

Hawai'i's Newspaper Online Tuesday, February 26, 2008

Advertisement

HUGO HIGA M.D.
Aesthetic
VISION CENTER
www.aestheticvision.com

FRAXEL LASER SURGERY
Remove Dark Spots • Wrinkles • Acne Scars • Melasma
1441 Kapiolani Blvd. Suite #1313 • (808)947.2020

wegoguides
SEARCHABLE EVENT CALENDARS

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		26	27	28	29	1
31	2	3	4	5	6	7

[HONOLULUADVERTISER.COM](#) | [WEATHER](#) | [CLASSIFIEDS](#) | [JOBS](#) | [CARS](#) | [HOMES](#) | [APARTMENTS](#) | [SHOPPING](#) | [DATING](#)

[LOCAL NEWS](#) | [SPORTS](#) | [BUSINESS](#) | [ISLAND LIFE](#) | [ENTERTAINMENT](#) | [OPINION](#) | [TRAVEL](#)

Search:

WEATHER

72°F
Sunny
[Detailed forecast >>](#)



Island Life

[Printable version](#)

[E-mail this story](#)

Posted on: Sunday, February 24, 2008

- ISLAND LIFE
- U magazine
- About
- Men/Women
- Taste/Recipes
- Faith calendar
- Travel
- Comics
- Tube Notes
- TGIF calendar
- E-Postcards

The dragon's gift

[Photo gallery: Bhutan](#)

[Video: Academy of Arts exhibits rare Bhutan art](#)

By Victoria Gail-White
Special to The Advertiser

- ARCHIVE
- Today's headlines
- Today's multimedia
- Back issues

- FEATURED NEWS
- Nation/World news
- Movie showtimes
- Special projects
- Obituaries
- Weather
- Beach conditions
- Columnists
- Photo galleries
- Video

[Blogs](#) [myAdvertiser](#)

CUSTOMER SERVICE

- [Help page](#)
- [Contact us](#)
- [Subscriber services](#)
- [Reader services](#)
- [Advertising services](#)
- [About us](#)
- [Site map](#)
- [Corrections](#)
- [Today's front page](#)

DESIGN/CEC

Flying into Bhutan is an exhilarating, and at the same time frightening, experience, thanks to the gusting winds. Surrounded by high mountains on either side, the Druk Air plane descends from the clouds through a narrow passage onto the tarmac, 7,300 feet above sea level. Landing alive feels like an accomplishment — as does the experience of touring this cheerful, colorful country.

Islanders can experience a measure of what Bhutan has to offer beginning this week, when "The Dragon's Gift" goes on view at the Honolulu Academy of Arts. It will be the first time in the history of Bhutan that most of these 117 sacred works of art, ranging in date from the 8th to the 20th century, have been out of the



A Black Hat dancer at the sending-off ceremony for The Dragon's Gift artwork in Thimphu last November.

Photos courtesy Honolulu Academy of Arts



Advertisement

AAA MemberVacations [CLICK FOR MORE INFO->](#)

2008 MAHALO CRUISE
Colors of Canada & New England

10-Day Cruise
From \$1594

Oahu 593-2221 Neighbor Islands (800) 736-2886

TOP JOBS

[Accounting Manager](#)

[Art Teacher Grades K and 1](#)

[Document Processor](#)

[CONTROLLER HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGER DIRECTOR OF SALES An](#)

[Career Opportunities](#)

[All Top Jobs](#)

[About Top Jobs](#)

RESOURCES

[Discussion board](#)
[Traffic hotspots](#)
[HTYellowpages.com](#)
[Hawaiian dictionary](#)
[E-mail news alerts](#)
[RSS news feeds](#)
[Mobile edition](#)
[Newspaper in Education](#)
[Blood Bank of Hawaii](#)
[Internships](#)

HONOLULU TRAFFIC
 SPONSORED BY [DTRIC](#)

kingdom.

In September 2004, I traveled to Bhutan on a Stanford University tour with my husband, John. Professor Mark Mancall, the only U.S. citizen to hold a Bhutanese passport and the Stanford adviser to the princesses of Bhutan, gave the lectures. Because of his connections to the royal family, doors were opened for our group. This resulted in a abundance of serendipity.

This is a country of subsistence farming and hard work, but a magical reality seems to sustain the Bhutanese way of life. We were greeted with smiles, from schoolchildren walking home along the roads to older farmers in the rice paddies, everywhere we went.

Fueled throughout their day by their Vajrayana (Tantric) Buddhist beliefs, prayer flags flapping in that gusting wind, prayer wheels by the rivers, sacred symbols painted on the structures that house their hydroelectric turbine engines and monks chanting prayers in the monasteries, the country swells with good intentions for all sentient beings. It is the land of good vibrations.

