Erna's joint venture

A Dutch artist collaborates with Kathmandu artisans for an exhibition of silver ornaments in London next week

Erna Anema was a 25-year-old art school graduate when she first travelled to Nepal in 1979. She and her travelling companion had hoped to travel and trek in the Himalayas. Kathmandu to travel and trek in they had to fly directly to before them but the deteriorating situation in Iran meant that this germ of an idea would blossom into a joint venture. In 1979. She and her travelling companion had hoped to journey with her three children and her husband, Cas de Stoppelaar, the part owner of the Summit Hotel and eventual Consul General of Nepal to the Netherlands. In 1995, Erna began visiting a number of Newar craftsmen in Kathmandu valley. It wasn’t until 1995, however, that this germ of an idea would bloom into a joint venture. In the intervening years, while working as a professional artist, Erna often holidayed in Nepal with her three children and her husband, Cas de Stoppelaar, the part owner of the Summit Hotel and eventual Consul General of Nepal to the Netherlands. In 1995, Erna began visiting a number of Newar craftsmen to watch them at work and seek potential partners who could translate her artistic vision into precise copper, silver and gold objects. I had the pleasure of meeting Erna at her house in the Netherlands earlier this month, where she regaled me with tales of her collaboration with and fondness for, Nepal’s artisans. Her enthusiasm for her work and her ongoing relationship with this Himalayan kingdom are infectious, topped only by a charming unpretentiousness. She is disarmingly frank in the way that she describes both the challenges and successes of her artistic work.

One of the unexpected challenges in working with craftspeople in Nepal is the difficulty of accurately conveying an artistic idea in a manner that has local resonance. Trained to produce careful technical drawings in two- or three-point perspective, Erna soon realised that her Newar co-workers were unable to ‘read’ such visualisations, even if they marvelled at her precision.

The rough but elegant simplicity which Erna achieves in her art is unsightly to most people, but it is attractive to craftsmen in Nepal. For many of these craftsmen, bringing small gifts for their friends and neighbours is an essential part of their annual income. While respecting traditional craft techniques, Erna delights in bringing small gifts for her friends and colleagues Rajesh, Saroj, Mohan, Nabin and Gautam, such as strong work gloves, books on gilding and gas masks to combat the noxious mercury fumes which are released when Patan’s craftsmen decorate temple domes.

Erna’s oeuvre is made up of three component objects, jewellery and paintings. The first two are made in collaboration with craftsmen from Patan, while her painting is solo work from her studio in the Netherlands. Soon after an exhibition at Siddhartha Art Gallery in Kathmandu in the late 1990s, while Erna was teaching a workshop at Nepal’s Art Academy, she organised a successful exhibition in Haarlem at which all exhibited items were sold.

Her most recent artistic adventure is the Lal Project, which she will take on tour to London next week. A lal is a Nepali unit of measurement for silver, which Erna makes beaten silver medallions of different sizes and constellations.


For more on lals and Erna’s other:
www.ernaanema.nl/

Erna Anema was a 25-year-old art school graduate when she first travelled to Nepal in 1979. She and her travelling companion had hoped to travel and trek in the Himalayas. Kathmandu to travel and trek in they had to fly directly to before them but the deteriorating situation in Iran meant that this germ of an idea would blossom into a joint venture. In 1979. She and her travelling companion had hoped to journey with her three children and her husband, Cas de Stoppelaar, the part owner of the Summit Hotel and eventual Consul General of Nepal to the Netherlands. In 1995, Erna began visiting a number of Newar craftsmen in Kathmandu valley. It wasn’t until 1995, however, that this germ of an idea would bloom into a joint venture. In the intervening years, while working as a professional artist, Erna often holidayed in Nepal with her three children and her husband, Cas de Stoppelaar, the part owner of the Summit Hotel and eventual Consul General of Nepal to the Netherlands. In 1995, Erna began visiting a number of Newar craftsmen to watch them at work and seek potential partners who could translate her artistic vision into precise copper, silver and gold objects. I had the pleasure of meeting Erna at her house in the Netherlands earlier this month, where she regaled me with tales of her collaboration with and fondness for, Nepal’s artisans. Her enthusiasm for her work and her ongoing relationship with this Himalayan kingdom are infectious, topped only by a charming unpretentiousness. She is disarmingly frank in the way that she describes both the challenges and successes of her artistic work.

One of the unexpected challenges in working with craftspeople in Nepal is the difficulty of accurately conveying an artistic idea in a manner that has local resonance. Trained to produce careful technical drawings in two- or three-point perspective, Erna soon realised that her Newar co-workers were unable to ‘read’ such visualisations, even if they marvelled at her precision.

The rough but elegant simplicity which Erna achieves in her art is unsightly to most people, but it is attractive to craftsmen in Nepal. For many of these craftsmen, bringing small gifts for their friends and neighbours is an essential part of their annual income. While respecting traditional craft techniques, Erna delights in bringing small gifts for her friends and colleagues Rajesh, Saroj, Mohan, Nabin and Gautam, such as strong work gloves, books on gilding and gas masks to combat the noxious mercury fumes which are released when Patan’s craftsmen decorate temple domes.

Erna’s oeuvre is made up of three component objects, jewellery and paintings. The first two are made in collaboration with craftsmen from Patan, while her painting is solo work from her studio in the Netherlands. Soon after an exhibition at Siddhartha Art Gallery in Kathmandu in the late 1990s, while Erna was teaching a workshop at Nepal’s Art Academy, she organised a successful exhibition in Haarlem at which all exhibited items were sold.

Her most recent artistic adventure is the Lal Project, which she will take on tour to London next week. A lal is a Nepali unit of measurement for silver, which Erna makes beaten silver medallions of different sizes and constellations.


For more on lals and Erna’s other:
www.ernaanema.nl/