



 **MAS**
MUSEUM
AAN DE
STROOM

BUDDHA

EXPO | & MIND

21.10.16 - 19.3.17



1. Lotus Model

Daan Roosegaarde (°1979)

Rotterdam, 2012

Smart foils, lamps, sensors, electronics, software and other media

Studio Roosegaarde

BUDDHA & MIND

In our hectic lives we seek peace and tranquillity more intensely than ever. Growing numbers of us are taking up yoga and meditation to prevent stress. In the East, people have been using these methods for centuries, and above all to attain a greater sense of reality. You too will be immersed in meditation with this unique series of Buddhist miniature paintings.

Buddha & Mind has been created around 54 paintings. Together these form a secret guide to a Tibetan Buddhist mediation ritual. Step-by-step they show what a practitioner builds up in his mind. In principle such a process is never depicted. These paintings were exceptionally made for the initiation of a Mongolian prince in the 18th century. They reveal a unique exchange between Chinese, Mongolian and Indo-Tibetan cultures.

The MAS acquired the paintings from Rafaël Verbois, a Belgian missionary in China. In 2014 the Rubin Museum in New York devoted an entire exhibition to this masterpiece.

VAJRAYANA BUDDHISM

Buddhism arose around 500 B.C. in India and spread all over Asia. One of the three main Buddhist movements is Vajrayana. The meditation depicted in the 54 paintings belongs to this current.

In Vajrayana Buddhism the lama or spiritual teacher takes a central position in the transmission of secret knowledge to initiated pupils or monks. They use highly symbolic ritual objects and practices: mantras (sacred words), mudras (hand gestures) and mandalas (depictions of the cosmos). This creates a fast path to enlightenment and nirvana.

Mahayana Buddhists, on the other hand, strive for enlightenment of all living beings. Wisdom and compassion lead to nirvana. This is reached thanks to Bodhisattvas, compassionate figures from heavenly abodes. Theravada Buddhists mainly seek their own nirvana through study and meditation.

Meditation allows Buddhists to become conscious of a higher reality, surpassing sensory perception. Such an insight leads to a state of bliss and liberation from the cycle of death and reincarnation.

FROM A MONGOLIAN MONASTERY TO ANTWERP

For years the Flemish missionary priest Rafaël Verbois worked in China. He was deeply interested in culture and he collected photos and objects. In 1977 these ended up in the collection of Antwerp's Ethnographic Museum, now the MAS.

Rafaël Verbois (1885-1979) set up a missionary post in Wangzimiao, in Inner Mongolia. This is now the Chinese provinces known as Hebei and Liaoning. In this region behind the Great Wall poor farmers lived and were plagued by looters. In former centuries it was a prosperous multicultural region, which was popular among Manchu emperors, and a hub of Tibetan Buddhism with its many temples and monasteries.

Verbois had a good relationship with the monks. In 1923 he was given the collection of miniature paintings by a monk from his cell in the monastery of Wangzimiao. Before he left for Tibet to continue his studies.

The monastery, which was founded in 1707 by Mongolian princes of the Aokhan Banner, was used as a family temple. They most probably commissioned the paintings. It is not clear how the paintings landed up in the cell of the monk.

UNUSUAL COLLECTION BELONGING TO A MISSIONARY

Father Verbois, who worked in China between 1910 and 1939, left many notebooks and sketches when he died. His interest in Tibetan Buddhism was quite uncommon for a missionary at the time. He also made a study of the status of women and Chinese wedding and burial traditions.

The Verbois collection includes around 300 items: traditional clothes, prints, photos and ritual objects. The many block prints and votive tablets in clay (tsa tsas), originating from local Buddhist monasteries, are quite remarkable. Religious people wear them as a talisman or give them as an offering in holy places.

2. Left:

- Two portrait photos of Rafaël Verbois, taken in 1923 and 1979
- Notebooks
- Photos (reproductions) of Jehol, the area where Verbois lived. There is a strong resemblance between the landscapes and buildings and those in the series of paintings.
- Lotus shoes, little shoes for bound feet

China 1910-1939

MAS, Antwerp (EVA Library, AZ/B.351,

AZ/B.352, AZ/BA.102; photos

AE.1977.0027.0036.D, AE.1977.0027.0039.D,

AE.1977.0036.0007.D, AE.1977.0036.0008.D,

AE.1977.0036.0025.D, AE.1977.0027.0048.D,

AE.1977.0027.0040.D, AE.1977.0027.0042.D,

AE.1977.0029.001, AE.1977.0029.0016,

AE.1977.0029.0018, AE.1977.0029.0019)



Right:

- Votive tablets in clay. The images depict protective deities and teachers from Vajrayana Buddhism. (photo)
- Amulet holder
- Printing blocks
- Prints made using wooden printing blocks: Tibetan texts and preceptors, a windhorse carrying away prayers, a teaching monk from the yellow hat sect, the god Mahakala

China 1910-1939

MAS, Antwerp (clay tablets AE.1977.0029.0063,

AE.1977.0029.0059, AE.1976.0023.0043,

AE.1957.0038.0002, AE.1977.0029.0064,

AE.1977.0029.0081, AE.1977.0029.0062,

AE.1977.0029.0071, AE.1977.0029.0070,

AE.1977.0029.0069, AE.1977.0029.0068,

AE.1977.0029.0072, AE.1976.0023.0048,

AE.1977.0029.0076, AE.1977.0029.0075,

AE.1976.0023.0051, AE.1977.0029.0056,

AE.1977.0029.0055, AE.1977.0029.0066,

AE.1977.0029.0067, AE.1976.0023.0049;

reliquary AE.1976.0009.0005; printing

plates AE.5817, AE.5816, AE.1977.0027.0014,

AE.1977.0027.0018; paper prints

AE.1976.0023.0273, AE.1976.0023.0259,

AE.1976.0023.0116, AE.1976.0023.0076,

AE.1976.0023.0080)

PICTURES FROM CHINA

Verbois' collection of black and white photos provides valuable evidence of daily life at his missionary post.

Most photos are printed on glass plates from Antwerp's former school museum. They were taken by priests from Scheut (Anderlecht) and were used in presentations about the missions given to schools. The pictures of China are clearly from the time of Verbois.

Glass plates are photo negatives that are printed on glass. The MAS owns 58 boxes, each containing ten glass plates.

3. Box of glass plates

AE.1961.0038.1-13



Rafaël Verbois in a lama's living room. A lama is a Tibetan Buddhist teacher.

