Tibetan Realities: Collecting Tibet in the 21st Century

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TIBET: DREAMS & REALITIES
Collecting and Exhibiting Tibet in the 21st Century
Emma Martin National Museums Liverpool | University of Manchester

ABSTRACT
Tibet and its culture now exist in a highly politicised arena; one which many museum curators continue to shy 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 reimage 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.

Tibet: Dream & Realities
Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, UK
2016-17

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
Monuments and Magic, ‘Imperial Trophies’ and ‘Tibetan Splendour’ expose the agendas of colonial collectors.
- Visualising Tibet
13th century spiritual Masters to the Himalayas and western encounters with Tibet and Buddhists.
- Preserving Tibet
Shocks of Gold, ‘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 Tibetanness matters?