

thread by thread

1st May - 25th June, 2015



The Rose I by Baptist Coelho

My brother is in the army and was once posted on the Glacier. I did not know anything about the challenges he faced during this posting. The exhibition was thus a very personal journey for me to understand his experiences and that of countless soldiers," wrote Rinchen Dolkar in *Stawa* (June 2015) reflecting on the exhibition 'thread by thread' by Baptist Coelho.

The soldier is central to Coelho's exhibition as he attempts to reveal and understand conflict and war through observations and conversations that have been woven into the fabric of the lives of people, whether directly or indirectly affected. Focusing on the soldier fighting the war between India and Pakistan on the Siachen Glacier, Coelho attempts to reveal their challenges and valour, but also the paradox of heroism, confronted by brutal cold and the perils of a high altitude on an uncertain terrain, where more lives are lost due to the weather than fighting.

This exhibition resonated with the reality that is Ladakh, where over one-third of the population is made up of the Indian army. Ladakh Scouts comprises of five battalions and over the years has had a significant contribution to the Indian Army's presence in Siachen. Apart from soldiers the support personnel that work for the army from drivers to cooks and porters is immense.

The army impacts life in Ladakh in many ways and this exhibition certainly made



Baptist Coelho explaining his work 'Ribbons I', 2015 to Ambassador P Stobdan and guests during the opening

viewers aware of a different picture of Ladakh from the one usually sold to visitors to the region looking for adventure or searching for inner peace. Exhibitions such as 'thread by thread' are part of LAMO's commitment to continue to bring art that engages with the issues and questions of everyday lives and reflects

on the lived experiences of Ladakhis.

An exhibition by Baptist Coelho and curated by Monisha Ahmed.

The exhibition is supported by LAMO, Goethe-Institut / Max Mueller Bhavan, India and Inlaks Shivdasani Foundation.

Über Grenzen / On Borders

Human beings have gradually settled over the entire planet. No ocean, no desert, no mountain range has been able to stop them. In the end, they even traveled in space and to the moon. Tirelessly, as if this is their manifest destiny, they have worked on transcending every limitation that nature and its laws dictate. The only boundaries they have not yet been able to overcome are those that they have set up between themselves.

photographers from different countries and across generations showcased their unique perspective on the borders that run through the world today. They explored what borders mean to people and how people shape their lives along borders.

Six photographers from Ladakh responded to the images in the exhibition, below Mohammad Shafi Sagar reflects on his experience of living in Drass at the time of the Kargil war:



Photographs from Über Grenzen exhibited in the winter kitchen at LAMO

I remember my grandfather saying, "to make a property near the border is like throwing money in the water." I didn't really understand this but when the Kargil war of 1999 broke out, it became real. This was the first time we experienced a war in this modern era with all the high tech equipment. We heard the noise of bombs blasting almost every minute. No one knew when a bomb could stop the wheel of their life. Every person wanted to live. I remember every one was roaming here and there, in search of a safe shelter. I moved to Mushkoo with my family, but I was not aware that Mushkoo is also near a fighting place. Because Mushkoo is the base camp of Tiger Hill.

deafening noise of a bomb blast right near my residence. I shifted all the family members to a safer room at the back of the house. I cannot express the fear of that night, as we heard the noises of our heart beatings clearly. First time I understood real fear. After that we heard noises of bomb blasts almost every minute near our house and dust covered all the buildings. We felt we were waiting for the moment when a bomb would hit our roof and close the chapter of our life.

Many hours we spent in this condition. After that, my wife decided to go outside the room. I tried to control my fear, I gathered some courage and opened the door. I was surprised to see the blue sky and shining stars. I could not understand what happened. But my wife whispered slowly, "A bomb hit the room and destroyed its roof". I understood and thanked the Almighty. He escaped us from death. I realized that only one wall remained between our life and death.

These memories become dim with the passage of time but the exhibition at LAMO forced me to think about them again.

Mohd Shafi Sagar works for Kargil Number (Rangyul), a Ladakh-based newspaper.

The exhibition is by OSTKREUZ, Agentur der Fotografen, Berlin, in collaboration with Goethe- Institut / Max Mueller Bhavan Mumbai.

