of living artists.” Rubin’s collection will debut to the public at the Oglethorpe University in Atlanta in January 2009, and is planned to be exhibited at the RMA in 2010.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Palden Weinreb, interview by author, 10 November 2008, New York City, NY.

⁸⁵ Dina Bangdel, personal communication. This will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

⁸⁶ Donald Rubin, interview by author, 7 November 2008, New York City, NY.

Though their approaches are different from one another, each dealer's passion for contemporary Tibetan art arose from his involvement with traditional painting and antiques. Alsop believes his best decision was getting involved at the beginning—realizing the art's attraction, intensity, and potential. Each dealer admits the movement of contemporary Tibetan art is in a beginning stage, projected to grow in popularity tantamount to Chinese and Indian art. Tibetan art stands out, says Alsop, because:

the material is so interesting, so remarkably unique. Unlike Chinese art, which was selling for 1.6 million a piece, Tibetan art had not reached a price ceiling and will continue to sell with no real loss to the artists despite this [current] economic standstill [in the U.S. art market]. This allows for a smooth progression into the future.⁸⁷

Through international exhibitions, art fairs, and professional relationships with clientele, the dealers' involvement has been critical. Recent publications including catalogues and journal articles have enhanced art historical scholarship, informing a wide audience of the history of contemporary Tibetan art and the significance of the artists and their work.

⁸⁷ Ian Alsop, phone interview by author, 17 February 2009.

Chapter Three:

Contemporary Tibetan Artists

The label “contemporary Tibetan art” applies to works by a disparate group of artists that are unique in subject matter and style. To investigate this label, this chapter considers five specific artists differing in location and age, yet are all “contemporary Tibetan” artists. Norbu Tsering (Nortse), Gonkar Gyatso, Tsewang Tashi, Tenzing Rigdol, and Palden Weinreb incorporate aspects of cultural complexities, such as loss of identity, and elements of tradition in their work. This chapter examines how these factors, including the myth of Shangri-La,⁸⁸ affect the artists and their success.

Comparing the works of these five artists to one another will offer a sense of the range of media, subjects, and factors that influence contemporary Tibetan artists. Diaspora artist Gyatso lives in London, while Rigdol and Weinreb currently live in New York City. Nortse and Tashi live in Lhasa. Gyatso and Nortse exemplify how some artists have unique styles that arise from dealing with cultural and sociopolitical complexities. Tashi, and Rigdol illustrate how some artists use traditional qualities, such as Buddhist icons, within the art. Weinreb, who is different from the others because he was born and raised in New York City, will be used to challenge the “contemporary Tibetan” label.

To better appreciate these issues, it is necessary to look at the history of the movement. Until the 1950s, Tibetan art comprised of Buddhist religious sculptures,

⁸⁸ This myth has fueled Western fascination, resulting in the commodification of Tibet Buddhist spirituality in Western pop culture. For more information see Chapter 1 and the cited sources.

paintings, and ritual objects. Many traditional art exhibitions gave a “monolithic presentation of a ‘lost’ tradition, of which we witness today only fragmentary remains of this once glorious culture that existed prior to the Cultural Revolution.” In post 1959, Tibetan artists grew up in a Sinocized environment, trained by Chinese universities in the social-realist style, which was supported by the PRC government to create secular propagandist art. Such paintings showed jovial Tibetans performing everyday tasks such as farming, while displaying Mao as the central figure surrounded by adoring Tibetan families and laborers.⁸⁹ Three main criteria existed for this style: it has the communist red color; highlights the preeminent hero in a bright setting; and most importantly, glorifies Mao.⁹⁰

1980 was a critical year when Communist Party Secretary Hu Yaobang signed an order reinstating the practice of Buddhism as an inextricable part of Tibetan culture. Restrictive Chinese censorship laws prevented many contemporary Tibetan artists from being included in contemporary Chinese exhibitions, especially because the preferred style was social-realist, from which Tibetan artists deviated in style.⁹¹ Clare Harris wrote, “For him [Gonkar Gyatso], and a handful of others, the ‘real’ Tibetan art emerged from a fusion of ethnopoliticized aesthetics and the liberal example of Western modernism.” As artists became aware of the Western stereotypes of Tibet, while some in the diaspora

⁸⁹ Dina Bangdel, “Re-Defining Shangri-La: Modernity and Cultural Identity in Contemporary Tibetan Art,” Conference Paper Presented At: *American Council for Southern Asian Art Symposium XIII* Asian Art Museum of San Francisco March 3, 2007.

