

On the Trail of the Silver Silhouette



1

At the Welcome Station

A visit to the exhibition is a real adventure for you and your whole family. You can solve riddles, listen to stories, and use your eyes, ears, and feet. Even your hands – which usually aren't allowed to touch anything – will come in handy.

Find out who is hidden behind the silver silhouette and all the things he can tell you on your discovery tour.

→  This symbol is your signpost. Follow it throughout the exhibition.

Off you go!



2

Back to the beginning

The whole world is at your feet!

Have you ever seen such a large map? Can you find Switzerland on it?

The story you will hear in this room takes you to Asia. That is very far away. Most of the objects that you will see in the exhibition come from that continent. The silver silhouette also comes from there.

But now it's time to give the silhouette a face. On you go ...



3

The silhouette gets a face

Have you already noticed? The silver silhouette depicts the Buddha.

Look around. All of the figures in this room show the Buddha. They come from various countries and were made at different times and from different materials. That's why they are not exactly alike.

But all of them have large ears, don't they? Compare the figures and find the Buddha with the longest earlobes.

The Buddha has been known for 2,500 years. And he is still very important for many people. At the next station you will find out what makes the Buddha so extraordinary.



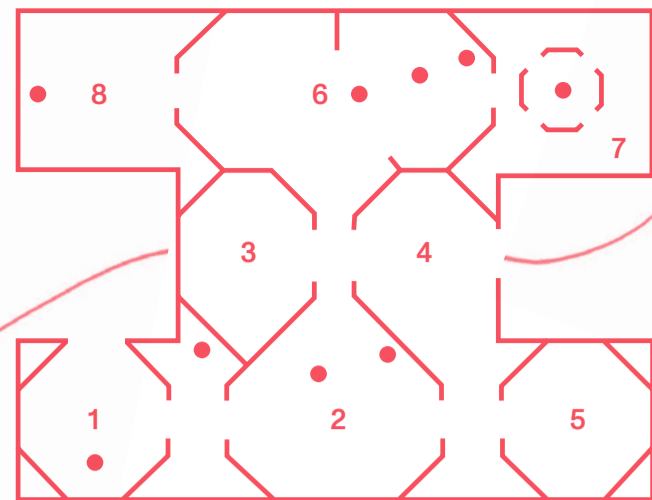
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There, under the tree

The Buddha looks a bit special here with his eyes half shut. Could he be sleeping? Sitting under the tree, the Buddha has just realized something that makes him completely contented and calm. He sits there peacefully, not even letting his attackers startle him.

The pictures in this room are set up like a picture book. They tell you the story of a sad prince who became a happy Buddha.

Do you know that the Buddha also had a superpower. What might that be?



5

No fear whatsoever

Can you find the elephant next to the Buddha on the sculpture?

Once, in a famous story, an angry elephant raced through the city, trampling down everything in its path. And what did the Buddha do? He stood fearlessly in front of it and raised his hand. Because of the Buddha's composure, the agitated animal lost all of its anger. Now if that isn't a superpower!

You, too, have certainly been angry at times. Do you have a trick to calm yourself down again? Look closely at the Buddha figures in the exhibition. Some of them are holding up their right hand. Now you know that this hand gesture takes away all anger and fear.

And what is your superpower? Perhaps matching pairs in a memory game? Then prove it right now at the next station ...



6

Long earlobes

Have you ever asked yourself whether ears can get bored? Prick up your ears and listen carefully: can you match the different sounds in the memory game?

Do you remember the Buddha's earlobes? And do you know why they are so long? As a child the Buddha already wore very big and heavy earrings. They pulled his earlobes down. After he had put aside all jewellery and had become the Buddha, his earlobes simply stayed long. They are a reminder that riches and power do not make humankind really happy.

Would you like to do something with your hands at last? No problem. At the next station your fine sense of touch is needed ...



7 A throne of petals

Although the lotus flower grows in muddy ponds, it always remains clean and beautiful. Everything drips off of its leaves and petals. It is almost the same with the Buddha, who is not even impressed by angry elephants.