Two Journeys – Reflections on the exhibition of Rupert Wilmot's photographs from the 1930s

By Rev. Dechen Chamgha

It was a privilege for me to be amongst scholars, historians, scribes and photographers of Ladakh gathered at the LAMO Centre to open the exhibition "Two Journeys – A Photographic Account of Rupert Wilmot's Travels to Ladakh in the 1930s" and launch the book of his images brought out by his niece and nephew Nicky Harman and Roger Bates. The black and white photographs, taken by Rupert on his journeys to Ladakh in 1931 and 1934, are a work of art. On observing some of the enlargements exhibited, as well as a quick glance through the book, I commend the professionalism of the photographer and appreciate the work of the curator and the restorer.

One must have an eye to appreciate the excellence of a photograph which is a combined product of a balanced composition, exposure and the theme behind it. Such photographs are always a source of revelation of the past to the present for a better future only when ones' past is connected to him or her, and it is a miracle that only an excellent photograph can perform.

I can think of two aspects that make a good photograph –



On the Approach to Leh, 1934

either it must be pleasing to the eye or it must convey messages to the onlooker. To my surprise, in Wilmot's photographs, I find both. Some images clearly stand out in this collection, for instance the ones Wilmot took of the then main market of Leh – they give us a wholesome visual of all the activities that were going on there. Some other photographs are witness of the beauty of our land, especially Leh which is now densely populated and over-built, and to which today's youth would not be able to relate.

Two of my favourite photos from the collection are:

1. The Descent from Lamayuru: Whenever I glance at the bridge of Khalatse, it reminds me of a tragic war story of 1948



The Descent from Lamayuru, 1931

that my grand-father told me. It is about a man from Chhushot village, who was amongst the many who were to be shot by soldiers and thrown into the Indus river from Khalatse bridge. Somehow he was able to free his hands that were tied to the hands of another man, supposed to be shot seconds later, and leaped from the bridge into the river. Defying the gun shots by ducking himself under water, he swam along the fast current for about 7 kilometres down the river and finally made a great escape to an another village. The tragic part was that, an informer was responsible for his re-arrest the next day and he was shot dead in that village.

2. On the Approach to Leh: This photo of Buddhist and Muslim women walking towards Leh town on a barren open space reminds me of my mother, a Christian lady, who would often propose a trip to Leh town to the Buddhist and Muslim ladies in our neighbourhood. On the eve of that great day they would decide whether to start at the first or second roosters' crow and would pack up their baskets (*tsepo*) with gifts for close relatives in Leh. In the cool and refreshing air of the morning they would arrive in Leh and would disperse with a plan to gather again in front of the mosque. On hearing the sound of the call to prayer from the mosque for the late afternoon prayer, they would return to their village walking for about three hours. Such was the commendable example of harmony among the communities in Ladakh.

There is no doubt that the work of Rupert Wilmot serves as an important visual for those with an interest in Ladakh and will be a valuable source for scholars. The overwhelming details of information on people, places, rituals, trade and architecture embedded in the pictures are a wealth of knowledge which must be treasured.

Rev. Dechen Chamgha is a retired pastor and an avid photographer.



Open Canvas:
A public collaboration as part of LAMO's Dosmoche activities had a wide range of visitors paint and express their feelings, hopes and aspirations for Leh on a canvas through visuals and words



Filming:
LAMO received a grant from India Foundation for the Arts to make a film on music in Old Town. As part of this project, LAMO has been documenting various musical traditions in Leh and neighbouring areas



Workshop:
Baptist Coelho worked with children to create work with recycled objects. The children used old clothes to make parachutes from which they suspended a personal message



Photography:
Photographer Mathieu Blondeau held a Pinhole camera-making workshop at Lamdon School. He also held a Product photography workshop at LAMO for professional photographers

Interning with LAMO

By Maya Woeser

Being in Leh is an experience like no other. The natural beauty, the clear skies, the gorgeous mountains surrounding you on every side – it all seems too good to be true. Naturally, I jumped at the opportunity to spend a month in this beautiful valley, and the fact that the opportunity was with LAMO made everything even better. LAMO is

an organization that echoes the beauty of Leh, it is located in the unobtrusive yet most central and unique location atop the hill where the old Palace of Leh stands. The office space is beautiful, a perfect demonstration of how restoration can be a successful blend of modern and traditional.