Projection

AE.1961.0044.0004.D

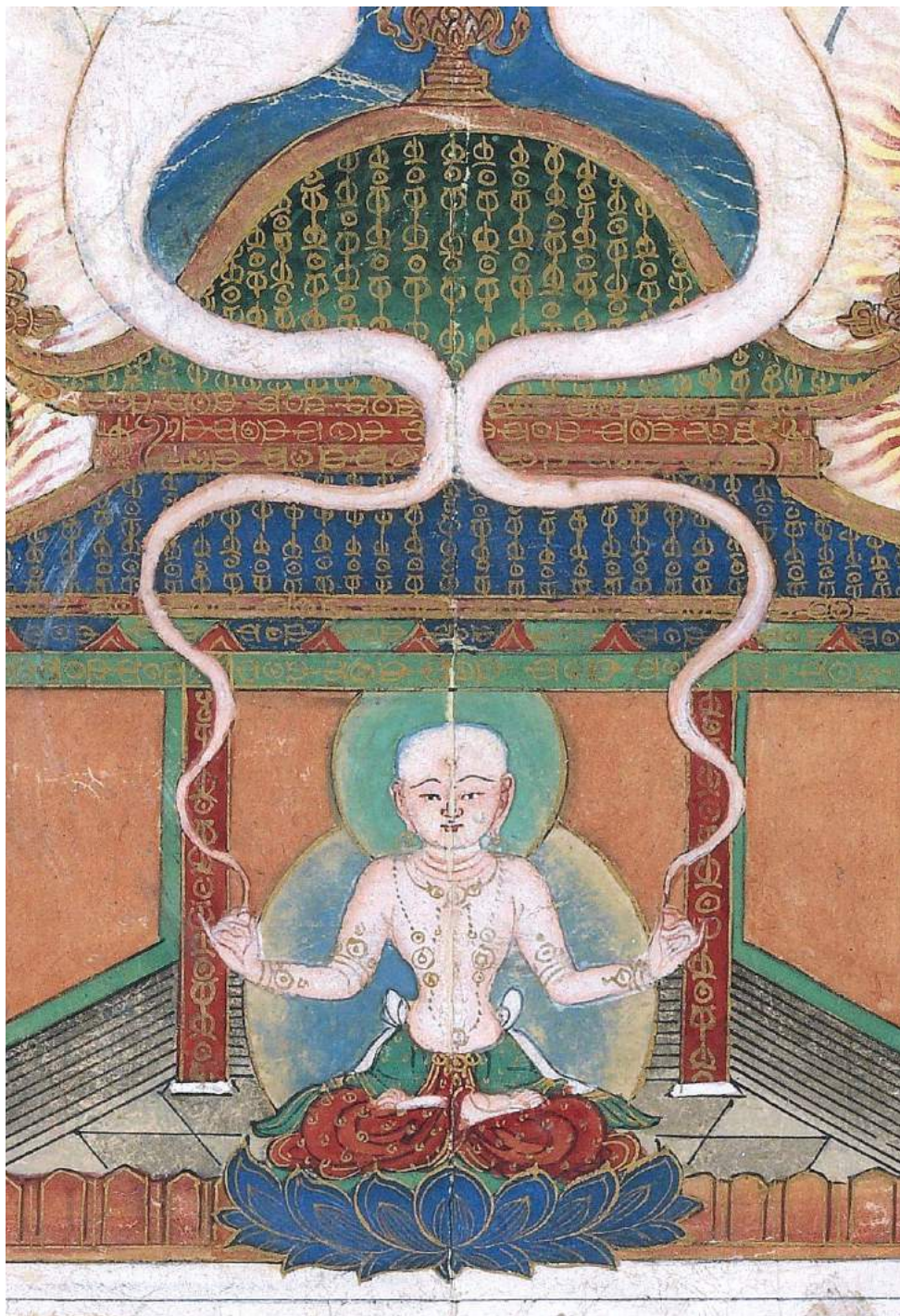
Print of glass plates

The missionary post in Jehol: village life, farming, wedding, burial, portraits

China 1910-1939

Acquired in 1961 from the 3rd directorate (of education) of the city of Antwerp
MAS, Antwerp





THE 54 PAINTINGS: AN IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE

The series of 54 paintings is unique. They reveal what goes on in the mind. The paintings were probably used to help a Mongolian prince with his meditation.

There is no title or text, but research indicates that they illustrate a ritual described in the Tantric text: *A Secret Guide to the Purification of All Bad Transmigrations*. This allows us to recognise the order and the six groups.

We see a visualisation exercise focused on the transcendent Buddha Sarvavid Vairocana. This is most commonly performed as a purification ritual after someone dies. In this kind of visualisation the imagination gives shape to the invisible reality. Normally such meditation may only be passed on verbally by a teacher to an advanced-level apprentice.

Its content is Tibetan-Buddhist, the style is Chinese and the cultural background is Mongolian. Such diversity is exceptional. Did the Mongolian prince place his order with a Chinese workshop, under the supervision of a Tibetan lama? The work is presumed to be made in the 18th century, but there are some references to an earlier date. This is probably a copy from the Qing era (1644-1911) of an older Ming original (1368-1644).

SARVAVID VAIROCANA, THE UNIVERSAL TRUTH

Vairocana is the central Buddha of the Five Heavenly Buddhas, but he also accumulates the characteristics of the other four. He presents the ether, the all-embracing light. His name means 'the radiant', the all-penetrating shining sunlight.

Vairocana is often shown with four faces. In this way he is able to see everything, and is therefore also known as 'Sarva-vid', the 'all-knowing'. He sits in a meditating position and holds a wheel. For Buddhists Sarvavid Vairocana embodies the universal truth.



4. Sarvavid Vairocana

Gilded bronze
Tibet, 15th century

Private collection

5. The Five Buddhas with Vairocana in the middle (photo)

Scroll painting (thangka)
Tibet, 19th century

Musée d'Ethnographie, Geneva, ETHAS 034487

6. The Five Buddhas with Akshobhya in the middle

Scroll painting (thangka)
Tibet, 19th century

Koninklijke Musea voor Kunst en Geschiedenis,
Brussels, VER.238

Akshobhya, featured with three heads and six arms, embraces his counterpart Sparshavajra. He is surrounded by the other four heavenly Buddhas. There are teachers depicted above them.

LAMA CROWN WITH FIVE BUDDHAS

During important rituals a Tibetan teaching monk (lama) wears a five-leaved crown showing the Five heavenly Buddhas as meditating princes. They illustrate the five abstract aspects of a single reality. These can only be perceived when meditating.

