

BOOK REVIEWS

TIBETAN SACRED ART: The Heritage of Tantra. By Detlef Ingo Lauf. Shambhala: Berkeley, 1976, 228 pp., 86 colour plates, 18 figures.

European interest in Tibetan art has been steadily growing over the past decade. D. I. Lauf has been among those most active in organising exhibitions and publishing descriptive catalogues; the present work originally appeared in German in 1972. In his text, the author gives a readily comprehensible background to the appreciation of Tibetan Buddhist art; his account is simple without being utterly banal. Doctrinal aspects are briefly touched on, and the several major Tibetan Buddhist orders are described. This is followed by essays on the relationship between Buddhist art and thought and the manners in which the principal classes of figures are represented. A short chapter deals with Tibetan calligraphy as an art. The remainder of the text treats of Tantric symbolism, mandalas, and the important guardian deities and, finally, the lives of several eminent lamas are drawn on to illustrate diverse types of Tibetan religious personality. The excellent colour plates are arranged in a series of small groups. They include objects selected from the full range of Tibetan art, from architectural ornaments to paintings, bronzes, and ritual implements. Close to each set of plates are descriptions of their contents. These passages are often fairly detailed, and invite the reader to a closer contemplation of the objects depicted. Many of the paintings and bronzes are of particular interest as coming from European collections not generally known to English-language readers. Lauf's book is an attractive and readable introduction to the subject, and may serve as a point of departure for more specialised studies.

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