This flower has become a symbol of the Buddha's wisdom. For this reason the Buddha usually sits on a throne in the shape of a large lotus blossom.

Here, at the lotus folding station, you can fold a paper blossom. You may take it home as a souvenir. Or throw it in the large container on the table, to wish for good luck for everybody else.

Back to the Buddha. Look up: can you see the huge head of the Buddha?



8 So big and so small

This Buddha head would have had many stories to tell you if it could speak – all that he had seen and heard! It is more than a thousand years old and comes from a rock temple in China.

Stand right in front of it. How big the whole figure must have been once! Do you still remember the small elephant next to the Buddha? Did it feel the same as you do now?

Figures of the Buddha are not always so gigantic, however. Sometimes they are so small you can even put them in your pocket. Can you find the small Buddha figures in this room? Which ones would be most suitable to take on a trip? A tip: you could thread a leather thong through the eyelet.

Eyes wide open – the next room sparkles!



9 Clockwise

The story here tells of a spectacular discovery. Look inside the small room and find out what Mr Peppé found in an Indian stupa.

What is a stupa? It is a hill or tower erected in honour of the Buddha. Buddhists venerate the Buddha by walking around a stupa clockwise. If you'd like to learn more about Mr Peppé and his discovery, you must walk around the small room clockwise.

Did you see how the colourful gemstones in the stupa sparkle? At the embossing station you will get a picture of a vase full of precious stones to take with you.



10 Not only there

You have now come to the end of your tour of discovery. You have come full circle: the tour brings you back to Switzerland.

But you can also find the Buddha here. Schoolchildren from the City of Zurich went on a big quest. They tracked down Buddha figures, asked them questions, and found answers. Discover what they learned in the three boxes.

Perhaps now and then you, too, will come across a Buddha figure in your everyday world. Keep your eyes open.

It's been nice to have you here at the exhibition. See you next time!

Your Exhibition Team

The thematic discovery tours were developed to accompany the special exhibition 'Next Stop Nirvana – Approaches to Buddhism' (13 Dec. 2018 – 31 March 2019) along with the art education project 'Understanding Religion through Art' at the Museum Rietberg Zurich.

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A close look at the narrative of Buddhist art



There is no magic involved in ‘reading’ Buddhist art. Once you start paying attention to details, it’s quite easy because hardly anything in Buddhist painting or sculpture is left to chance: every element of Buddhist iconography underpins a particular idea. The stories and meanings conveyed through works of art are based on Buddhist writings not only about the Buddha himself, but also about bodhisattvas and other deities. Discover some fascinating details as you make your way around our exhibition.



Item 1.3
Distinct gestures

What gesture might the Buddha’s missing right hand have made in the past?

Take a look at the figures of the Buddha around you. All of them hold their hands in a certain way. These gestures are called ‘mudras’, and each one has its own specific meaning. They recall a particular moment in the life of the Buddha or refer to his work as a teacher.



earth witness gesture



gesture of the turning of the wheel



gesture of meditation



gesture of fearlessness/encouragement

These are some of the gestures often seen in images of the Buddha. Can you decipher the original mudra of our Buddha?



Item 2.12
Utterly downcast

Why does Mara look so dejected?

Sitting in the bottom right-hand corner of this relief sculpture is Mara, the symbol of human mortality and the adversary of the Buddha. Holding his head in his right hand, he looks like someone who has given up; disheartened, he chooses not to watch what is going on around him. Legend has it that he made several attempts to prevent the meditating Siddhartha Gautama from achieving enlightened awareness, that is, from awakening. The relief shows the weapons Mara used to ‘fight’ the Buddha: an army of fearless demons who seek to kill him, and Mara’s daughters Discontent, Delight, and Craving, who attempt to seduce him — all to no avail, however, as Siddhartha Gautama has already overcome all obstacles on the path to enlightened awareness.

During the third watch of the night, Siddhartha achieves Buddhahood, becoming the ‘Awakened One’ — something Mara is clearly unhappy about.

