

Mandalas Bring Serenity to the Carlos Museum

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The symbol of the mandala is the newest addition to campus that is sure to provide enlightenment to all who seek to discover their inner Buddha. Far from the stress and chaos often associated with the start of a new semester, the opening of the mandala exhibition in the Michael C. Carlos Museum is a unique experience and escape from the difficult flow of college life.

Used in Buddhism to aid the beholder in reaching a state of enlightenment, the mandala is a religious symbol. Mandala is also a Sanskrit word meaning circle. The temporary exhibition, “Mandala: Sacred Circle in Tibetan Buddhism,” explores the aesthetic complexity, symbolism and functions of mandalas.

The exhibition, which opened on Jan. 21 and runs through April 15, focuses on Tantric Buddhism, which places heavy emphasis on visual practices. The outcome of this rich visual tradition is a diverse collection that includes a variety of deities, mandala types and materials.

Mandalas are meticulously crafted objects that can be made with cloth, wood, metals — like gold and silver —, shells, stone, horn and clay. They are often painted in deep reds with blue, orange, green and yellow details which often represent various deities and ritual practices.

The mandalas and other pieces on display at the Carlos Museum are on loan from various institutions and donors who have generously made this incredible experience possible.

Throughout the duration of the collection’s time at Emory, there will be a number of supporting programs like lectures, workshops and hands-on activities. There are also representations of mandalas in the Visual Arts Gallery, Cox Hall and Cannon Chapel.

Upon entering the special exhibit, the viewer is struck by the monumental three-dimensional wood mandala located in the center of the main room.

This mandala, which was made in India in 2011, is an immensely ornate and truly distinct piece. The mandala is a roughly four-foot cube made from a rich, light brown wood with a high gloss finish. The large size and reflective surface of the piece commands the viewer’s attention.

Upon closer inspection, the elegance and complexity of the piece begins to unfold. The wood is so excellently carved that it adopts the lightness of lace. The most intriguing aspect of the mandala is its seeming precariousness, as it is carved through so that the viewer can see through the piece.

The elaborate design and delicacy of the architectural elements is balanced by the strength and weight of the piece as a whole.

Also included in the collection are manuscripts describing ritual practices, protective amulets, cosmological images and other objects that aid the process of attaining enlightenment.

One interesting piece is a copper peg from the 18th century that was used with a hammer to symbolize the pinning and destroying of negative energies to protect the mandala services.

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of the exhibition is the event that will take place from Feb. 1 — 11, during which Tibetan Buddhist monks from the Drepung Loseling Monastery will create an elaborate sand mandala.



Joanna Chang/Staff

“Mandala: Sacred Circle in Tibetan Buddhism” is a new exhibit at the Carlos Museum that opened on Jan. 21 and will run through April 15. The exhibit explores the many functions and spiritual aspects of mandalas as well as various other objects related to Tantric Buddhism.

For 10 days during regular museum hours, the monks will meticulously place millions of grains of colorful sand on a table in the third level gallery.

The final work will depict the text of the mandala of Guhyasamaja, which symbolizes unity of method and wisdom.

Once the sand mandala is completed, it will be destroyed to demonstrate the impermanence of life.

The sand will then poured into a body of water such as a stream so that its positive energy can be spread to the rest of the Earth.

For those who will not be able to attend the actual production of the sand mandala, the exhibit features a time-lapsed video of the same process that took place in 2010.

Whether you are seeking serenity in the midst of a chaotic semester or you simply want to see the elaborate mandalas on display, “Mandala: Sacred Circle in Tibetan Buddhism” is an enlightening addition to the Carlos museum and should not be missed.