⁹⁰ Kabir Mansingh Heimsath, “Untitled Identities: Contemporary Art in Lhasa, Tibet”; available from <http://www.asianart.com/articles/heimsath/index.html>; Internet; accessed 13 February 2009.

⁹¹ Bangdel. I will expand upon this in my later research.

obtained a slightly romanticized perception of pre-1959 Tibet, most artists within Tibet challenge such misperceptions.⁹²

During the 1980s contemporary artists in Tibet bonded through their Tibetan heritage and experiences during the devastation of post-revolution Tibet.⁹³ In 1985, Gyatso co-founded the “Sweet Tea Association,” the first independent artists’ guild.⁹⁴ This association brought Tibetan artists together to discuss their double consciousness—Tibetan heritage, of which they had little memory; and their Sinocized upbringing, though they were not recognized as Chinese.⁹⁵ The artists were motivated to create a unique vocabulary in their art, reclaiming a sense of Tibetanness.⁹⁶ Thus, the Sweet Tea Artists used colors and shapes inspired by the Tibetan landscape to create their own modern style.⁹⁷ For example, Gyatso’s *Lhamo Latso* (1980s) (Figure 1) depicts mountains, a lake, and a dark sky using a modern linear technique. The Sweet Tea Association disbanded in the late 1980s, and in 1992, Gyatso moved to the refugee camp in Dharamsala, India, where traditional Tibetan language, religion, and painting has been preserved.

The contemporary artist movement continued with two significant events. First, the Amnye Machen Institute opened in Dharamsala in 1992, exhibiting a solo exhibition

⁹² Bangdel, 7-9.

⁹³ Clare Harris, *In the Image of Tibet* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 1999), 181.

⁹⁴ Sweet Tea House, “About the Gallery”; available from <http://www.sweetteahouse.co.uk/en/index.php?section=1>; Internet; accessed 13 November 2008.

⁹⁵ Currently the amount of Tibetans in Tibetan Autonomous Region is 2.6 million versus the 7 million Chinese.

⁹⁶ Ian Alsop, et al., “Contemporary Painting from Tibet,” *Visions From Tibet: A Brief Survey in Contemporary Painting* (London: Rossi + Rossi, 2005), 11.

⁹⁷ Clare Harris, et al., “Some Notes on “Tibetan Art”— Past and Present,” *Visions from Tibet: A Brief Survey in Contemporary Painting* (London: Rossi + Rossi, 2005), 9.

of Gyatso's work a year later. Second, in 2003, the Gedun Choepel Artists Guild formed in Lhasa during the centennial anniversary of the birth of modern Tibetan artist and nationalist revolutionary, Gedun Chöpel (1903-1951). Chöpel was inspired by European politics and by the work of modern Indian artist, Rabindranath Tagore.⁹⁸ Artists in this atelier bonded over, "[having] not been able to communicate with mainstream art culture in China because they are perceived by urban Han (Chinese) as pre-modern and peripheral."⁹⁹ The guild's mission was to contribute to the progress of contemporary art by creating works that respond to today's issues yet maintain a traditional element that reflects their unique cultural heritage.¹⁰⁰ The Gedun Choepel Guild thrived in Tibet as a popular gallery, but unfortunately, due to riots based around Sino-Tibetan politics in the spring of 2008, the atelier closed.¹⁰¹

