

Dina Bangdel (*1963-2017)

by Christiane Brosius



Dina Bangdel is no more, at least not on this earth. She died on 25 July 2017 in a US-American hospital from the aftermath of a sinus-operation and meningitis. With her demise, we pay farewell not only to a remarkable scholar and energetic colleague, but also to a passionate teacher, facilitator and curator of art in Nepal, both in Nepal and beyond.

With most of her higher education undertaken in the USA, she received her PhD from Ohio State University. Since several years, she was director of Art History Program at Virginia Commonwealth University in Doha, Qatar. She was also on the Board of Directors of the Nepal Art Council, among other positions of patronage and expertise.

At the time Dina fell ill, she was involved in many different activities, most in collaboration with different agents and institutions, both in Nepal and internationally. She had several exhibitions in the planning: one exhibition was a retrospective on the work of her beloved father Lain Singh Bangdel, famous 'pioneer' of Nepal's modern art. Another exhibition on Buddhist art was planned, with the Musée Guimet, a precious Paris museum concentrating on Asian art. In March 2017, she curated an exhibition in the context of the Kathmandu Triennale 2017, entitled *Built / Unbuilt : Home/City*, involving artists based in Doha and artists from Kathmandu, Nepal. One of her attempts was that of enabling respectful dialogue – between 'traditional' and 'contemporary', but also between Nepali and international art worlds. She brought Qatari art history students to India, to visit the Kochi Biennale and the India Art Fair in Delhi (2015), she invited Doha-based artists to Nepal, to learn more about art from Nepal, from each other. She often underlined the cosmopolitan character of Newar Buddhist art, the exquisite quality of the works. But also vice versa: Dina took a selection of artists from Nepal to the Art Fair in Delhi, brought them to Doha, and was in the process of writing a book about Nepali contemporary art. During her years at Virginia Commonwealth University, Doha Campus, Dina Bangdel made sure that she could contribute to conversations between Nepal and Qatar, whilst not ignoring the conditions of inequality and exploitation. Her passion for the arts, her professional attitude and humanist spirit gained her much admiration in the Nepali art world and beyond, had created a wave of energy. This became evident particularly in the context of her engagement with artivism in the aftermath of the grand earthquake of 2015. Dina followed closely the restoration work at Swayambhu, but also the relief work practiced by young artists and art teachers at various places, such as the town of Bungamati and the neighbourhood of Thulo Byasi in Bhaktapur. Her interest in art activism was published in "Breaking Views", a book I compiled with Sanjeev Maharjan in 2017, on artist responses to the earthquake (Himal Books, Social Science Baha).

Dina Bangdel's exhibition and publication records highlight her deep and elaborate commitment to art from Nepal, without 'branding' it as national or ethno-religious products, or as 'marketable fashion'. She curated *Circle of Bliss: Buddhist Meditational*

Art (2003, finalist for the Alfred Barr Award for best exhibition catalogue) at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, *Pilgrimage and Faith: Buddhism, Christianity and Islam* (2010) at the Rubin Museum, New York, *Prakriti Speaks: Contemporary Nepali Art* (2011) in Mumbai. Chapter publications range from “Contemporary Nepali Art: Narratives of Modernity and Visuality” (Nepal: Nostalgia and Modernity. Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2011) to “Visual Histories of Svayambhu Mahacaitya: The Mandala Iconography of the Great Stupa,” in *Light of the Valley: Renewing the Sacred Art and Traditions of Svayambhu*, edited by Tsering Gellek and Padma Maitland. Berkeley, California: Dharma Publishing, 2011. *The Art of Newar Buddhism*. Chicago: Serindia Publications. (Under contract, forthcoming 2014).

A void remains with Dina Bangdel's demise. But also, the recognition that what she believed in and worked for will remain with us, as a source of energy.



Dina Bangdel with artists from the post-earthquake project Camphub, Thulo Byasi, Bhaktapur, 2015, credit: Artree