Each one stands for a Buddha family with its own colour, direction, natural element, symbol, hand position etc. From left to right: Ratnasambhava (yellow, south, earth, jewel), Akshobhya (blue, east, water, vajra or ritual sceptre), Vairocana (white, centre, ether, wheel), Amitabha (red, west, fire, lotus) and Amoghasiddhi (green, north, air, double vajra).

7. Lama Crown

Tibet

17th - 18th century

Cardboard and woven silk

MAS, Antwerp, AE.1977.0004.0001



THANGKAS: HELP WITH MEDITATION

Sometimes, to help them with meditation, Tibetan monks use thangkas, paintings in a silk frame that can be rolled up. These adorn the walls of temples and hang in domestic altars.

They represent a Buddhist deity or teacher. Or a mandala, the universe in the form of a palace. The center is occupied by a deity, a cosmic Buddha with whom the meditating person can identify. Step-by-step he builds up the mandala in his mind. Tibetan temples and monasteries often have a mandala as floor plan. Thangka's often show a lineage of teachers at the top and protective, wrathful deities at the bottom of the painting.



8. Mandala of Akshobhya (photo)

Scroll painting (thangka)

Tibet, mid-19th century

Koninklijke Musea voor Kunst en Geschiedenis,
Brussels, VER.344

The square is separated into four triangles, each with its own colour and four gates, symbolising the directions. These are surrounded by circles filled with flames of fire, vajras and lotuses. These prevent the uninitiated from entering.

9. Mandala of Sarvavid Vairocana

Scroll painting (thangka)

Tibet, 18th century

Private collection

I | PREPARATORY EXERCISES

The first nine paintings show how the main figure, a young monk, gets ready to meditate on Sarvavid Vairocana.

He first pays his respects to the ‘three jewels’: the Buddha, the teachings and the Buddhist community. He honours his teacher and promises to accomplish the exercise properly and to become enlightened.

He then carries out some preparatory activities: using ritual objects, reciting magical words (mantras), performing hand gestures (mudras) and making symbolic offerings.

The meditation starts with exercises such as: visualizing oneself as a deity, concentrating on the syllables of mantras, visualizing the symbolic attributes from the deity and radiating and absorbing rays of light.



I.1 | Honouring Buddha

The practitioner is standing below, in the center. He is wearing an Indian monastic robe with his right shoulder bare. The part featuring the teacher (right) is missing. He honours the seated Buddha (middle), a book (left) and a scroll painting (right) depicting Vairocana. These are symbols of Buddha's body, speech and mind.

The jewel trees, small tables and yellow-pink clouds are typical of 15th-century Chinese painting.

AE.1977.0026.6-54, folio 1



I.2 | Initiation request

The practitioner (lower left) asks the teacher (with yellow hat) to be initiated in the mandala of Sarvavid Vairocana. The palace featured in the background refers to the cosmic residence, the rays of light refer to Vairocana.

The monk's robes are Indian, the architecture is Chinese.

AE.1977.0026.10-54, folio 2



I.3 | Worship

The practitioner is seated outside, on a throne before a small table with ritual objects. He uses them and makes magical gestures with his hands. In doing so he focusses on the god Vajrasattva, the Buddha and the teacher, all of whom are visible in the sky above. This ritual is performed to purify himself of negative influences.

The blue-green landscape and the floating clouds are typical of the court paintings from the early Ming dynasty (1368-1644).

AE.1977.0026.23-54, folio 3



I.4 | Moon disk

The monk sits in meditation before a small table with ritual objects. He visualises a moon disk representative of ultimate reality. The disk emits light from which a blue lotus, a symbol of Vairocana, emerges. In the lotus is a vajra with the syllable Hum at its center. From this syllable comes forth rainbow light that reaches in all directions.

AE.1977.0026.12-54, folio 4



I.5 | Four concepts

The monk meditates on four concepts: emptiness, the primordial Buddha Vajrasattva, Vairocana and his mandala or representation of the cosmos. Respectively these are shown as a moon disk (top middle), a mantra (top right), the light of a rainbow (middle) and white palace steps (top left).

The mantra has been written by an expert in Tibetan calligraphy.

AE.1977.0026.38-54, folio 5



I.6 | World of thought

The practitioner attempts to visualise Sarvavid Vairocana. A river still separates him from the world he is trying to imagine. The Buddha statue and the golden rays of sunlight refer to the omniscience of Vairocana, his final goal.

The dramatic blue-green landscape contrasts with the simple white bridge printed in 19th century wood block style.

AE.1977.0026.8-54, folio 6



I.7 | Five Buddhas

The practitioner envisions the Five Buddhas: the white Vairocana, the blue Aksobhya, the yellow (shown here in white) Ratnasambhava, the red Amitabha and the green Amoghasiddhi. Together with their female counterparts they form a whole, enveloped by the clear light of the moon disk.

The gate and walled-in trees at top right suggest a royal garden, a reference to the outer wall of Vairocana's palace.

AE.1977.0026.24-54, folio 7



I.8 | Sunlight

The practitioner evokes the four-headed Sarvavid Vairocana and envisions him sitting in his mandala abode. The crown of light above the palace roofs represents the all-penetrating sunlight, like a halo for the deity that is making reality visible.

The style of the very fine jewels and almost transparent crown of Sarvavid Vairocana is Chinese, rather than Tibetan. This is also the case for the mass of scrolling clouds around the emerging palace.

AE.1977.0026.34-54, folio 8



I.9 | Offerings

The monk brings offerings that refer to the five senses and the eight auspicious symbols. He asks his Tibetan teacher (right, with a pointed hat and a yellow undergarment) to guide him further in his meditation. The ritual should bring enlightenment to all living beings.

AE.1977.0026.33-54, folio 9

II | THE VISUALISATION EXERCISE

The second group of seven paintings shows how, in his mind, the meditating person gradually builds up the mandala, the cosmic residence of Sarvavid Vairocana, like a palace. And how he gradually takes in the central position of this deity.

The meditation begins with calling to mind the god Trailok-yavijaya. By picturing his weapons and attributes, all physical and mental obstacles to the accomplishment of this visualisation are removed. He makes symbolic offerings, performs magical gestures and utters mystical syllables. With this practice he manifests the deities that live in the mandala, including Vairocana. They grant him blessings and depart to their abode of ultimate reality.

The meditating person is shown seated on a wooden throne. His face, shown in three-quarter profile in the first group of paintings, changes to a frontal view. He has assumed the characteristics of the forward-looking deity.



II.1 | Transformation

The practitioner envisions a lotus with the syllable hum on top. This penetrates his heart, after which he is transformed into the wrathful blue deity Trailok-yavijaya. He requests him to grant him extraordinary powers.