Political censorship can be a hindrance for artists in Lhasa because they cannot overtly depict their opinions regarding Tibet's political relationship with other countries. Instead, artists must be subtle. For example, *Ice Buddha Sculpture NO. 1— Lhasa River* (Figure 2), an installation captured in photographs by Gade and Jason Sangster, was exhibited at the Red Gate Gallery in Beijing. The photographs depict an ice sculpture of Shakyamuni Buddha slowly disappearing into the Kyi Chu River with the Potala Palace in the background. Gade comments that this represents the circle of life, solidified elements returning to the earth as raw elements.¹⁰² The melting Buddha can be interpreted

⁹⁸ Harris, 1999, 214.

⁹⁹ Leigh Miller-Sangster, "Inside Out," *Lhasa — New Art from Tibet* (Beijing: Red Gate Gallery, 2007), 8.

¹⁰⁰ Asian Art.com; available from <http://www.asianart.com/gedun/about.html>; Internet; accessed 13 November 2008.

¹⁰¹ Jim Aplington, email interview by author, 17 February 2009.

¹⁰² Leigh Miller-Sangster, *Lhasa — New Art from Tibet* (Beijing: Red Gate Gallery, 2007), 8.

as representing the loss of Buddhist heritage in Tibet. The Potala Palace is stripped of being the home to the Dalai Lama and now is merely a building in the Tibetan landscape.

Tsering Nyandak's *Red Wall* (Figure 3) shows a child sitting on another child's shoulders attempting to see over a red brick wall that restricts a view of a vast landscape. The two children may symbolize the vulnerable minority status of Tibetans and the red wall represents the Chinese government who censors the children from seeing the outside world—the mountains. Gyatso, who lives in London, says that artists establish a self-censorship within their consciousness, “[T]he artists cannot say f-off to the communist party because they will get in trouble, hindering their chances to be in art shows . . . so they must find other ways to say that.”¹⁰³ Self-censorship enables artists to be creative in representing any sociopolitical commentary. Nortse and Gyatso, two senior artists, exemplify such creativity when exploring their personal and cultural complexities.

Since 2006, Nortse has drastically changed his style and subject matter. His earlier work addressed Tibet's violent past, as he explained:

In my work, I began to focus on the influence of the Cultural Revolution on Tibetan culture. . . . I wondered how the Tibetan people managed to survive decades of violent social change, and how these changes had affected the innermost being of each individual.¹⁰⁴

Nortse's *Red Sun* (2006) (Figure 4) places a broken fragment of a metal buddha on a bold red circle, alluding to the Tibetan Buddhists who suffered in a broken post-Cultural Revolution state of being. *Brief Moment* (2007) (Figure 5) shows a

¹⁰³ Gonkar Gyatso, interview by author, 19 June 2008, London, England.

¹⁰⁴ Fabio Rossi, *Consciousness and Form* (London: Rossi + Rossi, 2007), 1.

figure whose face is hidden with white bandages and has been hammered by nails in its inner body, illustrating the pain of the individual who is blind to his heritage.¹⁰⁵

His 2008 solo exhibition *Nortse: Self Portraits — The State of Imbalance* at the Rossi + Rossi Gallery, displayed an evolution in style. His works addressed issues such as global warming, underage drinking, pollution, and modernity. His signature bandages were composed of materials ranging from clean and bloody bandages to newspaper and Mickey Mouse facemasks. For example, *Group Photo* (2007) (Figure 6) depicts the three characters *Prayer Wheel*, *Big Brother* and *Auto Man* representing the past, present, and future of Tibet.

Prayer Wheel is a figure representing the past, who wears traditional clothes, holds a Buddhist prayer wheel and has a face bandaged with Buddhist mantras. *Big Brother* wears modern clothes, is bandaged with newspaper and holds a cell phone, alluding to the ubiquity of technology within the urban landscape of Lhasa. *Auto Man* has mylar bandaged around his torso, wears a futuristic mask, and holds a remote control. From *Prayer Wheel* to *Auto Man*, Nortse illustrates a cultural evolution from individual religious societies to a global community dependant on electronic technology. Shifting from focusing on the violent past to confronting global issues, Nortse inspires the viewer to look critically at the cultural and political complexities affecting the global community.

