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# Dalai Lama's monks take up residency at museum

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RICHMOND — Three Tibetan monks from the personal monastery of the Dalai Lama are meticulously fashioning a cosmic diagram of Buddhist symbols formed by fine grains of brightly colored sand.

But their painstakingly crafted art a mandala — will be ceremonially destroyed later this month to demonstrate the temporal nature of earthly existence.

"It does not bother us," said Champa, the most talkative of the soft-spoken monks. "Dismantling it shows people that all things are impermanent. When they break cups or glass, then people realize it."

Champa, Dhondup and Tsering are from the Namgyal monastery in India. The monastery is the home of the Dalai Lama, the highest priest of Tibetan Buddhism who fled to India after the Chinese Communists invaded Tibet in 1959.

The monks began the mandala on July 7, the birthday of the Dalai Lama. They spend five hours a day creating their religious art at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, which is sponsoring the monks' residency in conjunction with its "Mystic Visions" exhibition of Tibetan art.

The exhibit features more than 100 paintings, sculptures and ritual objects dating from the 7th century to the early 20th century. Some of the

pieces were recently acquired from Berthe and John Ford of Baltimore and Jack and Muriel Zimmerman of New York — the nation's top collectors of Nepalese and Tibetan art, museum officials said.

The monks are staying in an apartment rented by the museum. They rise each morning at 5 a.m. and meditate for three hours. After breakfast, they study English or other subjects and pay tribute to the mandala process until 11 a.m. Then they head to the museum, where they lay sand all afternoon.

The mandala is created according to specifications the monks have memorized through years of training.