

# Datebook



**Bad Reporter:**  
The truth behind the lies ... E12

SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE AND SFGATE.COM | Friday, May 4, 2012 | Section E WB

## ART

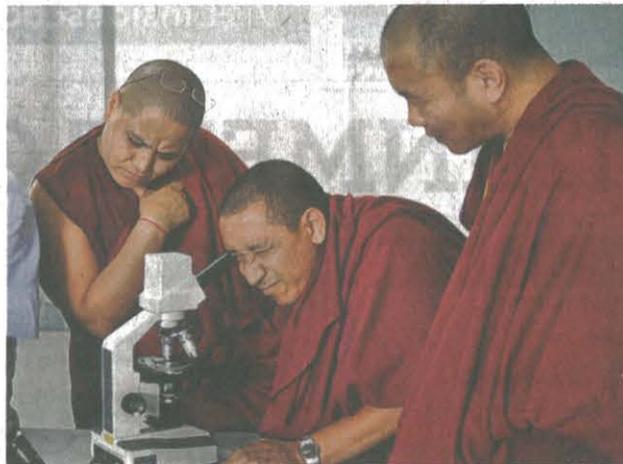
### Delving into 6 senses through visual art

By Meredith May

After a decade of study under top scientists from the Smithsonian and the Exploratorium museums, a group of Tibetan Buddhists are displaying their paintings, which depict the five senses, at the Exploratorium.

The seven monks and two nuns, who live in exile in India, are in San Francisco for the U.S. debut of "The World of Your Senses: Parallel Perspectives From Buddhism and Western Science of Sensory Perception," a collection of 15 paintings depicting sight, sound, smell, taste and touch.

The artworks are done in the traditional Tibetan thangka style, typically reserved for religious



Courtesy Bryce E. Johnson

**An exhibit of Tibetans' paintings is the culmination of a philanthropic effort to bring scientists to exiled Tibetan communities to teach science to monastics.**

paintings of ornate Buddhas and deities. The artists drew upon 17th century Tibetan medical-text paintings that were once used by traditional healers.

The exhibition is the culmination of a decade-long Science for Monks program, a philanthropic initiative of the Sager Family Foundation in Boston to bring Western

**The World of Your Senses:** 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Fri.-Sun., Tues.-Thurs. Exploratorium, 3601 Lyon St., S.F. (415) 397-5673. [www.exploratorium.edu](http://www.exploratorium.edu).

scientists to exiled Tibetan communities to teach science to monastics, at the behest of the Dalai Lama.

Teachers from UC Berkeley, the University of Arizona, the Smithsonian and the Exploratorium lead lessons on the solar system, the body and quantum mechanics, which the monks and nuns in turn teach to children. The Exploratorium, which operates teacher training programs around the world, including Mexico, Antarctica, Singapore

*Art continues on E12*

## Tibetans explore 6 senses via paint

Art from page E1

and Brazil, joined the Science for Monks program last year.

"Science is a beautiful thing to behold," said visiting monk Geshe Lhakdor, director of the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala, where the Science for Monks classes are held.

"Our exhibit also represents the sixth sense," Lhakdor said. "Most people pay no attention to the sixth, or consider it mysterious like that American movie, but in our tradition it's the most important deciding factor of our life."

The exhibit was first shown in late 2010 in New Delhi at the India

Habitat Centre.

The visiting Tibetans are acting as docents at the Exploratorium, sharing the Buddhist perspective of the five senses to visitors.

"Consciousness plays a much bigger role in sensing things in the Buddhist perspective," said Exploratorium staff scientist and Science for Monks Director Bryce Johnson, who makes annual trips to India.

"We are more driven by the object and think of our sensory perception as an exterior experience. The nice thing is that two explanations are harmonious, they don't contradict," Johnson said.

During the special exhibit, which runs through Thursday, visi-



Courtesy Bryce E. Johnson

**Tibetan monks in India study and paint the five senses for "The World of Your Senses," an art exhibition running through Thursday at the Exploratorium.**

tors will be able to watch master painter Jampa Choedak create a painting of microscopic marine organisms found in the bay. His work will go on permanent display

in the Exploratorium when it moves to a new home on Pier 15 in spring 2013.

"They will be our artists in residence," said Melissa Alexander, the

Exploratorium's director of public programs.

The monks and nuns will also participate in Exploratorium programs while they are here, studying climate change

alongside groups of visiting high school students.

While in San Francisco, the monks and nuns will stay in a home within walking distance of the Exploratorium. They plan to tour Google, the Golden Gate Bridge and the usual San Francisco sights, plus stop by Stanford University, where compassion researchers will hook them up to brain scanners to study the physiological effects of long-term meditation.

"I think there's a struggle in our culture to view science and religion in a binary way," Alexander says, "and this exhibit combines both deep religious practice and engaging scientific inquiry that shows they don't have to be in conflict."

Meredith May is a San Francisco Chronicle staff writer. [mmay@sfchronicle.com](mailto:mmay@sfchronicle.com)