¹⁰⁵ *Consciousness and Form*.

While living in Tibet, Gyatso was inspired by politics, especially by the brutality of the Tiananmen Square Massacre. In response, Gyatso painted *Red Buddha* (1989) (Figure 7), a canvas soaked in red and black paint with a faceless buddha, representing the bloodshed and victims of the massacre. *Buddha and the White Lotus* (circa 1989) (Figure 8) shows a formless Buddha immersed in a dark canvas, exemplifying the “powerlessness of the Buddha whose teachings could not truly materialize in Chinese-run Tibet.”¹⁰⁶ Gyatso’s early works evoke intense emotions heavy with political messages about Tibet’s social and political state.

In 2003, Gyatso created a four-photograph series, *My Identity* (2003) (Figure 9 - 12), which he described as emancipating himself from his inner-struggles associated with his double consciousness. Gyatso admitted that his “identity” was a hindrance because he did not feel as though he belonged anywhere, nor did he have an understanding of Tibetan heritage to hold onto. As Clare Harris wrote, “The photographs must be read as a group, in which the artist’s biography is divided in four chapters revealing the interplay between multiple states of being.”¹⁰⁷ Gonkar bases this series as a visual trope of the famous photograph of Tsering Charles Suydam Cutting, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama’s thangka painter.¹⁰⁸

The photos show Gyatso in a seated position looking out to the viewer; however the walls, accoutrements, outfits, and even hairstyles differ depending on which identity is depicted. The first shows Gyatso dressed in traditional clothing, sitting as a traditional

¹⁰⁶ Harris, 1999, 189.

¹⁰⁷ Clare Harris, “The Buddha Goes Global,” *Association of Art Historians* 29, no. 4 (2006), 710.

¹⁰⁸ Harris, 2006, 711.

Tibetan thangka painter. The room is red and gold with an outline of blue vajras (a Buddhist attribute used during meditation), and his bowls of paint sit on top of an ornate cabinet. Interestingly, Gyatso was never a thangka painter. However, he felt this image allows him to express an affinity with a true “Tibetanness.”¹⁰⁹

The second photograph shows Gyatso as a Sinocized-Tibetan representing the time he worked for the Chinese government in Lhasa. He wears a communist Red Guard outfit with his canvas depicting the familiar bust of Mao. The cabinet is the bright communist red color, indicative of the Cultural Revolution ‘painting over’ Tibet with Chinese ideals.¹¹⁰ The third photo is of Gyatso as a Tibetan refugee in Dharamasala, painting an image of the Potala Palace and Dalai Lama. His materials are on a Bangla beer box and Gyatso has long flowing hair and is dressed in Indian clothes. The walls are corrugated tin, and his shelf is a piece of luggage embossed with a ‘free Tibet’ patch, emphasizing the impermanence of his time in Dharamasala.

The final image shows Gyatso as an artist in the West, specifically London, in a white room with light wood flooring, sitting in sneakers and jeans, with a tousled hairstyle. He is in front of a modern painting and uses an Ikea-like cabinet for his brushes. In each photograph, Gyatso confronts each major part of his past. By creating the photographs as a set Gyatso illustrates that he resonates with all four identities. This set was fundamental in his artistic development as it liberated him from the confusion over his identity.

¹⁰⁹ Harris, 2006, 710.

¹¹⁰ Harris, 2006, 711.