The workshop I was working on was for students' aged 13-16, all from different local schools. Although the original plan

was to focus on creative writing, the workshop progressed and transformed as the days went on – and it ended up being more of a creative expression workshop. The primary focus, and the goal we wanted to achieve, was to have students explore different creative, fun ways of using the English language or visuals to express their thoughts, ideas, opinions or just stories. Although certainly challenging at times, I believe that everyone involved enjoyed themselves and learnt a lot, as I certainly did!

The highlight was definitely getting to hear the stories the students wrote, which were all well-written, personal, witty and insightful, covering themes ranging from love to tourism to the environment to life from a fish's perspective!

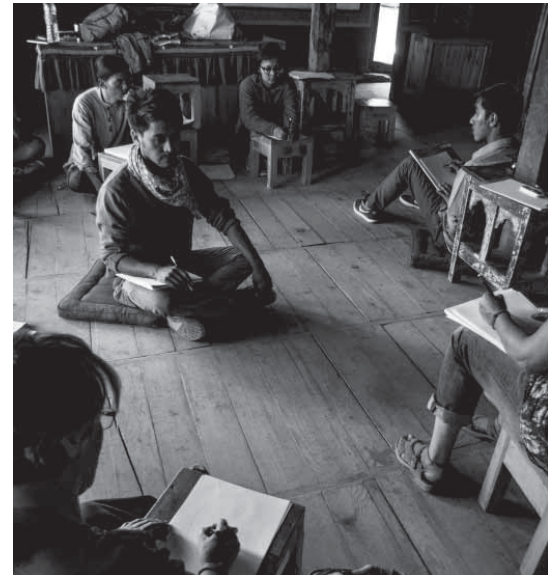
It was altogether an experience like no other, that left me eager to return to LAMO to work on more wonderful projects in this beautiful space.

Maya Woeser is currently a second year student at Middlebury College in USA.



Group photo of participants in front of the 'Word Wall' from the Creative Writing workshop in collaboration with Stawa

Drawing as a Language



Edoardo Paolo Ferrari, an architect from Italy held a two-day live workshop, 'Drawing as a Language' which included still life, architectural and model drawing for local artists

Editorial Note

It has been another eventful and productive year for us at LAMO with exhibitions, workshops, film projects and an increasing number of visitors to our Centre in Leh. We opened the year with the 'Wishing Tree' at Dosmoche. Constructed out of scrap metal by sculptor Tsering Gurmet, it represented the changes taking place around us – environmental degradation and decline of greenery, particularly in Leh as more fields are converted for commercial use and trees struck down to make way for roads. As we mourn this loss, the upward stretching branches of the tree also signify hope. It was to garner this hope that LAMO invited people to make a wish and hang it from the tree, the feedback was tremendous with verbal renditions that spoke of joy and hope, sorrow and suffering and aspirations for a better future.

Some of these themes continued in our art exhibitions – Baptist Coelho looked at loss and longing amongst soldiers posted at the Siachen Glacier, and the paintings of Ladakhi artists Kunzang Chodak and Rigzin Paljor spoke about a sense of belonging that comes from the sense of 'spaces' they inhabit. Rupert Wilmot's exhibition continued LAMO's commitment to building up a collection of and disseminating archival images of the region. Wilmot's photos spoke about changes the region has experienced over the years, to the landscape and the people. Collaborations with other art organisations continued and with Goethe Institute we showed the photographic exhibition 'Borders' – in the literal sense and also those that we create in our lives.

We are particularly excited about our partnership with Siddhartha School and the support we have received for the Sound Studio that we are setting up at LAMO along with them. And we are grateful to everyone who helped us raise funds through the Kickstarter initiated by Siddhartha.

Taking forward concerns that the Wishing Tree project raised, our focus in 2016 will be the Environment and its many manifestations. As the world talks about climate change, we hope to take up this challenge and construct dialogues about the relevance of this to Ladakh. Along with Stawa, we are planning a Ladakh Photo Exhibition and will be putting out a call for participation.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has contributed to this year at LAMO and supported us in various ways. We look forward to seeing you all again next year.

