

THE LION'S ROAR

TIBETAN TANGKAS FROM THE SAKYAS

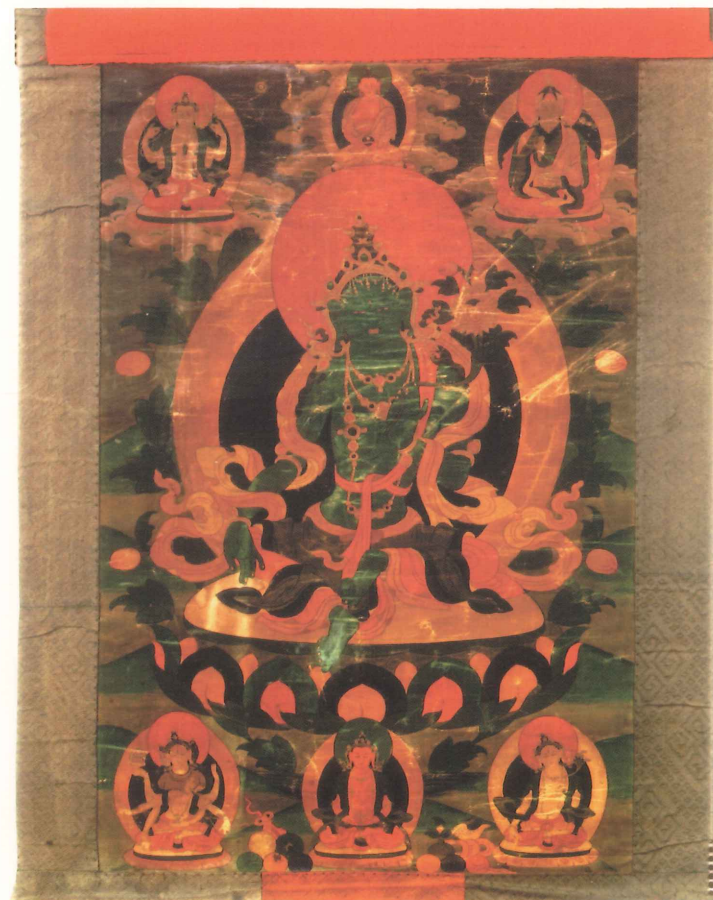
It is a special privilege to present this collection of tangkas from the Amdo region of Eastern Tibet, where His Holiness the Dalai Lama was born. The tangkas have been collected by Chog Dorje of the Sakya Order. The exhibition has been curated by Mark Levy, Professor of Art History at California State University, Hayward.

Visitors may remember that The Buddha himself was a member of the Sakya Clan. That name and that spirit have never died. What we see in this profoundly beautiful sacred art is the continuous flowering of a spiritual tradition that is 2500 years old. The purpose of this art is not for decoration or self-expression, but as visual aids on the meditative path toward Enlightenment. Enlightenment, according to the teachings, is a special state-of-mind that everyone can attain. It comes into being when the chains of selfishness are broken, and we move out of the dark, self-serving prison of the ego into the light of our full humanity. Then we become compassionate, spontaneous, fearless servants of the world, and every act is an act of love.

Visitors may find it strange that some images in these tangkas are tranquil, while some are horrific, as frightening as the shamanic animal spirits who lived in Tibet before Buddhism arrived. The symbolism of Tibetan Buddhism



Mahakala, Kham Style, 18th Century



Green Tara, Amdo Style, 18th Century

continues to include the dramatic images of this shamanic tradition. Each psychological experience has a specific purpose in this very precise meditative practice. Some are ready to swim in cool, quiet waters. Others need to work on internal obstacles best burned away by the power of flaming truth.

The experience radiating from a Peaceful Deity, such as Amitayus (who is Infinite Light) or Tara (who is Perfect Wisdom),

can stream as gently as a whisper. The experience emanating from a Wrathful Deity, such as Mahakala or Yamantaka, can flame as loudly as a lion's roar. Yamantaka is so powerful that he "defeats death," as the ancient story tells. More precisely, he can help us defeat our fear of death. Only ego is fearful. Once that fear is gone, we are free.

Lanier Graham, Director
University Art Gallery, CSUH



Yama, Amdo Style, 18th Century

"Arising in the 11th century and continuing today in Tibet and in exile, the Sakya order is known for its scholarly endeavors and administrative abilities. Like the other Tibetan orders, the Sakyas commissioned tangkas — paintings made of water-based pigments sized with animal glue on cotton cloth, paper and silk — depicting their teachers and lineage holders, their sacred diagrams or mandalas, and their Peaceful and Wrathful Deities. These images were used primarily as an aid to visualization during meditation practice.

"Among the Peaceful Deities, the Sakyas have enjoyed images of Tara, a goddess of compassion, and Ushnishavijaya, a goddess of long life. Of the Wrathful Deities, the Sakyas particularly have favored Mahakala whose ferocious energy they evoked during meditation to help remove spiritual obstacles. The exhibition also includes healing images of the Medicine Buddhas, and an image of the Wisdom Dakini Machig Labdron, a very potent and seldom depicted emanation of the Mother Goddess."

Dr. Mark Levy
Professor of Art History, CSUH



Ushnishavijaya, Amdo Style, 18th Century