

Kathmandu Contemporary Art Centre: Vibrancy as Key – In conversation with Celia Washington

The Kathmandu Contemporary Arts Centre summarily reflects the current vibrancy in the fine arts scene of Kathmandu. It was established in Jawalakhel by Celia Washington, a magic realist artist from Britain, and Sangeeta Thapa, a prominent Nepali patron and art aficionado.

Bringing in strains of revival and re-ignition, the Centre aims to promote contemporary Nepali art and to support young Nepali artists by providing an exhibition and exchange space as well as a locus for building and honing artistic work and talent of international repute and acclaim.

Additionally, art education is also part and parcel of the centre's vision with a focus on the growing need for dynamic fine arts training and curricula. The Centre Library, a key part of the acquisitions and outreach facility, is currently being built with the generous help of overseas partners such as the Tate Modern in London. Globalization, in its purest form, appears to have been instrumental in a convergence of the artistic ethos and the spirit of artistic collaboration that is visibly impressive in its founders and its current address.

Building a centre of this scope can seem daunting. The coordination of individual artistic development; an arts-based community; and arts-related resources and innovations along with exhibitions and partnerships are, however, the need of the hour in Kathmandu as well as the larger Nepali milieu.

Celia Washington, the founder, spokesperson and international coordinator for the Centre, has an engaging artist's portfolio. Now well attuned to Nepali realities and artistic themes and trends,

she passionately advocates for a free-spirited fine arts fraternity. Having spent time at the Kathmandu University as well as with the local community of Bhaktapur, she believes that art can be an indispensable approach to integrating various social backdrops and allowing a free flow of opportunities.

She is also keen to promote Nepali art from the dual perspectives of the rich traditional art that Nepal is home to as well as the contemporary endeavors of young artists who work as filters for the teeming issues and concerns of the day. “All art is political,” she says wisely.

Giving us a unique angle from which to view Nepali art, she speaks of the long-standing contribution of Nepali art to the Asian Civilization and to Asian Art. However, she is quick to remind us that this is almost hidden to the larger western world and relates her experience of finding only 6 Nepali art books in a library that hosts entire rooms to other art forms of the region.

A potent facet of life in Nepal, Celia also talks about two seemingly irreconcilable existential strains – that of fulfilling our basic needs as well as our more creative and ‘high culture’ aspirations towards artistic self-expression. “This is an exciting time for Nepali art and artists,” she says encouragingly.

There is much more to discover in the Centre and its people. It is hoped that this ‘report’ will facilitate dialogue, collaboration and great works of art in Nepal.

by Veneeta Singha