Since living in the West, Gyatso has aspired to be a messenger of international political and social events, noting that “it is difficult to not cross any lines at which point my work would be transformed from art to propaganda. I am like a sponge, absorbing information from all around the world. There are so many things happening in the world, Tibet is just one part.” Gyatso’s signature style delivers serious messages through a whimsical and universally recognized way—through stickers. *Buddha Shakyamuni* (Figure 13) shows the Buddha figure composed by a collage of stickers and written phrases. The background, which follows the strict formula of traditional thangka paintings, shows blocks of New York City—fusing east and West. The Buddha’s halo is created by an array of international fighter jets flying outwards, alluding to the world at war. As a communist truck drives down Broadway, Lisa Simpson speaks Chinese, and a Rugrat cartoon character rephrases a Buddhist Noble Truth, “desire is the source of all problems!!” Batman holds a flag saying, “Dear Allah, my mission is to spread a democracy.” This piece is engaging because of the stickers, text, and the contrast of the enlightened Buddha with elements of global violence. This work examines the issue of international warfare as the product of both greed and pride.

Gyatso is especially proud of his androgynous Buddha figures, filled with cultural symbols and pop icons. An untitled piece (not pictured) depicts a Buddha bust filled with Tibetan and Chinese-language characters, surrounded by the Chinese dragon and the Tibetan snow lion, representing both cultures existing together but separately. He says this piece reflects his past, having been both Tibetan and Chinese. “Gyatso’s Buddha

works mark a phase of acceptance and accommodation, where he can acknowledge the recent history of Tibet and what it has meant both personally and collectively.”¹¹¹

Nortse and Gyatso deal with personal issues and complexities with distinct styles. For Nortse, and some artists who live in Tibet, identity is no longer a source of insecurity, whereas some artists in exile deal with feelings of displacement. Instead, artists in Lhasa challenge the expected Tibetan stereotypes, propaganda, or romanticized art, while dealing with modern issues such as globalization and urbanization.¹¹²

The second half of this chapter will address how artists Tsewang Tashi, Tenzing Rigdol and Palden Weinreb use traditional Tibetan aspects in their art. Tashi lives in Lhasa and uses his art to battle the Shangri-La myth while focusing on the modernity of Tibet, whereas Palden Weinreb and Rigdol, who live in New York City, use their art as a platform to expose global audiences to new interpretations of Tibetan art.

Visions from Tibet reads,

Tashi uses his physical environment, real people and contemporary life as a source of inspiration. He avoids incorporating certain elements in his work that would perpetuate the myth of Tibet as Shangri-La and believes that contemporary art cannot be created when contemporary life is ignored.”¹¹³

After growing up in post-revolution Tibet and attending the Central University for Minorities in Beijing, Tashi became disillusioned with the ‘modernization’ of Tibet and

¹¹¹ Harris, 2006, 712.

¹¹² Heimsath, <http://www.asianart.com/articles/heimsath/index.html>.

¹¹³ *Visions from Tibet*.

“decided that the land itself was the only aspect of Tibet that was unchanging.”¹¹⁴ Tashi’s painting, *During the Season when Ice and Snow Melt* (1996) (Figure 14), depicts a Himalayan Mountain and river as large, natural, and beautiful.

[Tashi] has turned from drawing inspiration from the physical environment to photographic portraits of real people to work against and highlight the many competing interpretations of Tibet. These portraits of youths, in everyday city dress . . . create a powerful contrast to the typical image of Tibetans found in tourist souvenirs and advertisements.¹¹⁵

Tashi’s large scale digitally manipulated portraits use colors that are naturalized in Lhasa’s urban development, such as rich purple, neon blues, and bright yellows. Imposed on a white background, the subject looks stellar in composition with an aura of importance. Tashi was inspired by the memory of large posters of Chairman Mao and “desired to place ordinary Tibetans in a similar iconographic mode,”¹¹⁶ giving laypeople equal importance to what was bestowed upon Chairman Mao. The young man in *Untitled No. 3 2006* (Figure 15) has tousled hair, wears a small stud earring, and has an indifferent facial expression. Likewise *Untitled 2001* (Figure 16) shows his daughter wearing two hoop earrings, short hair, and a modern zipper jacket.¹¹⁷ Tashi’s subject matter confronts any Shangri-La romanticizations of Tibet by highlighting the individual personalities of everyday contemporary people.