The god with many arms has a whole series of weapons. These are unusually magnified in the illustration. This demonstrates that the painting is made for someone who is not familiar with Tibetan tradition.

AE.1977.0026.13-54, folio 10



II.2 | Syllables

The practitioner is seated on a throne before a small table with ritual objects. He makes magical gestures with his hands and recites mantras. In each hand a syllable appears (left hum, right ah) and a circle with sixteen syllables from which light emanates. By pronouncing the syllables the palace of Vairocana comes into view.

The palace garden is strewn with jewels and the trees are decorated with ribbons.

AE.1977.0026.21-54, folio 11



II.3 | Hand gestures

The meditating person performs hand gestures (mudras) to manifest the buddhas Aksobhya (blue), Vairocana (white) and Amitabha (red). The magnification of the hand gestures is unusual and serves as a visual aid for the pupil.

AE.1977.0026.46-54, folio 12



II.4 | Palace

The practitioner has manifested the Five Buddhas. From left to right: Ratnasambhava (yellow-white), Aksobhya (blue), Vairocana (white), Amitabha (red), Amoghasiddhi (green). The palace symbolises the mandala, where they reside. The building is now almost complete.

The gate at the front and the roofs are painted in a typical Chinese style. The garden is illustrated quite realistically.

AE.1977.0026.47-54, folio 13

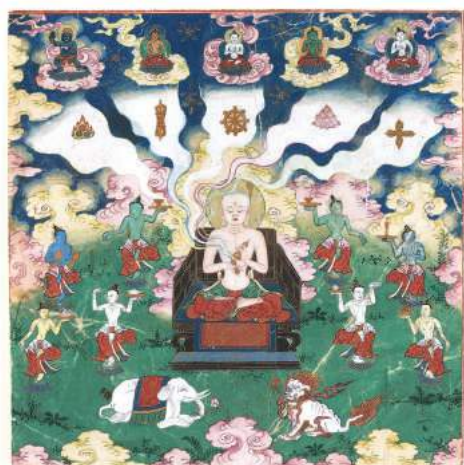


II.5 | Special power

The practitioner envisions the Five Buddhas emanating their respective symbols: a three-part jewel, a vajra or ritual sceptre, a wheel, a lotus, a double vajra. By viewing them he absorbs their special powers. Then, in his mind, he builds up the fence made of vajras demarcating the boundaries of the mandala.

The lacquered throne and little blue Chinese shoes are noteworthy.

AE.1977.0026.48-54, folio 14



II.6 | Eight goddesses

The practitioner holds a vajra and bell, the two most important ritual objects. In his mind he imagines the eight goddesses bringing offerings. Experts will notice from the order of the figures and objects above his head that the artist was unfamiliar with Tibetan Buddhist iconography.

The style of painting, such as the main character's flat head, is typical of the Qing era (1644-1911). Note the elephant, Vairocana's vehicle and the lion, which is linked to the historic Buddha Shakyamuni. The goddesses on their lotus pedestal are may have been copied from sculpture.

AE.1977.0026.49-54, folio 15



II.7 | Devotion

Following the visualisations and ritual practices the practitioner once again recollects the Five Buddhas, asking them to return to their residence. The depiction of the deity Vajrasattva, and the teacher at his both sides are symbolic of his devotion to the Buddhist teachings and practices.

The bare shoulder indicates that the teacher is Indian.

AE.1977.0026.45-54, folio 16

POWERFUL INSTRUMENTS

In their meditation Tibetan monks use symbolic, powerful ritual implements. The most important of these are the vajra and the bell. The vajra, a metal sceptre, represents the male, active aspect removing all obstacles. It is the method and the path to enlightenment. The hand bell is the female aspect, the goal that is wisdom. Together, they help to attain compassion, insight and enlightenment: the way and the goal become one.

Objects of human bone or skulls refer to transience and death. These offer a chance for a new and better spiritual life.

10. Ritual implements:

- vajra: ritual sceptre, thunderbolt, lightning. Literally 'diamond', the greatest, indestructible, all-penetrating power of the universe. (photo)
- ghanta: hand bell
- phurba: ritual dagger
- shanka: conch
- kapala: skull cup
- damaru; hand drum made with two halves of a skull, covered with stretched animal skin
- kangling: ritual trumpet made of human thigh bone
- akshamala: prayer beads with 108 beads made of human bone
- vishvavajra: crossed vajra
- cymbals

China, Tibet, 19th-20th century

MAS, Antwerp (AE.1957.0027.0016, AE.1957.0027.0015, AE.1960.0013.0001, AE.1973.0016.0007, AE.1974.0046.0001, AE.1960.0013.0002, AE.1993.0017.0015, AE.1976.0044, MAS.0089.004, MAS.0089.005)

Ritual table

Nepal, 20th century

Tibetan Institute Karma Sonam Gyamtso Ling, Schoten



III | IMAGINING ONESELF AS THE DEITY

The third group, consisting of thirteen paintings, shows the visualisation and ritual in which the practitioner transforms himself into the deity Sarvavid Vairocana in order to acquire his qualities.

The meditating person sits on a blue lotus, in the middle of an ocean. This is a metaphor for samsara, the ocean of life: the endless cycle of suffering, death and birth. He contemplates on Vairocana, identifying with him by reciting mantras. In this form he spiritually purifies all realms of existence.

The practitioner then manifests the Five Buddhas and establishes a fence made of vajra's, ritual scepters, around the mandala. He then meditates on emptiness – the ultimate nature of reality – represented by a moon disk. He perceives the outside and inside of the palace and places himself in the middle of it, just like Sarvavid Vairocana.

Rainbow coloured light rays emanate from his head and penetrate all realms. The sound of his mantra must liberate all living beings from unfortunate rebirths.



III.1 | Mantra sounds

In his mind the meditating person honours the four-headed Sarvavid Vairocana above him by reciting a mantra that is dedicated to him. Chinese and Tibetan instruments in the sky echo its sound. From left to right: mouth organ, frame with chimes, hand drums, cymbals, white conch, flute, wooden clapper.

In the ocean we see Chinese water creatures, like the hairy crab. The clam with a pearl offering and the turtle with a coral branch are Taoistic symbols. The tiger and dragon represent the Chinese yin and yang principle.

AE.1977.0026.35-54, folio 17



III.2 | Palaces of light

The sound of the mantra for Sarvavid Vairocana penetrates the entire world. The words are written in Tibetan calligraphy, in circles with a single centre. The recitation makes certain parts of his residence appear, in the form of palaces emitting light.

