

THE 
GRIFFIS ART CENTER

INTERNATIONAL ARTIST-in-RESIDENCE PROGRAM – MAISON des ARTISTES
NEW LONDON, CONNECTICUT USA

TENZIN WANCHUCK

2008 - 2009 Griffis Art Center's International Artist-in-Residence
Tibet / Dharamsala, Republic of India



"Inner Circle of Compassion Buddha"

"This sand painting is the Inner Circle of Compassion Buddha and I dedicate this to have Great Energy of Compassion and I have auspicious symbols which would bring the message of Compassion through this Art Center and may all living beings enjoy happiness."

Date Acquired: 07/14/2009, Date Created: 07/14/2009
Framed Dimensions: unframed, Picture Dimensions: 24 x 24"
Medium: Oil and ground marble on Board

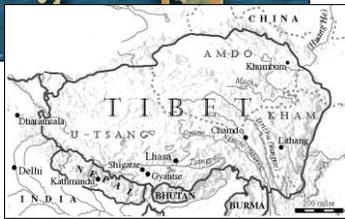
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My work revolves around the traditional Tibetan art of sand painting and focuses upon my own vision, thoughts, and analysis, as well as the philosophy intrinsic to that art.

The tradition of sand painting is itself, based upon the philosophy of Tibetan Buddhism, which expresses the values of love, patience, compassion, and forgiveness.

As a practice, traditional sand painting is laborious, requiring that the sand itself be first ground by hand from solid blocks of marble. After being colored, the sand is painstakingly poured into intricate patterns to create complex compositions called Mandalas. Because of their complexity the Mandalas are often quite large, and much patience is required to complete each. Sand painting is usually done according to rituals that reinforce the values integral to Tibetan Buddhism.

While normally sand paintings (Mandalas) are temporary and ritually destroyed upon completion, I am presently experimenting with ways in which the sand paintings can be made more permanent. In addition, my work also involves experimentation in combining traditional methods with more contemporary mediums, idioms and imagery from both Eastern and Western Cultures. Presently there are no other artists of whom I am aware working in this transcultural /trans-medium manner specifically with sand painting.

My studio practice began with my experiences as a Buddhist Monk working for many years directly in the service of the Dalai Lama. However, I chose to leave the monastic life in order to share my work and philosophy with others. Much of my work ultimately reflects my own struggles with adjusting to the drastic changes that I have undergone in that transition from the monastic world to that of the layperson artist.

Another aspect of my work is the preservation of Tibetan Culture; a culture that is slowly being eradicated from my native land. As one of the few ancient cultures alive today, its eradication would be a great loss to the world. My goal is to bring that culture to the outside world while making a direct connection between the traditional and the new, and, to express those values that unite us as humans.

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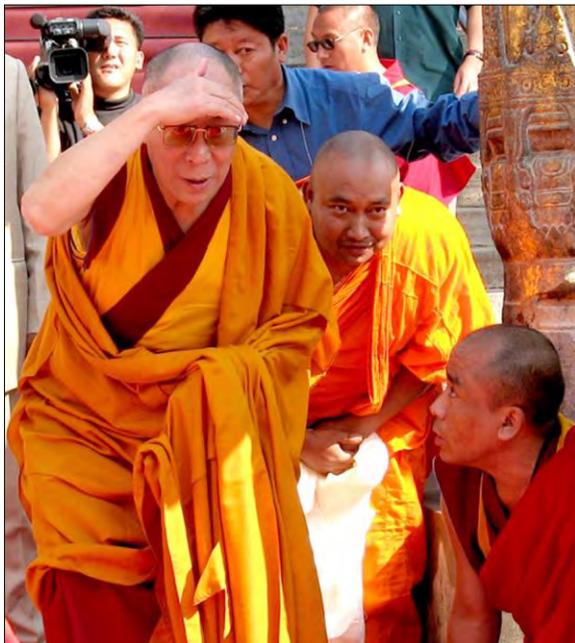
A Tibetan Offering of Peace to New London

TENZIN WANGCHUK

The Ancient Art of Sand Painting

ABOUT the ARTIST

Born in Tibet, Wangchuk escaped to India when he was a child, but then completed his primary education at the Tibetan Children's Village school in Dharamsala, India. In 1987 he joined Namgyal Monastery and studied the memorization of different meditation deity texts. For five years he learned the sacred Tibetan arts of butter sculpture, mandala drawing, ritual instruments and dances.



In 2004 Tenzin Wangchuk completed his 13-year philosophical studies, earning the degree of Master of Buddhist Sutra and Tantra. Wangchuk has traveled throughout the US and Europe performing sand mandalas and ritual dances. He has served in the ritual offering activities of many empowerments given by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He has served as: A member on the Board of Directors at the parent Namgyal Monastery Dharamsala, India; Manager of the Namgyal Monastery branch located in Bodhgaya, India; and he served as the first board member from the parent Monastery to simultaneously serve as a member of the Board of Directors at the Namgyal Monastery, Ithaca branch.

Creating a sand mandala, one grain of sand at a time, building up the forms, has taught Tenzin Wangchuk the elements of design and the power of an image.

Having left the Namgyal monastery, his goal is to transform the sacred arts into a more concrete form. The images of the mandala, the auspicious symbols and their elements will be first visualized in pastel

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and then in sand. He has developed a process whereby the sand image can be made permanent. He wants to use his art to teach about Tibetan heritage in order to preserve that which might otherwise be lost.