¹¹⁴ Harris.

¹¹⁵ *Lhasa — New Art from Tibet*.

¹¹⁶ *Visions from Tibet*.

¹¹⁷ *Lhasa — New Art from Tibet*.

Whereas Tashi uses his art to challenge perceptions of Tibet, Rigdol is inspired by a fusion of Tibetan and Western ideas. “[Rigdol’s] work embraces tradition and modernity, complex visual imagery and the written word, poetry and music, and he is at ease with both his Tibetan heritage and Western culture in which he is immersed.”¹¹⁸

Rigdol was born in the Tibetan refugee community of Kathmandu, Nepal in 1982. Receiving his early education in Dharamsala and later attending University in Denver, Colorado, Rigdol admits that because he has never been to Tibet he has a slightly romanticized view of his heritage. He says, “It’s not like the Western concept of Shangri-La but rather an idea of a beautiful country that was ravaged during the Cultural Revolution.” Rigdol believes that Buddhist imagery is an essential, albeit inescapable, part of a Tibetan artist’s cultural identity.¹¹⁹

His work *Aes Dhammo Sanantano — Change is the Eternal Law* (2006) (Figure 17) incorporates his two inspirations, the West and the buddha figure. The buddha is filled with a collage of magazine clippings and scriptures, representing Rigdol’s fascination with religion, philosophy, and human conflicts. By using media that alludes to his heritage, yet is presented in a contemporary fashion, Rigdol “[provides] new contexts to discuss the issues of modernity in Contemporary Tibetan art.”¹²⁰

Compression/Blue/Deity (2005) (Figure 18) shows a sinister-like blue painting with bold words “Revolution,” “Big Bang,” and “Violence,” emitting from the canvas. The deity, whose face bursts through the chaotic scene could possibly be Mahakala or

¹¹⁸ Fabio Rossi and Francesce Gavin, *Experiment With Forms* (London: Rossi + Rossi, 2009), 5.

¹¹⁹ Tenzing Rigdol, interview by author, 8 November 2008.

¹²⁰ Bangdel.

Yama, (deities of death). Rigdol's compositions combine elements of Eastern and Western religion and philosophy:

Tradition is present but his method and stylistic slant are intensely modern . . . Rigdol's work almost has a pop feel with its primary colors and almost-slick approach. The artist, however, argues that he verges on being anti-pop. Instead of turning every-day imagery into something iconic he is turning the extraordinary and sacred into the ordinary and secular.¹²¹

Works by Tashi and Rigdol demonstrate that despite the subject matter, artists maintain Tibetan elements, be it Buddhist or contemporary subjects, in their work. Palden Weinreb, however, is different than other contemporary Tibetan artists because he was born and raised in New York City, is half-Tibetan, and does not seem to be inspired by Buddhism as his work is composed by abstracted lines. Weinreb receives much criticism for being included in the "Tibetan movement," and believes that critics should decide if they appreciate the work, rather than be concerned with his origin: "Besides, you do not want everyone to have the same story and style."¹²²

Spotted Range (2007) (Figure 19) displays five shell-like objects, formed by carefully drawn lines. Weinreb is interested in the creation of space assumed by the viewer's eye, noting that it is the meditative process within the work that assumes a connection to Tibetan Buddhism. Weinreb says, "I maintain a regimented mechanical process that generates tension between natural and modern systems of progression. This tension is a driving influence in my work."

¹²¹ *Experiment With Forms*, 7.

¹²² Palden Weinreb, interview by author, 10 November 2008, New York City, NY.

