Tibetan Realities: Collecting Tibet in the 21st Century

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TIBET: DREAMS & REALITIES

Collecting and Exhibiting Tibet in the 21st Century

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**ABSTRACT**

Tibet and its culture now exists in a highly politicised arena; one which many museum curators continue to shie away from. Clifford’s ‘ethnographic present’ still defines the collecting and displaying of Tibet. The construction of museum shrines and the acquisition of ‘authentic’ or traditional objects silence Tibet’s recent history.

Dream and Realities: Collecting and Exhibiting Tibet in the 21st Century - a collecting policy for National Museums Liverpool - aims to rethink Tibet in the museum space. The answers to how, what and from whom to collect are not solely ethnographic in practice, but incorporate contemporary art, commissions, documentaries, mass-produced things and archival research.

**QUESTIONS**

Where is Tibet? In Tibet, in China, in exile, in the imagination?

Who represents Tibet’s multiple realities?

Can the Museum reimagine Tibet for its contemporary audiences?

**PROJECT OUTLINE**

- Why has contemporary Tibet been ignored by many museums with Tibet collections in Europe and North America?
- Form a collection that considers objects of ‘Tibetanness’ and the emerging Tibetan contemporary art movement, but while also asking questions of Liverpool’s historic collections.
- Create a visual challenge to museological and material markers of ‘Tibetanness’.
- A programme of commissions and collecting reflecting the many different representations of Tibet in the 21st century.
- Work with artists, traders, film-makers, and cultural organisations in Tibet, India, Europe, America, and China.
- Collaborate with Tibetan curators to create interventions in the permanent Tibet displays.

**Collection Conversations**

An exhibition charting a century of changing perceptions, using NML’s ethnographic collections from Tibet and commissioned works from leading Tibetan artists.

- Introduction: Where in the World is Tibet?
  A geographical orientation and an investigation into how Tibet is imagined.
- Mapping Tibet
  Nomenclature and Magic: ‘Imperial Trophies’ and ‘Tibetan Splendour’ expose the agendas of colonial collectors.
- Visualising Tibet
  1960s spiritual tourists to the Himalayas and western encounters with Tibet and Buddhism.
- Preserving Tibet
  ‘Shock of Exile’, ‘Preservation’ and ‘Masters in Exile’ follows the agendas of Tibetan culture in exile.
- Challenging Tibet
  Charts the emergence of a new ‘Tibetan Art’ and the changes and challenges that new subjects, styles and mediums have had.
- What next for Tibet
  Showcase new works by both emerging and leading artists. This section will ask what makes these art works Tibetan and if Tibetaness matters?