

NO.69 SPRING 2006
BENE LEGERE
NEWSLETTER OF
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Theos Bernard Collection

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Tibetan thangka portraying Hayagriva, and Shakyamuni Buddha, in copper, gold, bronze (both 19th-20th century).

This collection is a rich resource for the study of all aspects of Tibetan culture that were documented by American explorer and scholar Theos Bernard at a time when the Tibetan government maintained a strong isolationist policy. In 1937, Bernard spent several months in Tibet, where he was granted unprecedented access to monastic practices in temples. He took thousands of photos and shot 20,000 ft. of 16 mm film, recording Tibetan civilization at the height of its development and before the Chinese invasion of 1949 and subsequent Cultural Revolution had destroyed it. As well as the pictorial material and personal archives, the Bernard collection includes extraordinary museum pieces--bronze statues, paintings, mandalas, prints on cloth, traditional clothing, implements and other items. The collection is housed in several libraries and museums around campus.

Contrary to the myth of a "closed" country, the Bernard collection sheds new light on the nature of Tibetan society and its selective openness, in certain circles, to interaction with the outside world. As with many records of cross-cultural interactions, Bernard's written and visual record of his life and experiences tells us just as much, if not more, about America in the 1930s as it does about India and Tibet at that moment in time.

--Paul G. Hackett, *Special Projects Archivist at the Bancroft Library*

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From the Theos Bernard Collection, Berkeley Art Museum. Photos: Benjamin Blackwell.

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