At the bottom the Taoistic dragon king shows his respect towards the practitioner. To the left a turtle holds a coral offering and a clam holds a pearl offering. The waves of water are represented in a stylised manner with white-edged curls.

AE.1977.0026.39-54, schilderling 18

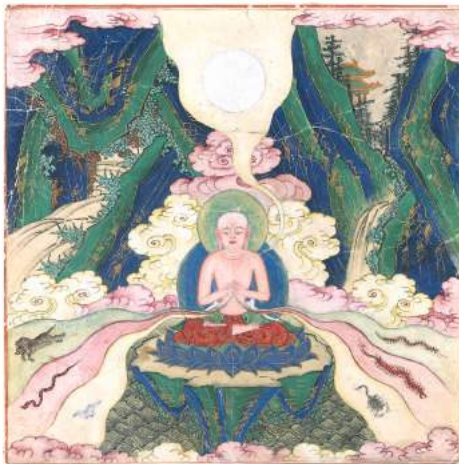


III.3 | Transformation

The practitioner imagines himself transformed into Vairocana, adorned with jewels and seated on a blue lotus. He contemplates the nature of existence and the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni (above his head). He recollects the Buddha's first disciples and all those who have attained liberation.

The style is particularly Chinese, 19th century: the flat head, the yellow, pink and even green curling clouds, the Taoistic figures.

AE.1977.0026.51-54, folio 19



III.4 | Vices

To reach enlightenment the practitioner needs to eliminate the three vices that lead to the endless cycle of reincarnations. These are symbolised by three animals: pig (ignorance), snake (hatred) and rooster (desire). The insects represent additional factors that prevent the full realization of enlightenment. The full emerging from the heart of the meditator signifies the understanding of the nature of reality, beyond all obstacles.

A palace roof (top right) and a cave (left) nestle in the blue-green landscape. These suggest a secret access to a hidden world.

AE.1977.0026.18-54, folio 20



III.5 | Purification of karma

The negative karma that stands in the way of enlightenment is purified through the visualisation of the wrathful deity Trailokyavijaya. The practitioner recites his mantras, shown here in concentric circles, and written in Tibetan calligraphy.

The crossed vajras and Images of palaces indicate that the outer mandala has been established.

AE.1977.0026.14-54, folio 21



III.6 | Demons

The white moon disk on the blue lotus symbolizes a contemplation on the nature of reality. From this emerges the wrathful deity Vajrapani, who chases all demons and disruptive elements to the outer periphery of the mandala.

The lotus leaves are similar to those found in Chinese woodblock prints. The spirits with flaming hair are a classic feature of tormented souls in depictions of the Chinese hell realm.

AE.1977.0026.19-54, folio 22



III.7 | United

The practitioners visualises the Five Buddhas and their female counterparts. He performs specific mudras (hand gestures) and envisions them consorting and becoming one. He meditates on their nature which is pure light, shown here as a full moon disk containing the two groups of gods.

The flowers and plants are particularly stylised, which is typical of paintings from the Ming era (1368-1644).

AE.1977.0026.23-54, folio 23



III.8 | Rainbow light

The practitioner emanates rainbow light in all directions, like a kaleidoscope. In his mind he builds the fence around the mandala of Sarvavid Vairocana. The outer ring of the fence is made of crossed vajras, whereas the inner ring consists of regular vajras.

AE.1977.0026.36-54, folio 24



III.9 | Knowledge of reality

In his mind practitioner constructs the vajra tent, a pavilion of vajras, or ritual sceptres. Two streams of light emerge from his hands and come together above his head in one cloud of light. These are two ways leading to knowledge of reality. The earth strewn with gems symbolizes the ground of the mandala.

AE.1977.0026.11-54, folio 25



III.10 | Moon

The mandala is shown finally complete, in the form of palaces emitting light. The central palace, in which the full moon disk is depicted, represents the inner mandala where Sarvavid Vairocana resides.

The architecture is very schematic, without decorative elements.

AE.1977.0026.30-54, folio 26



III.11 | Sarvavid Vairocana

The four-headed Sarvavid Vairocana is seated on a blue lotus in a meditating position. Vajrasattva and his female counterpart sit beside him. The practitioner himself is the central deity, with whom he has identified. The palaces with radiating light refer to sections of the mandala. The white moon disk represents the ultimate reality.

Sarvavid Vairocana is shown in Indo-Tibetan style: with a white skin and jewelry with inset precious stones. Below, six Chinese heavenly officials make obeisance.

AE.1977.0026.31-54, folio 27



III.12 | A focus on reality

Sarvavid Vairocana, surrounded by gods and guardians, emanates rays of light in all directions outside of his palace. They reach all realms and illuminate all aspects of reality.

The paintings are clearly made by different artists, the product of a workshop. The head and jewellery are totally different to those in the previous painting. The figures at the bottom are Taoistic, and a lion and a dragon represent the principle of yin and yang.

AE.1977.0026.32-54, folio 28



III.13 | Hell

The light rays together with the sound of the mantra of Sarvavid Vairocana, reach the hell realm and free all beings from that unfortunate state of existence.

At the bottom the gates of hell are flanked by a bull-headed and a horse-headed guard. This is similar to popular Chinese depictions of hell.

AE.1977.0026.40-54, folio 29

11. Vairocana

Tibet

14th century

Bronze, silver, copper, turquoise
(moulded, cold gilded)

Wereldmuseum, Rotterdam, 74428

12. Buddha Shakyamuni, the historic Buddha (photo)

Tibet

Second half of the 18th century

Copper alloy

MAS, Antwerp, AE.2002.0002.0009

13. The four heads of Sarvavid Vairocana

Nepal

20th century

Brass

MAS, Antwerp, AE.1979.0031



SADAKSARI LOKESHVARA

This is a representation of the bodhisattva or Buddha-in-the-making Avalokiteshvara. He is the tutelary deity of Tibetan lamas (teaching masters). The Dalai lama is his incarnation.

The best-known mantra in Tibet is dedicated to him and has six (sad) syllables (aksari): om-ma-ni-pad-me-hum, 'Om, the jewel in the lotus, hum'. Worshippers repeat this mantra for good karma and monks recite it during meditation to reach a deeper level of consciousness.

In one hand he holds prayer beads and in the other a lotus, the symbol of purity. The cintamani jewel in front of his chest makes every wish come true.

