

## Quest for Enlightenment

'Mystical Arts of Tibet' celebrates culture with paintings, dance

Story by Mariam Mohiuddin • Photo Illustrations by Robert Hynecek, Cariño Casas and Sallie Turner • Photos courtesy of Texas A&M Amnesty International chapter

On the second floor of the MSC sat two monks, dressed in red robes, meticulously laying sand on a black slab, creating a mandala. Students, faculty and passers-by watched as they created an intricate design with colored sand. Every person who stopped was awed by their patience and detail. To the dismay of the onlookers, however, the sand painting will be destroyed today.

Katheryn Nguyen, president of A&M Amnesty International chapter, president of Students for a Free Tibet (SFT) and a senior psychology major, said many museums have offered the monks large sums of money to keep a sand painting.

Each time the monks refuse, sticking to the belief that the mandala is a representation of the impermanence of life. Since Saturday, the monks have spent eight to 11 hours each day constructing the sand painting — millions of grains of sand intricately laid on a flat platform to form the image of a mandala — as part of a five days of

events of The Mystical Arts of Tibet sponsored by the A&M Amnesty International chapter.

Nguyen said this is an old tradition and that the monks choose what to create by examining and seeing what they feel the world needs.

"The mandala is a representation of Buddha," she said. "Right now, they are working on the Buddha of longevity. There are several different Buddhas, and with this one, they believe people in the world need to have long lives."

Each image and every color in the mandala has a particular meaning. None of it is arbitrary or ambiguous.

"The symbol in the middle is called a Shi and the nine symbols around the center one represent the nine other Buddhas," Nguyen said. "There are four domes, also on the mandala, represent pathways to four different Buddha temples."

The monks will dismantle the mandala at 2 p.m. They put half in an urn and will deposit it into a body of moving water. The other half will be given to the audience. This is done to spread the healing all throughout the world.

Nathaniel Rich, president of Texas A&M University Buddhist Association and a sophomore philosophy major, said there are five major colors involved with the mandala.

"The colors represent the five root afflictions that all of us suffer from — ignorance, greed, hatred and others," Rich said. "There are also five wisdoms that Buddhists believe in. The symbolism of the mandala is that these five afflictions, if practiced, will become the wisdoms and that we have that potential to perfect ourselves. It is a diagram of the spirit of our past."

The week-long event will come to a close tonight with the "Sacred Music Sacred Dance for World Healing" at 7 in Rudder Theater.

Rich said the monks will be recreating parts of their Tibetan Buddhist ceremony.

"A lot of what is happening is a showcase of Tibetan culture which is profoundly rooted in Buddhism," he said. "They are inseparable, and the culture is geared towards spirituality and values. The chanting and dancing have religious and spiritual significance."

Nguyen said the Tibetan Buddhist monks are the only ones who can chant in overtone, which is singing at one time in three different chords.

"They did the chants at the opening ceremony, and there is no way to explain it," she said. "It envelops you. It is overwhelming and beautiful. I don't know what it is, but it has comforting feeling, and it brought me to tears at two different times. This is a completely educational experience."

Even though Tibet has been surrounded by political debate and controversy, Nguyen said she was amazed by the calmness of the eight Tibetan monks that have been touring North America for the last 14 months.

"The monks are between the ages of 25 and 35, and they act like they are 12-year-olds," she said. "They are not immature, but they are playful, like kids. They are funny and sweet, and they are always happy. If you ask them about the Tibetan situation, they just say 'Oh well' and change the subject. The only time they are serious is when they are meditating or chanting."

The Tibetan events were held in coordination with the International Day of Action for Tibet, a day recognized by Amnesty International chapters all over the world. The day was originated in a Massachusetts chapter of Amnest International.

Nyugen said she believes over the years, the rally for a free Tibet has become a part of popular culture.

"It has definitely become trendy to work for this cause," she said. "It has, however, only helped us to bring about awareness through popular means. At the huge Tibetan Freedom Concert, everybody at first was clueless about what it was about, but it made 100,000 people aware."

"SFT is sometimes seen as political, but it is not; all we want to do is educate the public. SFT is a nonprofit organization working to educate the young about the reality of Tibet and to translate that awareness through nonviolent, political, social and inter-faith cam-

paings."



SIGMA ALPHA EPSILON Presents

# CHILI FEST

## 99

Charlie Daniels Band

Gary P. Nunn

Tommy Alverson

John Conlee

APRIL 10TH • SNOOK, TEXAS

TICKETS AT CAVENDER'S - MSC - TEXAS AGGIE BOOKSTORE

FOR INFORMATION 409-775-1705

Benefiting Burleson County GO TEXAN

# While You're Working On Your Tan, Shape Up Your Brain.

Flex your mind and pump up your future with some summer classes at your closeby Dallas Community College.

(Summer I classes begin June 7, Summer II classes begin July 15 — and the credits are a snap to transfer.)

DALLAS COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT  
Brookhaven Cedar Valley Eastfield El Centro Mountain View North Lake Richland

Call 1-817-COLLEGE for more information. Web site: www.dcccd.edu

EARN UP TO 4 CREDITS IN 3 WEEKS IN MAY TERM SESSION!