



# Holy Madness: Portraits of Tantric Siddhas

By Rob Linrothe

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## Holy Madness: Portraits of Tantric Siddhas By Rob Linrothe

*Holy Madness: Portraits of Tantric Siddhas* is a groundbreaking examination of the art and legends of some of the most colorful characters in South Asian and Himalayan civilization. With contributions by ten of the most prominent scholars in the field, this catalog provides both a survey of the topic of mah?siddhas (Sanskrit, “mah?” meaning “great” and “siddha” meaning “accomplished one”) in art as well as essays on particular aspects of the theme, including literary, religious, sociological, and anthropological dimensions.

These mahasiddhas were instrumental in transmitting tantric Buddhism from India to the Himalayas between the seventh and eleventh centuries. Their legends are filled with miracles and eccentric behavior, which in the end is interpreted as not mere indulgence or insanity but the wisdom of direct religious, mystic experience.

At the heart of the enduring appeal of these saintly tricksters are stories told in prose and in poetry. Vivid and entertaining, the tales told here are set in palaces and huts, in villages and fields, and on the road. They tell of great frustrations and wonderful epiphanies, of the ordinary and the extraordinary expressed in compelling visual imagery.

The catalog provides a survey of the format of mahasiddha art, the contexts and purposes for which the art was originally made. It features complete sets of paintings and sculptures — in some cases reconstituting groups that have been dispersed into different Western museum collections. More than a hundred works of art are included, from Indian miniatures to contemporary photographs of ascetics, from Nepalese clay sculptures to Tibetan woodblock prints, palm-leaf manuscripts and lifesize bronze sculpture. The various works are compared with art still surviving in situ to give a wide view of this important and charismatic type of religious teacher, one that inspired generations of artists.

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