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January 4, 2022

VMFA Presents Tsherin Sherpa's First Solo Museum Exhibition
Tsherin Sherpa: Spirits Addresses Loss, Struggle and Re-empowerment



Spirits (Metamorphosis), 2019-20, Tsherin Sherpa (American, born Nepal, 1968) acrylic and ink on canvas. Collection of Dolma Chonzom Bhutia.

Richmond, Virginia — The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) presents *Tsherin Sherpa: Spirits*, the first solo museum exhibition by the Nepalese-born Tibetan American contemporary artist. On view from February 19, 2022 to October 16, 2022, *Spirits* is a focused retrospective of Sherpa's captivating and sublime works of paintings and sculpture.

“Visitors to VMFA may remember seeing Tsherin Sherpa's works in the museum's 2019 group exhibition *Awaken: A Tibetan Buddhist Journey Towards Enlightenment*,” said Alex Nyerges, VMFA Director and CEO. “We are excited to present this exhibition of works by this globally-acclaimed artist as the themes Sherpa explores — the struggles for individual and collective identity and empowerment — are universally relatable and compelling.”

Tsherin Sherpa was born in Kathmandu, Nepal in 1968, and immigrated to the United States 30 years later. From a young age, he studied Tibetan thangka painting with his father Master Urgen Dorje. Sherpa moved away from this form of traditional painting and began creating original spirits influenced by both Tibetan Buddhist deities and icons of popular culture, exploring the dichotomy of the sacred and the secular, rendering the artist's own diasporic experiences.

“*Spirits* is a fascinating exhibition that will intrigue those who have an interest in contemporary global art, traditional Asian art, Tibet and Buddhism,” said exhibition organizer Dr. John Henry Rice, VMFA’s E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Curator of South Asian and Islamic Art. “Not only are Sherpa’s works in the exhibition visually mesmerizing, but each is layered with the artist’s contemplation of the struggles faced by Tibetans and other displaced peoples.”

Sherpa’s works are both autobiography and social commentary, addressing loss, struggle and re-empowerment. One sculpture, the large seven-layer, spirit-faced mandala *Wish-Fulfilling Tree*, created after the devastating Nepal earthquake in 2015, beckons visitors to write their wishes on pieces of paper, for insertion into the piece.

The mystical painting *Spirits (Metamorphosis)* portrays two spirits in mid-transformation. Their grief, conveyed through the spirits’ facial expressions and melting, dripping bodies, is transformed. The butterflies fluttering above the spirits symbolize change.

With *Skippers (Kneedeep)* Sherpa’s self-assured bubblegum-blowing subject provides a preview of a transformative moment in the story of *Spirits*. This was the artist’s first attempt at integrating painting with sculpture. The colorful fiberglass three-dimensional work is the rendering of Sherpa’s painting by the same title, created in 2018. *Skippers (Kneedeep)* is a crucial development for the *Spirits*’ series, featuring polychrome swirls of “protectors” — previously rendered as background elements in his paintings — covering the body of the figure.

The artist’s prolific *Spirits* body of work will be explored through a fascinating conversation between Sherpa and Dr. Rice on February 17, 2022, at 6:30 p.m. in the museum’s Leslie Cheek Theater. For more information about *Tsherin Sherpa: Spirits* and programs related to the exhibition, visit www.VMFA.museum.

Ticket Information

Tickets for the exhibition *Tsherin Sherpa: Spirits* are now on sale: \$10 for adults and \$8 for seniors 65+, youth 7-17 and college students with ID. The exhibition is free for VMFA members, children ages 6 and under, and active-duty military personnel and their immediate families.

About the Sponsors

Organized by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, *Tsherin Sherpa: Spirits* is sponsored by the Fabergé Ball Endowment; The Ellen Bayard Weedon Foundation; Anne Battle and Leonard Slater; Susan L. Buck in memory of Ed Chappell; Mr. and Mrs. Wayne A. Chasen; Heather Daniel, Barrie McDowell, and Susan Russell; Birch Douglass; Mr. Arnel U. Manalo; Teri Craig Miles; Jacquelyn H. Pogue; Ms. Jennifer L. Schooley and Mr. William Bradley Burch; Nupa Agarwal, Esq.; Michael and Maura Bisceglia; Paula and Charles Collins; Philip and Kay Davidson; Mr. James W. Klaus; Deanna M. Maneker; Amy and Sean McGlynn; Jon McGurl and Michelle Gluck; Jaclyn Miller, Ph.D.; Mr. and Mrs. Stanley J. Olander, Jr.; Reynolds Gallery; Dr. Bibhakar Sunder Shakya; South State Bank; Mr. and Mrs. John Stark; Drs. Shantaram and Sunita Talegaonkar; Stephen C. Thompson, Jr. and Jon McCue. Marketing support for this exhibition is provided by the Charles G. Thalhimer Fund.

About the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia, is one of the largest comprehensive art museums in the United States. VMFA, which opened in 1936, is a state agency and privately endowed educational institution. Its purpose is to collect, preserve, exhibit, and interpret art, and to encourage the study of the arts. Through the Office of Statewide Partnerships program, the museum offers curated exhibitions, arts-related audiovisual programs, symposia, lectures, conferences, and workshops by visual and performing artists. In addition to presenting a wide array of special exhibitions, the museum provides visitors with the opportunity to experience a global collection of art that spans more

than 6,000 years. VMFA's permanent holdings encompass nearly 50,000 artworks, including the largest public collection of Fabergé outside of Russia, the finest collection of Art Nouveau outside of Paris, and one of the nation's finest collections of American art. VMFA is also home to important collections of Chinese art, English silver, and French Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, British sporting, and modern and contemporary art, as well as renowned South Asian, Himalayan, and African art. In May 2010, VMFA opened its doors to the public after a transformative expansion, the largest in its history.

The museum has undertaken an exciting \$190 million expansion and renovation, anticipated to be complete in late 2025. International architectural firm SmithGroup is charged with designing a 105,000-square-foot wing for contemporary art, African art, photography, special exhibitions and events; a new 40,000-square-foot collections center to accommodate an expanded conservation department and collections storage; and 45,000 square feet of renovations to the museum's 1936 building, 1970 building and Leslie Cheek Theater.

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts is the only art museum in the United States open 365 days a year with free general admission. For additional information, telephone 804.340.1400 or visit www.VMFA.museum.

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