14. Sadaksari Lokeshvara

India, Bengal

1911

Beaten copper plate

MAS, Antwerp, AE.1957.0025.0006

15. Vajrasattva

Tibet, Newari style

15th century

Bronze

Private collection

The primordial Buddha from which the Five heavenly Buddhas emanate. He holds a vajra and a bell, symbolic ritual instruments leading to enlightenment.

16. Krodha Vajrapani, guardian of the secret

Tantric teachings (photo)

Nepal

18th century

Copper alloy

MAS, Antwerp, AE.2002.0002.0014

Wrathful deities are originally evil demons from the pre-Buddhist Bon religion in Tibet. In Buddhism they guard the teachings and help to attain the highest level of consciousness.



17. The new-born Buddha Shakyamuni

China

20th century

Bronze

MAS, Antwerp, AE.1957.0011.0003

18. Yidam in an ecstatic embrace

Tibet

19th century

Copper alloy

MAS, Antwerp, AE.2002.0002.0026

Yidams help monks to overcome their deficiencies and transform them into wisdom. They are often shown in sexual union (yab-yum), symbolising the dissolution of all opposites.



19. Namasangiti, the embodiment of Wisdom

Nepal

20th century

Copper alloy

MAS, Antwerp, AE.2002.0002.0022

Using his thousand arms Namasangiti helps all people to reach enlightenment. The hands raised above the head make the gesture of the highest enlightenment.

IV | CONTEMPLATING THE LIFE OF BUDDHA

Having established himself as Vairocana, the practitioner contemplates the life of Buddha Shakyamuni, the Buddha from our world era.

This fourth group of nine paintings depicts well-known episodes from the Buddha's life. They are different to the Indo-Tibetan tradition. The framework is for example entirely Chinese. The moment of 'enlightenment', attaining supreme consciousness, is represented in two ways: first according to the Indian Buddhist tradition and then according to the Tantric tradition.

After attaining enlightenment the Buddha or 'The awakened one' is depicted with eighty characteristic marks. In Vajrayana Buddhism, enlightenment originates from the intuitive understanding that all which is palpable is perpetually changing and therefore mere illusion. Only emptiness exists eternally. This is the ultimate nature of reality. The emptiness is symbolized by a white full moon disk.



IV.1 | The mother's dream

Siddharta Gautama, the later Buddha, is shown descending to the human world, on the back of a white elephant. This occurs in a dream of queen Maya, his future mother.

The setting of this representation is Chinese. Both the perspective used in drawing the steps and the lines applied to depict the roof tiles are very mechanical. According to Tibetan tradition no one sits on the white elephant.

AE.1977.0026.1-54, folio 30



IV.2 | A superhuman baby

Siddharta Gautama is born from the right side of his mother while she holds onto the branch of a tree in a park. He is shown here as a baby who is pointing upwards, proclaiming that he is superhuman. A lotus springs up at every step he takes.

Maya is dressed as a Chinese queen. The young prince wears a loincloth and is bathed by Chinese dragons. This is different to the Indo-Tibetan tradition.

AE.1977.0026.2-54, folio 31



IV.3 | Educating the prince

The young Siddhartha, shown here as a Chinese prince, grows up in the palace and learns to read and write, ride horses and shoot with a bow. His parents are shown in the pavilion to the left.

The palace architecture and court are also Chinese.

AE.1977.0026.3-54, folio 32



IV.4 | The four encounters

Siddhartha Gautama ventures outside the palace and is confronted by an old man, a sick man, a corpse and an ascetic. These are the famous four encounters.

Siddhartha leaves the city gate (top right), mounted on a white horse. His entourage is entirely Chinese. Even the ascetic (top left) is depicted as a Chinese monk in a wide-sleeved tunic.

AE.1977.0026.4-54, folio 33



IV.5 | The enlightenment

The Buddha follows the ascetic's example and leaves the palace. Gods carry his horse so as not to waken the sleeping court. Outside the palace wall he cuts off his hair (top left), known as the act of renunciation. After years of seclusion and meditation he attains enlightenment (bottom left).

The Buddha is presented in a halo of light, still as a monk and not with his characteristic marks, such as a cranial protuberance, elongated earlobes, etc.

AE.1977.0026.5-54, folio 34



IV.6 | Miracles

The Buddha performs three miracles: he tames a mad elephant, converts five non-believers and predicts the imminent death of a monkey that is serving him honey.

The hairline of the seated Buddha is typically Chinese and the non-believers are shown as two Taoist immortals and three Confucian sages.

AE.1977.0026.50-54, folio 35



IV.7 | The ultimate reality

According to Tantric tradition, this painting depicts complete enlightenment. The ultimate reality is symbolised by a full moon disk, on top of an enthroned blue lotus. Along with the rainbow-coloured light emanating from it, this represents Vairocana. The Buddhas of the Three Times and the Ten Directions are seated on clouds above.

The six-cornered throne and the two guardians are typical of the Ming and Qing era.

AE.1977.0026.52-54, folio 36



IV.8 | The enlightened Buddha

This is the enlightened Buddha, with long earlobes and cranial protuberance. He preaches to disciples, gods, bodhisattvas and guardians. Two rays of light with books emerge, symbolizing his teachings. From his head two rays of light emerge, showing a teacher and a moon disk representing ultimate reality. Both are essential for his meditation.

Here Tibetan, Indian and Chinese conventions are combined.

AE.1977.0026.7-54, folio 37



IV.9 | Buddha's death and liberation

In the centre there is a burial monument (stupa), symbolising Buddha's death and parinirvana, the liberation from the cycle of reincarnation. In the rays of light the Five transcendent Buddhas appear. They represent all the aspects of the primordial Buddha or ultimate reality.

This stupa is typical of the Himalayan region. The three monks in front of it are from the Tibetan Gelug or order of the Yellow hat, but their red tunics with blue belts are Mongolian and the shape of their hats is unusual. The others wear the wide-sleeved robes of Chinese monks.

AE.1977.0026.9-54, folio 38

20. Reliquary in the shape of a stupa (photo)

Tibet
19th century
Brass, pearl, turquoise

MAS, Antwerp, AE.2002.0002.0027

A stupa is a burial monument that symbolises Buddha's death and nirvana. The form refers to the structure of the cosmos.

21. Tsongkhapa, the great reformer

Tibet
18th century
Copper alloy

MAS, Antwerp, AE.2002.0002.0010

Founder of a new Buddhist order in Tibet in the 14th century: the Gelug-pa or Yellow Hat sect.