Labeling Weinreb a “contemporary Tibetan artist” broadens definition of what constitutes a “contemporary Tibetan artist.” He responds, “to be a part of the contemporary Tibetan art movement, you need only be three things: aesthetically similar to Tibetan artists, in Tibet, or Tibetan by descent.” The Gedun Choepel Guild claimed that ethnicity was never a criterion for inclusion. “What they see is an artificiality of the Western discourse to define contemporary Tibetan art, to make sense of the shifting negotiations of the collective identity.”¹²³ Modern traditionalists argue that labeling the contemporary artists as “Tibetan” is invalid because the artists inappropriately depict Buddhist icons out of context. To the traditionalists, this new movement is radical and the only true Tibetan artists are thangka painters.¹²⁴

This begs the question, is the label of “contemporary Tibetan,” as it is used today, appropriate? The label allows for artists to connect with one another, but as the Gedun Choepel Guild stated, the framework of this collective group of artists is constantly changing.¹²⁵ Gade said,

My generation has grown up with thangka painting, martial arts, Hollywood movies, Mickey Mouse, Rock-n-Roll, and McDonalds. We still don’t know where the spiritual homeland is — New York, Beijing or Lhasa. We wear jeans and T-shirts and when we drink a Budweiser it is only occasionally that we talk about “Buddhahood”.¹²⁶

¹²³ Bangdel.

¹²⁴ Private discussion with a modern traditionalist Artist in Residence at the Rubin Museum of Art.

¹²⁵ Additionally, the contemporary Tibetan label, and what associations it connotes, is problematic and needs to be revisited and redefined.

¹²⁶ Bangdel.

The label is important for distinguishing the artists, even though they are different from one another. However because the West has been fascinated with Tibetan culture for centuries, the artwork that has obvious Tibetan qualities tend to be the most marketable. Elements of Tibetan culture such as monks, yoga and Tantra have been commodified by the West.¹²⁷ Thus this label creates attention for artists. Weinreb, whose art is not visibly Tibetan, uses this group as a platform to increase his personal success.¹²⁸

Gyatso questions if his art would remain successful if it did not have visual references to Tibet.¹²⁹ Which leads to the question, would the art sell if it was removed of its label, if the West was not inextricably fascinated with Tibet, and if the artists did not use Buddhist icons? The art would remain successful because of the exploration of identity, cultural hybridity, and modernity that gives the art unique depth and emotion.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ For more information see Martin Brauen, *Dreamworld Tibet* (Trumbull: Weatherhill, Inc., 2000).

¹²⁸ Palden Wienreb.

¹²⁹ *Visions from Tibet*.

¹³⁰ *Waves on the Turquoise Lake: Contemporary Expressions of Tibetan Art* (University of Colorado at Boulder, 2006).

Conclusion

This thesis has focused on factors that have contributed to the success and recognition of contemporary Tibetan artists. Specific aspects discussed in this thesis are western fascination with Tibet, traditional art exhibitions that have exposed a wide audience to Tibetan culture, international dealers, the artists and their work.

The early missionaries, travelers, and Theosophists perpetuated exotic stereotypes about Tibet in the West which have continued through modernity. Such stereotypes affected museum exhibitions because the majority of early scholarship romanticized and exoticized Tibet. Exhibition catalogs since the 1990s, written by prolific and diverse scholars, have increased the quality and quantity of extant scholarship of traditional Tibetan art.

International dealers have been working together to market the artists and generate a global audience. Though contemporary Tibetan art has recently become popular, dealers are creating new exhibitions each year. The published exhibition catalogs contribute to the art historical scholarship as they include interviews, artist's statements, and scholarly essays.

The contemporary artists use their art as platforms to discuss various social, political, and personal issues that inspire their work. The aesthetics and concepts differentiate between artists, especially between those in diaspora and in Tibet. While some artists question identity and modernity, others fuse East with West and challenge stereotypes. It can be speculated that the Tibetan elements in the art aids the marketability because of the longstanding fascination that the West has had with Tibet. Though the

artists from diaspora and Tibet have recently gained international recognition, there is no certainty how the next few years will progress. However, most dealers, collectors, and artists believe that the movement will continually grow in popularity and success.

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Vita

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