

Exhibition: *Realms of the Dharma: Buddhist Art Across Asia*

Dates: May 11, 2025–July 12, 2026

Location: Resnick Pavilion



(Image captions on page 3)

(Los Angeles, CA—April 22, 2025) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *Realms of the Dharma: Buddhist Art Across Asia*. International in scope, this exhibition examines key concepts of Buddhist thought and practice through sculptures, paintings, textiles, and ritual objects. Incorporating 180 masterpieces of pan-Asian Buddhist art, *Realms of the Dharma* begins with the religion's origins in India in the 5th century BCE and follows its spread through Southeast Asia, the Himalayas, and East Asia. Drawn from LACMA's permanent collection, with several significant loans from private collections, the exhibition explores the life of the Buddha, the role of the bodhisattva or Buddhist savior, Buddhist cosmology, and such key concepts as dharma, karma, nirvana, mantra, mudra, and mandala. The show will focus on art associated with such key phases of Buddhism as Theravada (early monastic Buddhism), Mahayana (the "Great Vehicle"), Vajrayana (the "Diamond Vehicle"—tantric or esoteric Buddhism), and Chan (Zen).

As part of the museum's effort to share its permanent collection with audiences around the globe, a version of this exhibition was on view at the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City, in 2018, *Las Huellas de Buda* (*The Footsteps of the Buddha*). The exhibition is curated by Stephen Little, Florence & Harry Sloan Curator and Department Head of Chinese & Korean and South & Southeast Asian Art, and is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue with essays by Little and Tushara Bindu Gude, LACMA's former Associate Curator of South and Southeast Asian Art.

"*Realms of the Dharma* presents an exciting opportunity for visitors to learn about the Buddhist religion, cosmology, and practice through works of art," said Stephen Little, Florence & Harry Sloan Curator and Department Head of Chinese & Korean and

South & Southeast Asian Art. "The exhibition explores the key concepts underlying this religion's historical development and the reasons for its widespread popularity across Asia."

Michael Govan, LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director said, "Following our recent exhibition *Mapping the Infinite*, which looked at cosmologies across cultures, *Realms of the Dharma* continues LACMA's commitment to presenting stories, perspectives, and ancestries that are deeply connected to the people of L.A. County. We've made that a cornerstone of the museum's approach to studying and sharing the collection with our vast public."

Exhibition Organization

Realms of the Dharma is divided into two sections. The first section tells the story of Buddhism's birth and growth in and around the Indian subcontinent. The second section follows Buddhism as it travels beyond India to Sri Lanka, Myanmar [Burma], Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia, Kashmir, Nepal, Tibet, China, Korea, and Japan.

Exhibition Highlights

From the late 6th century, the north Indian image of the historical **Buddha Shakyamuni**, with its serene countenance, embodies the style of the late Gupta dynasty (320–600), a balance of elegant form and inner spirituality. Although the Gupta rulers were Hindu, they actively patronized Buddhism. This Buddha embodies two ideals basic to Buddhism, the perfect yogi and the universal ruler. He possesses the yogi's supple body and contemplative gaze, and the ruler's strong shoulders, firm body, and webbed hands and feet. Time-honored traditions of portrayal connect the Buddha's human form with nature; his long eyes are shaped like fish, his curls like snail shells, and the profile of his left shoulder and arm like the trunk of an elephant. Following the invasion of northern India by Islamic rulers from Afghanistan in the 12th century, this sculpture was long preserved in a Tibetan monastery.

In Buddhism, Maitreya first appears as a bodhisattva—a fully enlightened being who was prophesied to become the Buddha of the next cosmic eon, or kalpa, after the end of the current universe. Until that time it is thought that Maitreya exists as a bodhisattva, but will eventually descend to earth from the heaven where he currently resides, undergo his final rebirth, and become a Buddha. In the 11th century schist ***The Bodhisattva Maitreya***, the figure can be identified as Maitreya by the presence of a miniature stupa (reliquary) in his headdress. Maitreya's name means "The Benevolent One."

The Cosmic Buddha Vairochana is a rare painting from China of the primordial Buddha Vairochana, a central figure of the Five Cosmic Buddhas of the Mahayana

and Vajrayana pantheons. The veneration of Vairochana first flourished in China during the Tang dynasty (618–906), and worship of this Cosmic Buddha soon spread to Korea and Japan. The historical Buddha Shakyamuni was believed to be a manifestation of Vairochana, who exists beyond time and space. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this work—in addition to its remarkable state of preservation—are the large numbers of smaller Buddhist and Daoist figures, among which are the guardians of the four cardinal directions and Dizang (Kshitigarbha or Earth Matrix), Bodhisattva of the Underworld.

The vibrant *The Buddhist Deities Chakrasamvara and Vajravarahi* depicts the embrace of the deities Chakrasamvara and Vajravarahi, symbolizing the two essential elements of Buddhist belief and practice: compassion (male) and wisdom (female). Chakrasamvara is the central deity of the *Chakrasamvara Tantra*, a text composed in the late 8th or early 9th century in India, the main purpose of which is to provide a path to spiritual awakening and enlightenment through the meditation on the deity Heruka Chakrasamvara in union with Vajravarahi. The tantra outlines rituals, philosophies, and practices designed to cultivate enlightened states of mind by uniting the principles of bliss (right method) and emptiness (wisdom).

Credit: This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

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About LACMA: Located on the Pacific Rim, LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection of more than 150,000 objects that illuminate 6,000 years of artistic expression across the globe. Committed to showcasing a multitude of art histories, LACMA exhibits and interprets works of art from new and unexpected points of view that are informed by the region's rich cultural heritage and diverse population. LACMA's spirit of experimentation is reflected in its work with artists, technologists, and thought leaders as well as in its regional, national, and global partnerships to share collections and programs, create pioneering initiatives, and engage new audiences.

Location: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036. lacma.org

Image captions (left to right): *Buddha Shakyamuni*, India, Uttar Pradesh, late 6th century, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of the Michael J. Connell Foundation; *The Bodhisattva Maitreya*, India, Bihar, Gaya District, 11th century, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, from the Nasli and Alice Heeramanek Collection, Museum Associates Purchase; *The Cosmic Buddha Vairochana*, China, c. 1600, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Richard and Ruth Dickes; *The Buddhist Deities Chakrasamvara and Vajravarahi*, Tibet, c. 15th century, Los Angeles County

Museum of Art, from the Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Museum Associates Purchase; all photos © Museum Associates/LACMA

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