

**Iconic Objects : The Paradise of Maitreya**  
**Royal Ontario Museum**  
**Ka Bo Tsang, Assistant Curator, World Cultures**  
**Heidi Sobol, Paintings Conservator**

*[Podcast begins with music and Iconic Objects logo, title reads: Iconic: The Must-See Treasures of the ROM]*

*[Fade to close up of mural with title: The Paradise of Maitreya]*

*[Music starts; cut to animated spinning globe; China is outlined in white on the globe; music ends]*

*[Fade to panning shot of a grassy lawn with trees]* **Ka Bo Tsang, Assistant Curator, World Cultures:** This painting came from a Buddhist monastery located in the south western part of Shanxi province in China.

*[Cut to panning close up of the mural]* **Ka Bo:** It depicts a prophecy about the coming of a future Buddha who saves the souls of people in this world. *[Cut to shot of Ka Bo standing in front of the mural in the Bishop White Gallery of Chinese Temple Art at the Royal Ontario Museum]* It was painted on a wall. Now in China, the architecture was such that the walls were made of clay.

*[Cut to shot of Heidi Sobol, Paintings Conservator, standing by the mural in the Bishop White Gallery]* **Heidi Sobol:** In the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, it was a dry process or a dry fresco technique, not atypical at all. Everyone used to do it like that even other places in the world like Italy.

*[Cut to detail of the mural showing a man's face]* **Heidi:** They'd take a wall and they mud it with a bunch of clay adulterated with a whole bunch of straw chopped up, a gritty reddish brown clay would be put on top and that was the working surface.

*[Atmospheric music; Fade to a panning shot of the mural showing the central figure]*

*[Cut to a shot of Ka Bo by the mural; she walks along the mural, pointing out details as she describes them]* **Ka Bo:** This is a symmetrical composition, so I would like to point out that in the middle, this huge image, *[cut to detail of the Buddha's face]* this is Buddha Maitreya. On his right hand side there is a monk

*[cut to detail of the monk's face]* Ananda together *[cut to a detail of the older monk]* with an older monk Kasyapa.

*[Cut to shot of Ka Bo by the mural]* The figures are dressed in Chinese clothing, but the story actually recorded in the Sutra, is about a place in India.

*[Cut to a detail of a foot; atmospheric music plays]*

*[Cut to a detail of an upturned hand]*

*[Cut to a detail of a monk standing beside the Buddha]*

*[Cut to detail of the nose and lips of one of the figures]* **Heidi:** The master painter working from a smaller drawing *[cut to panning shot of the mural]* would transfer it using a light carbon ink. The pigments that were used when this was created, *[cut to shot of Heidi standing in front of the mural]* were all derived from nature, so these were in a vegetable form or in a mineral form, *[cut to close-up of Heidi's hand as she points out a blue detail of the mural]* which if you look at some of the blues, you'll see it's azurite.

*[Cut to panning shot of the mural with atmospheric music]*

*[Cut to detail of an ornately dressed figure]* **Ka Bo:** This is King Sankha and the other *[cut to detail of an ornately dressed female figure]* is Queen Syamavati, *[cut to shot of Ka Bo beside the mural]* the representatives of the first converts after the first assembly held by the future Buddha. *[Cut to panning shot of the mural in the gallery with several Buddhist sculptures]* Since they set an example, it was recorded that 84, 000 followers also became Buddhists.

*[Fade to archival photo of a temple]* **Ka Bo:** During the 1920s, China was in a chaotic state. Armies plundered through villages. *[Cut to detail of an archival photograph of a building]* The monks in this monastery, in order to protect the murals, *[cut to shot of Ka Bo standing by the mural]* decided to gather people and to cut the wall paintings into *[cut to black and white image showing the cuts in the mural]* sections and store it away. *[Cut to archival photograph of an urban street]* But there was drought and famine followed, and the monks were destitute, so they approached some art dealers.

*[Music cuts in; cut to archival photograph of a posed group shot of men and women in western dress; zooms in on a man in a priest's robe; cut to archival photograph of the same man seated at a desk]* **Ka Bo:** Bishop White was serving as an Anglican bishop of Henan province *[cut to shot of Ka Bo beside the mural]*

and he heard about the sale of this painting, *[cut white screen; a handwritten notes slides down the frame]* and he had connections with various dealers.

*[Cut to a silhouette map of Asia; Monastery is marked on the map]* **Ka Bo:** The paintings were hidden in Taiyuan *[a red line connects Taiyuan and Tianjin on the map]* and then shipped to Tianjin, and from there someone obviously procured the services *[a historical American Express document appears behind the map]* of American express to ship this to Boston. *[Map of Asia is replaced with a map of eastern North America; Boston appears on the map and a line connects Boston to Toronto]* And then from Boston it came to Toronto by train.

*[Cut to black and white detail of the mural; zooms out to show the entire mural]* **Heidi:** This painting has never moved since 1933. *[Green lines appear over the mural where it was cut into sections]* It's not one giant painting. It's actually a series of smaller rectangular panels. *[Cut to detail of the seams between two panels]* Now the structural treatment that was focussed on had to do with the panels being abutted together. Those gap fillers were actually degrading and popping out.

*[Cut to shot of Heidi beside the mural]* **Heidi:** There was also realizing there was a lot of losses and disfigurement so the conservators went about in-painting. *[Cut to panning shot of still photograph showing conservators at work on scaffolding in front of the mural]* the sympathetic addition of new and removable paint onto areas of loss or disfigurement. *[Cut to detail of a female conservator treating the mural with a paintbrush; zoom in on her brush]* They decided to go back to the roots and use a tempera-like paint *[cut to shot of Heidi beside the mural]* and that acts as our watery binder just like the naturally sourced peach gum from 700 years before.

*[Cut to detail of a figure holding a bowl of fruit; zoom in on the face]* **Ka Bo:** This painting is special in many ways. *[Cut to shot of Ka Bo standing beside the mural]* Although it is huge, it is crowded with so many interesting details. *[Cut to medium shot showing a portion of the mural]* Only a few examples *[cut to detail of a monk surrounded by other figures]* still bear witness *[cut to close up detail of the monk's head]* to all the paintings *[cut to panning shot of the mural in the gallery; zooms out to show the surrounding gallery]* in the Hsing Hua monastery. So, it is very special and has become almost unique.

*[Music plays ; music fades out and podcast ends as screen fades to black]*