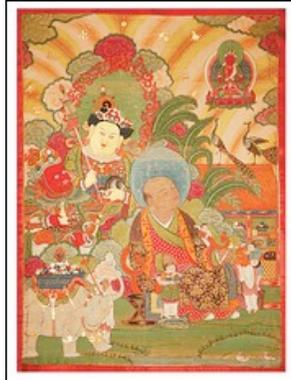
Bhutan is a country that has never been colonized, limits the number of visitors to the kingdom, and whose government focuses on a concept it calls Gross National Happiness, rather than Gross National Product. In fact, the country is incorporating its Four Pillars of Gross National Happiness (good governance, balanced socio-economic development, conservation of the environment, and preservation and promotion of culture) into its new constitution.

During our eight-day trip we did a lot of hiking, attended a tea party with one of four queens in her elaborate mountaintop chorten (sanctuary), spent time in an elementary school's classrooms (every child is taught English along with Dzongka) and visited dzongs (monasteries), markets and museums.

And totally by surprise, in front of The Textile Museum in Thimphu, I encountered Stephen Little, director of the



Buddha Vajrasattva: 15th-16th century gilt bronze with cold gold, from Dongkarla Kunzang Choling – one of the star pieces of the academy's show.



"The Monk Hvashang with the Guardians Virupaksa and Vaisravana," from the 11-thangka set "Buddha Sakyamuni, the Sixteen Arhats, Two Companions, and Four Guardians," 19th-century thangka, ink and mineral colors on cotton.

Honolulu Academy of Arts. I saw him three times in three different places in Bhutan. He was there on a mission — to bring "The Dragon's Gift: The Sacred Arts of Bhutan" to Honolulu. I have been patiently waiting for this to happen.

VIEWING ADVANTAGE

We have a distinct advantage in viewing these Bhutanese works of art here. They will not be in dusty, dark museums or monasteries (the way I saw them) but in a beautifully lit and designed exhibit space.

Ephraim (Eddie) Jose from the conservation department at the academy has conserved many of the pieces, as part of an agreement sealed in a 25-page legal contract with Bhutan. Along with Mark Fenn from the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, Jose trained more than 40 Buddhist monks in methods to assist in preserving their treasures.

Most of the artworks in the Academy of Arts exhibit come from active temples. Some have rarely been revealed to the public in Bhutan. Due to the fact that many still serve as consecrated objects of veneration, Bhutanese monks will accompany "The Dragon's Gift" and remain in residence to perform the pujas (ritual observances) daily — keeping them connected to Bhutan spiritually.

The exhibit, five years in the making, involved an abundance of devotion, focus and energy not only from Little and Terese de Bartholomew, curator of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco (who introduced the idea to Little), but from a plethora of officials in the Bhutanese government, monks, curators, a host of employees of the academy, sponsors and a film crew led by Joseph Houseal, executive director of the Chicago-based Core of Culture, to document the living history of its ancient dance and movement traditions.

Initially, there was some reluctance by the Bhutanese to do a project with the United States, which doesn't have a diplomatic relationship with Bhutan. Some of the barriers were overcome with reassurances that this wouldn't be a commercial enterprise for the academy or the museums that the "Dragon's Gift" will travel to over the next two years.

Nevertheless, this \$2 million project is the most ambitious project the Honolulu Academy of Arts has ever undertaken. Little is still raising money and hoping to break even.

A ROLL OF THE DICE

For Little, the project began serendipitously.

"I was asked to do a divination about the project in Bumthang on my first trip," says Little. "I had never done this before. I was divine, in this instance, because I was heading up the project. I threw the dice (three times) and the numbers were about as auspicious as you could get.

"Odd numbers are good. I rolled a seven, a nine and an 11. Three odd numbers, all ascending. That's important, and it set a good tone. I knew there would be obstacles, and there have been plenty, but I had a sense the project would develop its own karma."

It has, and on many different levels. For Shawn Eichman, curator of Asian art at the academy, it was chance encounters in remote places in Bhutan with people from his home state of Nebraska.

John Johnston, the exhibit's assistant curator, was based in Bhutan for three years, submerged in the language and culture.

"I especially enjoyed visiting sacred sites that required five or more hours of vigorous hiking," says Johnston, who selected many of the pieces in the exhibit. "We always tried our best to be completely respectful and to follow local customs and protocol on these sacred site visits. I was normally accompanied by a monk from the Central Monastic Body and a representative of the Department of Culture of the Royal Government of Bhutan."

The hikes that Johnston references are no easy walks, as I can attest. I hiked for five hours up an extremely narrow mountain path to visit Taktshang Monastery (Tiger's Nest) in Paro, the most sacred in Bhutan. One local woman on pilgrimage almost couldn't make it. She was crying in fear of the height, but she persisted with a helping hand to experience the monastery.

The "Dragon's Gift" will be divided into 12 sections to help the viewer understand the symbolic content of Tantric Buddhist art. In addition to the exhibit, the academy is holding a symposium, a Bhutanese Film Festival and a "Textiles of Bhutan" exhibit. The Museum Learning Center will host an interactive exhibit of Bhutanese dance and an exhibition examining thangka painting conservation.