The LAMO Team
Kharyog, Leh
28.12.2015

LAMO Staff
Monisha Ahmed: Executive Director
Tashi Morup: Projects Director
Isaac Gergan: Program Officer, Arts
Sonam Angchuk: Assistant Officer, Media
Tsering Chonzom: Librarian and Educational Outreach Officer

LAMO Trustees:
Ravina Aggarwal
Monisha Ahmed
Phunchok Stobdan
Ghulam Mohammad Sheikh
Skalzang Youdon

LAMO Advisors:
Clare Harris
Ghani Sheikh
Kaneez Fatima
Thinles Angmo
Tsering Dawa
Dorje Angchuk

Design and layout by: Mabel Disket
with inputs by Virginie Seiller

Copyright LAMO

This is published and printed by LAMO, Post Box No. 152, Below Namgyal Palace, Old Town, Leh, Ladakh 194101, J & K India.
Email: info@lamo.org.in; Web: www.lamo.org.in; Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/LAMOLadakh, https://www.facebook.com/oldtownleh



LAMO books: *Ghosts Stories from Old Town Leh* and *My Way Back from School* are for sale at the LAMO library and Leh-Ling Book Shop, Leh Bazaar

LAMO T-shirts are available for sale in three designs: *gyanak lchakri*, *rabslal* and *dragon*

LAMO postcards and cards with artwork from workshops are available as individual and sets.



The Man who Planted Trees

A mime-show by Swiss theatre company, Andrayas

By Sonam Angchuk

This show is inspired by a short text by the acclaimed French writer Jean Giono. It depicts the meeting between a young man and an old farmer, and how they stay together for over 20 years in a journey based on friendship. The old farmer is obsessed with transforming the dry region where he lives into a forest. The story talks about his passion and resilience, the importance of pursuing one's dreams and never giving up.

In collaboration with LAMO, the Swiss theatre company Andrayas planned 20 shows in Leh and surrounding villages. The company consisted of one actor, two musicians and a productions-manager cum set designer. At first the group were unsure how their show would be received in Ladakh but after the first show at LAMO they had nothing to worry about. It was amazing, the actor's movements and expressions, the props and the story, kept the audience enthralled. They went on to perform in various schools, hostels and community halls in Leh.

We then planned a trip to various villages around Leh and I took them to Sakti, Khatse, Domkhar, Thagmachik and Skurbuchen. Many villagers attended and found it very interesting. Reactions to the show were slightly different from Leh; here the show was more appropriate for the people as most of them are farmers. It added to their local knowledge of trees, and stressed the importance of planting them as they are crucial for life. They have many purposes such as holding the soil during floods, providing oxygen or use as timber for building. By seeing one man's efforts in this show, the viewers and I were encouraged to take initiatives that sometimes seemed bigger than us. Furthermore, I was inspired by the group's energy to do so many shows and their ingenuity of using various props and materials to tell this universal story. The villagers enjoyed the modern equipment they used, especially because today they are used to having some forms of such technology. They also enjoyed the drama aspect, as it was a familiar form to the many performances they had in their villages before, which has now been replaced mainly by television.

Sonam Angchuk is Assistant Officer, Media, LAMO.



A scene from the mime-show by Swiss theatre company Andrayas at the LAMO Centre



Discussion:
An interactive session with Sameera Khan, co-author of *Why Loiter? Women and Risk on Mumbai Streets* that focused on women's engagement with issues of violence, public space and the community



Word Wall:
As part of July's Creative Writing Workshop, in collaboration with *stawa*, participants created a wall of words using new words learnt during the workshop or based on specific themes



Exhibition:
Five students, over one year, recorded their personal and shared experiences of studying away from home in urban settings across India. This culminated in the exhibition 'Between Worlds: Ladakhi Student Life across India'



Music:
A variety of contemporary and traditional music performances and activities were held during the year, including performances by the Mahabodhi Trash Band and J&K Police band during Ladakh Festival

Confluence of Birds from Contemporary Spaces



Namgail Angmo speaks during the panel discussion on education-driven urban migration, as part of the photo exhibition 'Between Worlds'

By Namgail Angmo

Egyagar e chipa tsangma duglong miruk. (These Indian birds have no time to rest for a while) exclaimed a Ladakhi Ajang-le (uncle) metaphorically to his companion in Leh Market, while my friend and I walked past by them in a hurry to reach the LAMO Centre.

It was a sunny last day of June, and we had an exhibition there, of pictures reflecting our lives as college students living outside Leh titled *Exploring Contemporary Spaces*. We were five students studying different courses in various parts of India such as Kolkata, Varanasi, Delhi and Jammu alongside taking photos of our lives over the past one year.

Three among the five students were "unusually" artists, none were engineers or IAS aspirants!