22. Hat belonging to a lama (photo)

Nepal or Tibet

20th century

Corduroy

MAS, Antwerp, AE.1973.0015.0001

23. Monk's shirt

East Mongolia

Ca. 1920

Cotton

MAS, Antwerp, AE.1976.0023.0059

24. Pouch with vajra and bell

Nepal or Tibet

19th century

Bronze, wood, textile

MAS, Antwerp, AE.1993.0017.0016

During Tantric rituals monks hold the vajra in the right hand and the bell in the left hand.

**PAINTING WITH SAND**

Making a sand mandala is a form of meditation. For days monks work together to 'paint' with coloured grains of sand. They start the day with special prayers and concentrate hard on their work. The energy that they use in doing so has a positive influence on their environment.

When the mandala, a graphic symbol of the universe, usually in the form of a circle and closing a square, is ready, it is destroyed and the sand is thrown into a river. This is an exercise in the realisation that everything is transient. This shall be the case in the MAS at the end of the exhibition.

25. The mandala of Sarvavid Vairocana

Monks from the Tibetan Institute of Huy and Paris

Antwerp, 2016

**Time Lapse****Animated film**

Visualisation of Vairocana

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

V | VISUALIZING THE DEITY IN FRONT OF ONESELF

This fifth group of seven paintings shows another visualisation. Now the practitioner identifies with Vajrasattva and he envisions the deity Vairocana in front of him.

The primordial Buddha Vajrasattva has a purifying effect on minds that are clouded with ignorance and a negative karma. He removes all obstacles on the path to enlightenment.

The gods in Vairocana's entourage appear once again. Sarvavid Vairocana blesses the meditator and sends rays of light to all realms of existence. This purifies all living beings and liberates them from unfortunate rebirths.



V.1 | Magical syllable

The meditator proceeds with purification rituals, sitting on a reed mat. He recites the mantra of Vajrasattva and this deity then emerges in a ray of light from the magic syllable hum.

The Chinese boat on the left below is probably a metaphor for the journey to a desired place or goal, in this case the completion of the meditation practice. The white stupa next to a Chinese pavilion refers to the famous pilgrimage site Wutaishan in the Chinese province of Shanxi.

AE.1977.0026.26-54, folio 39



V.2 | The emblems of the Five Buddhas

The practitioner has imagined himself as Vajrasattva. He uses the vajra and bell and in doing so calls to mind the emblems of the Five Buddhas: the wheel represents Vairocana, the vajra Aksobhya, the jewel Ratnasambhava, the lotus Amitabha and the crossed vajra Amoghasiddhi.

Once again the white stupa appears at the left of the blue-green stylised landscape. The hungry ghosts (bottom left) are an example of an unfortunate rebirth.

AE.1977.0026.27-54, folio 40



V.3 | Light

The practitioner envisions that a light emanates from his heart and manifests the seed syllables hum, ah, and pam. From these emerges a golden vajra. This emanates multicoloured light that invites the deity to manifest.

It is common for birch bark and pine needles to be shown in detail in such a typical Chinese landscape.

AE.1977.0026.43-54, folio 41



V.4 | All-knowing

The practitioner invites the deity to appear before him. The all-knowing Vairocana, white in colour and with four faces, is seated in meditation on a throne. He has emerged from the syllables in the middle of the vajra.

Although the composition is different, we still recognise all the elements in the landscape: the secret passage between the blue-green mountains, the river of life with a bridge, the wishing tree and the white stupa.

AE.1977.0026.37-54, folio 42



V.5 | Gods from the mandala

The practitioner performs special hand gestures and recites mantras, leading to the appearance of gods that occupy the mandala. Here the section where the green Amoghasiddhi presides is manifested. At his side Aksobhya appears in blue, Vajrasattva in white and Vairocana to his right with the wheel.

Little white dots can be seen in the landscape. They represent the rocks texture and are typical of the Qing era.

AE.1977.0026.16-54, folio 43



V.6 | Beams of light

Emerging from the fingertips of the practitioner are rays of light with the syllables om, hum, tram, hrih and ah. They are transformed into the Five Buddhas and their counterparts. This time these are not of opposite sexes, as traditionally depicted in Tibetan paintings.

The golden shower of flowers is often featured in Buddhist paintings from the Ming era (1368-1644).

AE.1977.0026.22-54, folio 44



V.7 | Liberation

The practitioner contemplates Vairocana and envisions how light rays emanating from his four heads, reach all dimensions. They illuminate, purify, and free living beings from falling into unfortunate rebirths.

The tiger (left) and the dragon (right) symbolise the principle of yin and yang. Taoistic gods, a Chinese sage wearing a black cap and an Indian monk dressed in red also come to pay their respects.

AE.1977.0026.29-54, folio 45

VI | RITUAL FOR THE DECEASED AND CONCLUDING RITES

In the sixth and last group, of nine paintings, the meditating person is sitting in front of the southern gate of the mandala palace of Sarvavid Vairocana. In a death ritual the body of the deceased, their garment, or a board with a written name is placed on a platform at this gate.

The practitioner performs visualizations and meditates on Vajrasattva, the purification deity. He repeats verses, brings symbolic offerings, uses ritual implements and calls to mind the symbols of the Five Buddhas. These actions invite wrathful deities and the four gatekeepers who corral them.

With the recitation of the mantras of Vairocana and Vajrasattva the the meditator imagines himself purifying the negative karma of the deceased. A ray of light emitting from Vairocana's hands purifies the hell realm and frees all living beings from unfortunate rebirths. A thanksgiving feast completes the ritual.



VI.1 | Entrance to the mandala

The practitioner is seated on a reed mat at the southern entrance of the mandala, shown here as a pavilion with a separate gate. He visualises a lotus from which a golden vajra arises. From the syllable hum emerge both light and the god Vajrasattva.

A second ray of light invokes the other deities of the mandala. They send the meditator blessings and purifying radiance.

AE.1977.0026.25-54, folio 46



VI.2 | Offerings

The practitioner is seated on a rock in a lotus pool. He holds the vajra and bell, and recites mantras that manifest Vajrasattva and ritual offerings, such as a vase, a jewel and a banner. These are used to purify the deceased's negative karma.

AE.1977.0026.28-54, folio 47



VI.3 | Cleansing rituals

The practitioner holds the vajra and bell and manifests various attributes from the Five Buddhas using verses and hand gestures. On behalf of the deceased he performs rituals that prevent him from falling into unfortunate realms of existence.

AE.1977.0026.20-54, folio 48



VI.4 | Wrathful deities

The practitioner invites wrathful deities and urges them to remove the last obstacles that might prevent a good future existence. The large number of weapons and ritual objects equal the number of hands that the two six-armed deities possess.

In between them stands Hayagriva, recognisable by the green horse head in his hair. At the bottom a red dragon winds around the rocky throne.

