

ARTTALK

Seeing Inside Buddha

Photographer **David Maisel** was taking pictures in the Getty Center's art conservation labs when he suddenly noticed a 12-foot-high X-ray of a painting that was taped to a window and lit from behind by the sun. Nearby was a small, drab landscape painting on which the X-ray was based. "It was amazing," says Maisel of the blowup. "It looked like a Franz Kline."

The encounter inspired Maisel to sift through the Getty's vast archive of X-rays of antiquities in its collection, most taken in the 1960s and '70s. Maisel selected the "poetic and potent" fragments, he says, and photographed them, creating the otherworldly images that

make up his series "History's Shadow," on view through the end of the year at UC Riverside's California Museum of Photography.

Emerging from a black background, statues and vessels glow in shades of white, green, and blue. Each image records a trace of both the front and back of the artwork, giving a sense of the three-dimensional object and revealing the cracks, lumps, and stray nails inside. In addition to the horses and figures and heads with carefully carved curls he documented at the Getty, Maisel made photographs of X-rays from the collection of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. He did this, he says, in

part because of a "desire to see inside a Buddha."

A "desire to see inside" also motivates Curator X, a character in a short story by **Jonathan Lethem** accompanying Maisel's photographs in a book to be published by Nazraeli Press in January. Like X, Maisel wants to reanimate his objects. "I'm looking for something transcendent," he says. —**Rebecca Robertson**

David Maisel's photographs of X-rays of objects in the Getty Center (bottom left and center right) and the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco (top right and bottom right). The images are part of his series "History's Shadow."