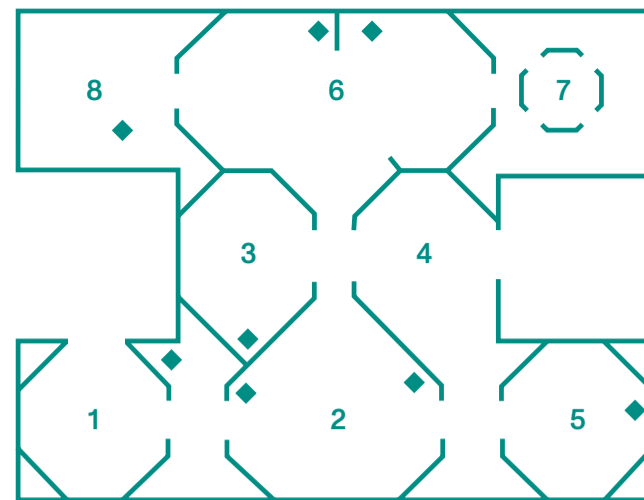


Item 2.22
A floral throne

Which plant is pure enough to be associated with the Buddha?

Take a closer look at this reclining Buddha from the side or even from below. The strip surrounding the upper section of his throne is clearly visible, and is reminiscent of delicate buds opening up. In the midst of the petals, the Buddha reclines on his right side, using his hand to support his head. This iconographic posture indicates the death – the complete extinction – of the Buddha. Even when he is portrayed seated or standing, his throne or pedestal is often decorated with such petals.

The leaves and flowers of the lotus plant rise high above the water’s surface. Although it grows in muddy water, it repels all grime. This is



why the lotus is an ancient symbol of purity, and is worthy of the Buddha. It is a frequent motif in Buddhist art.



Item 3.1
Richly decorated

Who might have inspired the attire and jewels of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara?

The eight-armed and eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara wears a full-length robe that covers his legs uniformly. A long shawl is draped over his shoulders. His ornate necklaces cross in the centre of his abdomen and reach down to his knees. Fine bangles adorn his arms and ankles, heavy earrings hang down to his shoulders, and crowns grace his many heads. Inlaid gemstones further enhance his sumptuous appearance.

Only princes or kings in ancient India dressed so lavishly. It is on their fashionable attire that Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara’s garments are modelled.



Item 5.9
A neat fit

What type of headgear does Sakya Pandita have on?

It would be wrong to think that what Buddhist figures wear on their head is unimportant. Crowns, hats, and caps adorn the heads of bodhisattvas, deities, and even buddhas. Look out for them. Founders of monasteries and important teachers like those in this room are often shown with some type of headgear. The shape and colour (in paintings) of these items allow us to draw conclusions about the people wearing them, for instance, which school of Buddhism they belong to. What is more, we can distinguish between head coverings that are worn every day and those worn for particular rituals and festivals.

Sakya Pandita’s headpiece fits tightly on his head, much like a swimming cap or woolly hat.

Its typical features are the side flaps that cover his ears and reach down to his shoulders. It resembles the commonly worn scholars' cap, which traces its roots back to Indian models. The so-called pandita cap, however, is normally pointed.



Item 6.15
All hands full

Why does the deity Chakrasamvara need so many hands and arms?

Take a moment to examine this sculpture to get an idea of just how many bodies, heads, arms, and legs it has! The four-headed and twelve-armed deity Chakrasamvara is not shown alone here, but in ecstatic union with his consort, Vajravarahi. Her legs are wrapped round the deity's waist. In one hand she holds a cleaver above his left shoulder and in the other she carries a skull bowl. Chakrasamvara's arms are fanned out on either side of his body. His uppermost arms hold the hide of an elephant, which is draped across his back. With his main hands he embraces his consort, his right hand holding a diamond sceptre, his left hand holding a bell. Chakrasamvara's other right hands hold a cleaver and an hourglass drum. In his left hands he holds a skull bowl, a snare, and the four-faced head of the god Brahma. In his empty hands, the deity presumably once grasped an axe, a trident, and a long staff. With his feet firmly planted, Chakrasamvara steps to the left to crush two bodies beneath him.