AE.1977.0026.17-54, folio 49



VI.5 | Rest

The practitioner praises all the deities of the mandala, including the four gate-keepers. He pacifies the wrathful deities and removes obstacles causing bad rebirths for the deceased.

Down below, the waves of water from the primordial ocean are delicately painted with a white edge of foam.

AE.1977.0026.15-54, folio 50



VI.6 | Purification

By repeating the mantra that is dedicated to Sarvavid Vairocana and Vajrasattva many times, the practitioner purifies the deceased of all the negative karma accumulated during his life. This guarantees him a better existence in the next life.

The mantras are written in Tibetan calligraphy, in circles with a common centre. This is the work of a specialist from one of the monasteries in the north-east of Tibet, with whom Mongolia maintained good relations.

AE.1977.0026.42-54, folio 51



VI.7 | Mantras for a pure mind

With multiple recitations of the mantra of Vajrasattva the Practitioner purifies the mental obscurations of the deceased. This also exonerates any mistakes he might have made while performing the ritual.

Vajrasattva's green scarf is not depicted in the traditional Tibetan way, but instead is draped in the Chinese manner.

AE.1977.0026.44-54, folio 52



VI.8 | Liberation

The practitioner visualises how not only the deceased but all living beings are freed from the hell realm and unfortunate rebirths. This is thanks to the ritual that he has performed.

A ray of light emitting from Buddha's hand flows through the gate of hell and liberates all those present. The god of death Yama appears above the gate, protected by two guards. On the right a girl with long sleeves performs a dance to flute music.

AE.1977.0026.41-54, folio 53



VI.9 | Thanksgiving

A Thanksgiving feast completes the ritual. The eight Taoistic immortals bring offerings, musical instruments fill the sky with music.

In three flaming halos three deities are shown: Mahakala, Vairocana and Vajrasattva. They are very popular in Mongolia.

AE.1977.0026.54-54, folio 54

Sarvavid Vairocana mandala
Wangzimiao, Inner Mongolia
18th-19th century
Gouache on paper

MAS, Antwerp, AE.1977.0026.1-54

26. Vairocana

Bihar, India
10th-11th century, Pala style
Granite

Private collection

TEMPLE ALTAR

An altar such as this one stands at the front of every Tibetan temple. The size can vary. There's a thangka hanging in the middle. On the shelves in front: bronze images, figures made of dough (torma), candles and cups with offerings. In the compartments on the side the sacred texts of the Kanjur and the Tanjur, the Tibetan translation of the Buddhist teachings are visible. The long, printed folio's are wrapped in cloth, chapter by chapter.

The plinth is painted with symbols of the five senses: fruit (taste), incense pot (smell), mirror (sight), flute (hearing), cloth (touch).

27. Middle

- Amitabha's paradise (thangka)
Tibet, 20th century
AE.1959.0026
- Amitayus, heavenly Buddha
Nepal, 20th century
AE.1957.0029.0012
- Buddha Shakyamuni, the historic Buddha
Mongolia, 20th century
AE.1957.0026.0001
- Sitatara, female bodhisattva
Tibet, 20th century
AE.1960.0048.0008

This home altar was made by monks from the Tibetan Institute in Schoten to mark the opening of Antwerp's Ethnographic Museum in 1988.

MAS, Antwerp, AE.1988.0011.0024, AE.1988.0011.0001 to 0023, AE.2009.0129.0001 to 0002, AE.2009.0130.0001 to 0011

CHINESE BURIAL RITES

Three main philosophies were present in ancient China: Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. These are often united, particularly in burial rituals. This is also demonstrated by the series of paintings. The illustrated purification ritual for the deceased is Buddhist, however in the background we see Taoistic immortals and Confucianist dignitaries.

Some of the aesthetic characteristics refer to the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). In those days burial rituals were very elaborate and the deceased were buried in tombes with a large amount of burial gifts in order to continue living in the afterlife as they lived on earth. It was also a duty to honour ancestors. This is why wealthy Chinese made large portraits of their deceased relatives.

At the beginning of the 20th century the priest father Verbois made a study of Chinese burial rites, which are basically the same today. The family come from everywhere to gather at the home of the deceased. The beautifully-clothed body is presented on a platform in the inner courtyard. Afterwards the coffin is carried away in a procession and buried together with everything that was cherished by the deceased. These days, paper copies are made of burial gifts, particularly money, and these are burned during a temple ritual.



28. Ancestral portrait

China

Ming style (1368-1644)

MAS, Antwerp, AE.1953.0003.0002

29. Burial gifts

in the form of:

- houses of the inner courtyard where the burial rituals are carried out
- an empty chair for the deceased
- an altar with offerings of food
- furniture to be used in the afterlife
- an incense burner in the place where the coffin should stand
- musicians and dancers
- servants and officials bringing the coffin to the cemetery

China

Ming era, 15th-16th century

MAS, Antwerp, AE.2002.0012.0001 to .0053



PEACEFUL PLACES

The need for inner peace or a mystic experience is universal and has always existed. In our western culture mindfulness is becoming particularly popular as a way to deal with life's stress.

Mindfulness developed from Buddhist meditation techniques. You learn to be present at what is now, not to push away and get caught up in things.

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Projection of photos of Antwerp's peaceful places

Photography and sound recordings Joris Casaer

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A TALISMAN AS A SOUVENIR

Many monasteries have their own printing press where worshippers can order sacred texts, drawings of gods and special talismans. These are an important source of income. Those going on a pilgrimage or visiting a temple monastery are sure to buy one.

The examples displayed on this wall are copies from Rafaël Verbois' collection. Take one with you as a talisman or souvenir.



COLOPHON

BUDDHA & MIND

Concept and creation

Chief curator Chris De Lauwer together with the MAS team led by Marieke van Bommel, the Rubin Museum of Art, New York, and staff at the city of Antwerp.

Lenders

Bibliotheek Etnografische Verzamelingen, Antwerp
Koninklijke Musea voor Kunst en Geschiedenis, Brussels
Musée d'Éthnographie, Geneva
Studio Roosegaarde, Rotterdam
Tibetan Institute Karma Sonam Gyamtso Ling, Schoten
Wereldmuseum, Rotterdam
and various private collections.

Design & Execution

Julia Rossow together with the MAS team / scenography
Volta / graphic design
Twin Design / construction
Tempora, Digipolis / multimedia

Catalogue 'The All-Knowing Buddha. A Secret Guide'

Jan Van Alphen (editor); BAI MAS Books – Rubin Museum of Art, New York, 2013

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