LESSON FOR WORLD

How do the Bhutanese people feel about this exhibit? Thinley Choden, a Bhutanese Asia-Pacific Leadership Program student who studied at the University of Hawai'i and finished her master's degree in May, says, "I feel happy about it and

cautious as we move forward. It is not wise for us to stay in the dark. It is progressive for the Bhutanese to use modern technology but not let it take us over.

"Spiritually, the people may feel the absence of these objects; they are a presence in Bhutan. But the project with the academy is a good one."

Choden recently finished working on a two-year documentary film project, "Bhutan — Taking the Middle Path to Happiness" with writer John Wehrheim, to be shown at the Honolulu Design Center in March. In the film, Karma Phuentsho, author and lecturer, says, "I have a dream that Bhutan could turn into a spring, a source of wisdom for the rest of the world, if we can truly keep up this rich old tradition. Bhutan can teach the rest of the world how to balance the pleasure we derive from outside, the material comforts, with the pleasures we derive from inside. In the long run, it is the pleasure we derive from inside, the happiness within, which is more reliable."

• • •

EXHIBIT

"The Dragon's Gift: The Sacred Arts of Bhutan"

Tuesday-May 23

Honolulu Academy of Arts

\$20; 532-8700

"The Dragon's Gift: The Sacred Arts of Bhutan" focuses on the Himalayan kingdom's Buddhist art and culture.

On view are more than 100 thangkas (paintings), gilt bronze sculptures, textiles and ritual objects.

One-hour exhibition tours, 10:15 a.m. daily; free with museum admission

Book signing

Noon-1 p.m. today, Academy Shop. "The Dragon's Gift" curator Terese Bartholomew and assistant curator John Johnston will sign copies of the exhibition catalog.

"Textiles of Bhutan"

Opens today, through April 20. Bhutan has produced skillfully woven textiles for centuries. On view from the academy's collection are clothing, containers and coverings conveying prestige, wealth and religious devotion.

"The Creation and Conservation of Bhutanese Thangka"

Today-May 23, Museum Learning Center. An examination of the Honolulu Academy of Arts' three-year project training Bhutanese monks in advanced techniques of Himalayan painting and sculpture conservation.

"Cham: Exploring the Sacred Dances of Bhutan"

Today-May 23, Museum Learning Center, Gallery 31. Visitors can try on Bhutanese clothing, examine traditional musical instruments and watch an extensive video collection highlighting cham, traditional Bhutanese dance.

Altar Room

Tuesday-March 23, Gallery 22. Bhutanese monks will perform daily rituals at a Bhutanese altar commissioned by the Honolulu Academy of Arts and designed by senior monks of Bhutan's Official Monastic Body.

Bhutanese Film Festival

March 21-28, Doris Duke Theatre. Bhutanese filmmakers Karma Tshering and Sherub Gyaltshen will introduce the film festival at a Friends of Film Friday screening on March 21, for Friends of Film members only. For a full schedule, go to "The Dragon's Gift" Web site.

"Beauty and Bhutan"

Bank of Hawaii Free Family Sunday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. March 16. Galleries will be open, and Bhutanese monks will share their traditions.

▲ Top

Advertisement



First Hawaiian International
AUTO SHOW

MINI SITE MAP

- LOCAL NEWS** : Education | Obituaries | Weather | Traffic hotspots | Military news | Discussion boards | Live chat | Columnists
- SPORTS** : Surf report | UH sports | High school sports | Recreation | Sports calendar | On the Air | Golf report | National sports
- ISLAND LIFE** : About Men/Women | Taste/Recipes | Faith calendar | Comics | TGIF calendar | Tube Notes
- ENTERTAINMENT** : U magazine | TGIF weekend calendar | 4-week guide | Movie showtimes | Dining | Visitors | National arts & leisure
- BUSINESS** : Hawai'i stocks | Hawai'i mutual funds | Hawai'i mortgage rates | Island bank rates | Stock quotes | Moneywire | Coming events | Trade Winds | Local resources
- OPINION** : Letters to the Editor | Dick Adair's cartoons | Submit a letter | Submit a commentary
- TRAVEL** : Travel almanac | Currency rates | Destinations | Sunday travel ads
- BLOGS** : The Daily Dish | Akamai Politics | The Warrior Beat | Volcanic Ash | Prep Talk | The Hot Seat
- HELP PAGE** : Contact us | Back issues | Newspaper subscriptions | How to advertise | Frequently asked questions | About us | Site map | Terms of service | Corrections
- CLASSIFIEDS** : Classified ads | Shopping | Coupons | Place an ad
- PARTNERS** : Jobs: Careerbuilder.com | Cars: Cars.com | Apartments: Apartments.com | Shop: ShopLocal | Real Cities
- CONTENT PARTNERS** : Hawaii.com | 101 Things To Do | 4info | AroundHawaii

© COPYRIGHT 2008 The Honolulu Advertiser. All rights reserved
Users of this site agree to the [Terms of Service](#) and [Privacy Policy/Your California Privacy Rights](#) (Terms updated May 2007)