Chakrasamvara's attributes symbolize particular aspects of his character. The bell (female principle) and the diamond sceptre (male principle) held one across the other symbolize, for instance, the fusion of opposites and the all-encompassing absolute. The cleaver is used to destroy flawed awareness of the self and one's passions. The trampling of the two bodies underfoot represents the defeat of hate. Visualising these aspects of Chakrasamvara serves to aid the practitioner during meditation.



Item 6.20
Gruesome!

What does Palden Lhamo keep in her small, pink pouch?

Tracing her roots back to the Hindu goddess Kali, the tutelary goddess Palden Lhamo could hardly be portrayed in a more gruesome fashion. Sitting side-saddle, she rides her mule across a sea of blood in which float the body parts of the enemies she has slain. Ready to do further battle, she brandishes a sword and a trident. Her necklace of severed heads and golden crown of skulls only reinforce her wrath-

ful and terrifying appearance. Her eyes are bloodshot, and a decomposing body is clenched between her teeth. Her mule is also embellished in a frightful fashion: poisonous snakes serve as its bridle, and the skin of a human serves as its saddlecloth.

Images of Palden Lhamo underscore in every detail her function as a wrathful deity. She wards off the enemies of Buddhist teachings and protects the city of Lhasa and the Dalai Lama. Her pouch, incidentally, contains all manner of ills that she unleashes on those hostile to the teachings of the Buddha.



Item 8.1
Stylishly clad

What type of robe does the Buddha wear?

The Buddha's body is clearly visible beneath the light material of his robe, which covers his legs and left shoulder while leaving his hands, feet, and right shoulder free. The drape of his garment is not completely realistic, however. While we can make out its hem both over his torso and around his ankles, the arrangement of its folds is the product of the artist's imagination. Blossom-like, the folds form an ornate fan at the feet of the seated Buddha.

On resolving to seek a path out of the cycle of suffering, Siddhartha Gautama not only removed himself from his father's palace, he also laid aside the splendid robes and costly jewels of a prince. Taking itinerant monks as his model, he began to dress in simple cloth that he wrapped around his waist and over his shoulders. The monk's plain robe has become one of the Buddha's defining features in art.

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How did the Buddhas find their way into a museum?



The Buddhist figures in this exhibition come from various countries across Asia. Just how did they end up in a Swiss museum? Only in rare instances can we fully trace their journey from their place of origin into the Rietberg's collection. 'Provenance research' is the study of old catalogues, sales records, and correspondence, and it seeks to reconstruct the route taken by these artefacts, many of which arrived in Europe decades ago. In the case of some items, we have learned who collected what and when and – more especially – why.



Item 2.6

On the trail of Alexander the Great

In the mid-nineteenth century, Central Asia became the focus of politics for the great powers of Europe. Russia, Great Britain, and France sought to strengthen their influence in the region by sending diplomats and spies as well as scientists and archaeologists to the borderlands of India, China, and Russia. In Gandhara, finds of coins with Greek inscriptions aroused particular interest among Western archaeologists, who set off in search of traces of Alexander the Great and his Greek soldiers.

Archaeologists began to explore and document the ruins of Gandhara in the closing years of the nineteenth century. Many of its Buddhist sites had been abandoned by since the end of the fifth century, and had decayed over time. Among the ruins, researchers found large numbers of statues and relief carvings. Clearly reflecting the influence of the Graeco-Roman world, these works of art became highly sought after on the Western art market.

Today many Gandharan statues are found in collections and museums in the West. Back in their countries of origin, museum staff and archaeologists are making efforts to protect sites of historical and artistic value from further deterioration and destruction.