Tenzin Wangchuk is also working on a book which will use his experiences as a senior monk at the Namgyal monastery to preserve Tibetan culture. The visual and written will come together in the work of this artist. Using the key tenets of wisdom and compassion as the base of the book he will use a dialectic structure to answer questions and provoke thought, contemplation and meditation.

Working with brass tubes filled with colored sand carefully rasped onto a template on a tabletop, Buddhist monks will carefully craft a mandala. A mandala (pronounced mun-DAH-luh) is an intricate design that has great significance to the Tibetan Buddhist religion. Permanent mandalas are created in pencil, paint or on fabric. Temporary ones are constructed of flower petals, dried grain or sand. Tibetan Buddhists believe that a mandala is a deity's divine environment or mansion.



By looking at a completed mandala, the viewer is said to be able to visualize the deity's dwelling and to experience some of the deity's qualities in his or her mind.

The sand mandala's construction begins with a prayer service and ends with the destruction of the artistry. To some, that might seem like a waste of time and effort, because the mandala takes days and sometimes weeks to complete, but Buddhists say the practice of destroying it represents the transience of life and the ideal of nonattachment to the material world and possessions.



As a work of art and one of the most revered rituals of Tibetan Buddhism, the sand mandala is a beautiful and fragile thing to behold. Fashioned by carefully tapping (rasping) grains of sand onto a grid outlined in white, it takes shape slowly and precisely. Using a tool called a chak-pur, which is a hollow brass tube with indentations, the monks coax grains of sand in a rainbow of colors onto a pattern on a table or the floor. Every dot and line

in the design is significant and must be placed in the same location every time the mandala is created.

Watching the making of a mandala gives the viewer a serene, peaceful feeling and a sense that this is something truly spiritual. Leaning over the table, the monks work at an even pace, precisely pouring sand and quickly aligning the edges into intricate patterns. They work, for the most part, in silence. The mandala construction is a sacred ceremony for Tibetan Buddhists. Only in the last 20 years have monks from several monasteries begun traveling around the world, creating the mandalas in public — usually at museums, art galleries or universities.

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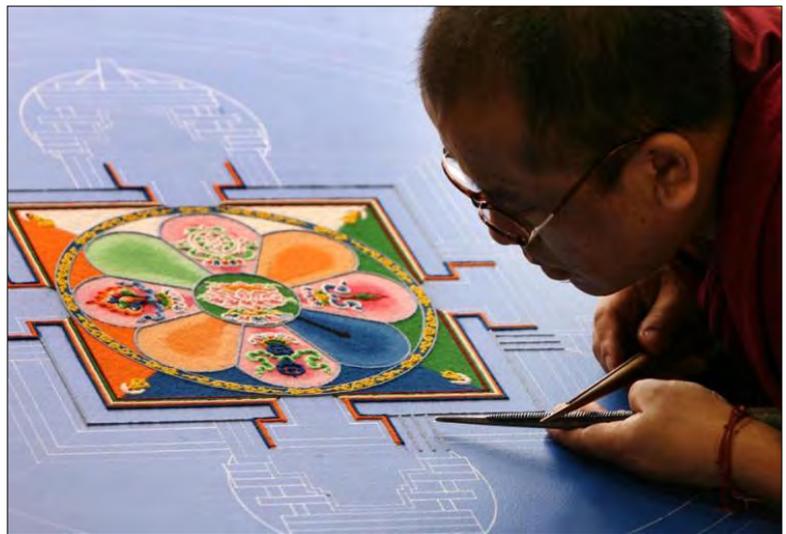
In the Tibetan language, this art is called *dul-tson-kyil-khor*, which literally means “mandala of colored powders.” The specific word for mandala, “*kyil-khor*,” means “center of the circle with exterior walls and surrounding environment.”

Buddhists believe a deity actually inhabits the center of the mandala, and the straight lines represented in the geometric pattern become the “grounds surrounding the deity’s mansion,” according to the Kalachakra Mandala of the government of Tibet. According to the Namgyal Monastery Web site, “A mandala is thought to bring peace and harmony to the area where it is being constructed.

Simply viewing a mandala is believed by Buddhists to be enough to change one’s mind stream by creating a strong imprint of the beauty of perfection of the Buddha’s mind, as is represented in the mandala itself.

As a result of this imprint, one may be able to find greater compassion, awareness, and a better sense of well-being.” Even in Christianity mandala-like forms are prevalent: the Celtic cross; the rosary, halo, crown of thorns and the Rose Cross. These “circles of the deity” also are found in Islam and other religions, according to religious scholars.

At the completion of the mandala, the monk will sweep the colored sand into a brass urn and carry it in a procession across to where the sand will be released into the flowing water to allow the deity to continue its journey. Tibetan Buddhist tradition requires that the mandala be placed in flowing water as part of the dissolution ceremony. When the sand enters the water, the deity’s kindness and compassion are disseminated into the world to benefit all beings.



A project of the 21st Century grant partnership.

A collaboration between The Griffis Art Center, the Garde Arts Center, LEARN, the Regional Multicultural Magnet School (RMMS), and the Interdistrict School for Arts and Communications (ISAAC).