For many years, this figure of a monk at prayer stood on the porch of the Casa Anatta on Monte Verità outside Ascona. From 1926 to 1939, Monte Verità was home to the banker and art collector Eduard von der Heydt. In his spacious hotel complex he not only welcomed visitors from around the world, he also provided exhibition space for his collection of non-European art. In line with his belief that fine arts with high creative quality has been produced in all cultures across the world throughout history, he placed African sculptures next to Indian bronzes, and Chinese Buddhas next to Romanesque images of the Virgin Mary.

In 1946, von der Heydt donated his wide-ranging collection to the City of Zurich. The gift eventually led to the founding of the Museum Rietberg. Despite his keen interest in the art of distant peoples, von der Heydt never travelled to Africa, Asia, or Oceania. He acquired his works of art from dealers or at auctions in Europe and the United States, mostly in the 1920s and 1930s. This monk was among his favourite pieces and was probably one of the first Asian items in his collection.

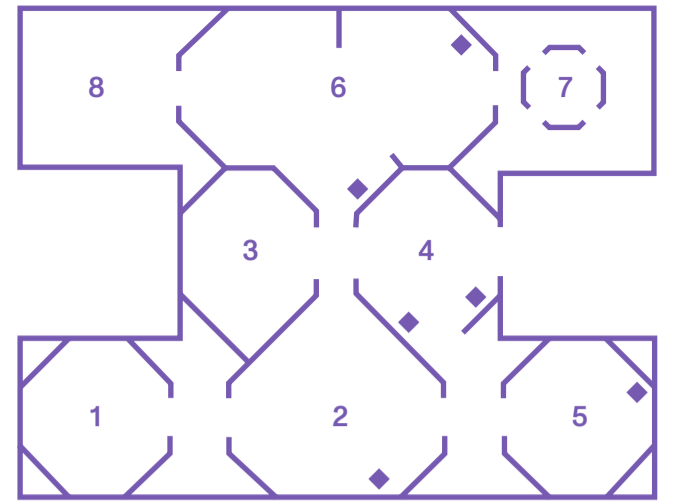


Items 4.3–4.5

Reproductions galore

These images are based on ink paintings by Guanxiu, a Buddhist monk and painter active around the year 900. He was the first to depict the disciples of the Buddha in such an unconventional manner. His series of images soon became famous and provided inspiration for subsequent generations of artists.

His images were still highly prized in the eighteenth century, and in 1764 the emperor had



the motifs carved into stone panels. Later, rubbings of the incised panels were made by placing a sheet of paper over the design, pressing it into the indentations, and then tapping the surface with an ink pad. This technique made it possible to reproduce the artist's creation in large numbers, albeit as a mirror image with white lines against a black background. Rubbings were affordable and became very popular.

The ink rubbings shown here are from the collection of the German art historian Otto Fischer (1886–1948), a former director of the Kunstmuseum Basel. Fischer had made a close study of Chinese painting while still at university. In 1921 he published 'Chinesische Landschaftsmalerei' (Chinese Landscape Painting), which became a standard text and is still read today. In 1926 he undertook a lengthy field trip to China and Japan where he visited historic sites, museums, and private collections. It was then he acquired a large number of ink rubbings that he found for sale in bookshops and at temples. His daughter donated his collection of 285 ink rubbings to the museum in 1965.



Items 5.8–5.17

Sacred art from the Roof of the World

Located high in the Himalayas, Tibet early on acquired mythical status for Westerners. If European travellers in the seventeenth century still hoped to discover the kingdom of Prester John there, later missionaries would describe the land as a nation of corrupt idolaters. At the end of the nineteenth century, members of occult movements idealized Tibet as a haven of wisdom and peace. Their influence was considerable, and it lived on in the ideas of the New Age movement.

In the first half of the twentieth century, it was all but impossible for foreigners to enter Tibet. After the Chinese invasion of 1950, many Tibetans fled the country – including, in 1959, the Dalai Lama, the spiritual head of the Tibetans, as well as many monks and nuns, drawing worldwide attention to their country's fate and culture. Many refugees ended up selling the cultural artefacts with which they had fled abroad. The looting and destruction of Tibetan temples and monasteries reached a sorry climax during

China's Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). As a result, even more Tibetan artefacts came on the market, giving rise to major collections of Tibetan art in Europe and the United States. The items on show here come from the collection of Berti Aschmann, who assembled it with expertise and great admiration for the individual pieces. In 1995, she presented her collection to the Museum Rietberg on permanent loan.

The Dalai Lama, respected across the world as a tireless ambassador for Tibetan culture, views Aschmann's gesture as a contribution to making Tibet's cultural heritage accessible to the wider public, thus saving it from complete annihilation.



Item 6.4

From mountaineer to explorer

This thangka is from the collection of Heinrich Harrer, an Austrian mountaineer and explorer who achieved global fame when his book 'Seven Years in Tibet' was made into a film starring Brad Pitt. Yet it was only by chance that Harrer ended up in Tibet. When he was in northern India with a German and Austrian team of mountaineers in 1939, war broke out in Europe and he was interned by the British. Harrer eventually escaped from the internment camp and fled to Tibet. He and his fellow mountaineer Peter Aufschnaiter crossed fifty passes and walked over 2,000 kilometres before reaching the remote city of Lhasa, which was, in fact, still off limits to foreigners. Both men stayed there until 1950, Aufschnaiter acting as an advisor to the Tibetan government, Harrer tutoring the young Dalai Lama.

Heinrich Harrer returned to Europe with a large collection of items that he had bought or received as gifts. In 1972, he sold most of it to the University of Zurich's Museum of Anthropology, along with his photographs, film footage, and written records. An exhibition – 'Begegnung - Spur - Karte' – about Harrer's time in Tibet (as well as his expeditions to Oceania and South America) is on view there until early September 2019.



Item 6.22

A head without a body

The collector Eduard von der Heydt acquired this large head of a Buddha in 1920 from a dealer in Paris. The earliest descriptions of it assume that it came from the Longmen cave temples, near the former Chinese capital at Luoyang. Composed of over 2,300 caves and niches cut into the cliffs, the Longmen site houses some 100,000 carvings. It has been the subject of thorough archaeological research in the last century, yet no temple or shrine was ever identified from which our head might have come.

In 2005, a team from the University of Chicago and Beijing University began investigation work on the little-known and much smaller complex of cave temples at Xiangtangshan (Mountain of the Echoing Halls). Around 1910, heads, hands, and free-standing figures were systematically removed from the complex and made available to the art market, just as demand for Buddhist art was growing in the West. At the time, China was experiencing political and social turmoil. The caves were semi-derelict and barely used for spiritual purposes by then, and some individuals obviously viewed them as a lucrative source of income.

Using 3-D survey techniques, the research team scanned not only the Xiangtangshan caves themselves but also those sculptures in the world's museums that match the site stylistically. This approach has enabled archaeologists to make a virtual reconstruction of the caves – and now we know that it was there this head originated.

Item 6.22

Why collect severed heads?

Buddha heads are now available to buy as a lifestyle accessory in any garden centre or furniture superstore. Those who produce them and those who buy them are probably unaware that these items are imitations of severed heads. We can usually find a good number of such heads in museums, too. Collectors have been buying them for decades and waxing lyrical about their expressive spirituality. Just how did fragments like these come to be viewed as the epitome of Buddhist art?

In nineteenth-century Europe, the bust enjoyed great popularity. The origins of this art form, showing a person's head, shoulders, and upper chest, go back to antiquity, and it again found favour during the Renaissance. Europeans have therefore long been used to viewing a head with no body as a form of portraiture. What's more, Renaissance collectors bought large numbers of heads and torsos from once-complete Greek and Roman figures. They and later generations were able to admire these works for their intrinsic aesthetic qualities, even in their fragmented state.

Presumably the Buddhist art of Asia has been viewed in a similar way. People simply admire the aura and artistic craftsmanship of Buddha heads and other sculpture fragments, overlooking the fact that such artefacts are remnants of larger, complete holy figures.

To find out more about provenance research at the Museum Rietberg, visit the show 'A question of provenance – Insights into the history of collecting' in the permanent collection.

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