Some of the images had common themes with an observation on daily lives of Ladakhi students in a different city dealing with nostalgia, loss, Ladakhi food, homesickness, their ideologies shaped by two different and contrasting cultural experiences. A few of the photos also questioned the idea of gender, fashion and prejudice among other personal experiences but always keeping Ladakh as the main focus of their pictorial narratives. Their relationship with non-Ladakhi people was an interesting feast for eyes looking at

cultures in confluence.

I had shaved my hair at that time and captured it in one of the pictures captioned, 'Again, this is narcissist me...' with a 'non-standard' pose and outfit. Exposure to the somewhat cosmopolitan milieu of Delhi while studying gender and sexuality as a literature student had made me shed my past persona during my sophomore years. But, these physical changes were incapable of shaking the roots of my Ladakhi identity, especially the values. The only incongruence was a difference in people's eyes regarding me back home with casual comments on my hair, ripped pants, lipstick colour and my outspoken attitude. But recognition for the major role of Ladakhi women in society was my central idea portrayed through a photo of my mother watering the fields and happily chatting with her female comrades.

The exhibition was followed by a healthy discussion on diverse and unspoken topics rotating around homosexuality in Ladakhi society, imbibing patriarchal mindsets, parental pressure, taboos and agricultural reforms. The discussion was carried forward by the gathering of visitors comprising mainly of students, especially Ladakhi students studying outside India (such as the USA). The exhibition and discussion proved to be a focal point of healthy learning process driven by unconventional opinions, observations and reformation methods. This was a major 'take away' for all the

people present there. Questions about prospects of returning to Ladakh and going back to an agrarian society of Ladakh in the adverse conditions of failed tourist industry weighed on everybody's mind.

The sun had set and it was getting dark outside, time did not allow us to go on, phones were already buzzing. So everybody had LAMO-made tea and returned to their homes. At the end I thought that since birds might not want to predict their migration

season, soon advancing, but their flight during migration is surely not an easy one.

Namgail Angmo is a postgraduate student in Liberal Studies, Ashoka University.

The exhibition is part of the project 'Education-driven urban migration, Himalayan youth, and future aspirations in India' supported by LAMO and a University of North Carolina University Research Council Grant.

King Gesar Storytelling at LAMO



Mireille Gehin with Ladakhi musician Tsering Chorol

When I came first time to the LAMO centre, which preserves Ladakhi architecture, I knew I could tell the story of King Gesar, the fabulous Asian epic there. The place was ideal. However I had many anxieties and some fears before starting. I would have to tell the epic in English for my first time (I am French) in front of an international audience. And as Chorol, my musician, a brilliant Ladakhi singer and I did not have much time for rehearsals, the project became a sort of challenge for me.

While telling the story, when I read the intensity of the visitors listening, I understood my English worked, the audience could dream and I quickly became confident. As the locals recognized the figure of the story

they sang along with Chorol and it was a joy for anybody in the audience and it continued to give me more strength. The epic needed it.

After the show, Ladakhi people came to me to tell about tales from their childhood. A Buddhist monk was astonished to see a woman telling the story when traditionally only men would tell this story. A young Indian lady asked me if the story was of Brahma, who is a Hindu god? A young Ladakhi came with emotion and who had suddenly rediscovered a part of his childhood.

With such encouragement, I will continue to tell the story in different places in Ladakh, believing people need it not only for entertainment but because they need to be in contact with their feelings and something more. Some talked about their imaginations, some others about their souls.

King Gesar story is of a child with supernatural power. He has to fight the demons to establish peace in his kingdom.

The writer Mireille Gehin is a storyteller from France.

For Girls by Girls

Health education amongst adolescent girls in Ladakh

By Tsering Chonzom

Looking back at her childhood in Muth, Tsewang Chuskit, a former student of Siddhartha School now studying in New York, had often wondered how women in Ladakh approach their bodies, how knowledge is shared between a mother and her daughter. What it means for an adolescent girl to understand the concerns surrounding her health and deal

with birth. Girls who get married early do not have time to complete their education as they are expected to perform household duties, their young bodies are not able to bear the weight of pregnancy and their knowledge of child rearing is poor. Young girls, who leave their families and come to study in Leh or Kargil, often have no one to turn to when they are in distress or

at LAMO inviting adolescent girls along with their mothers or older siblings, as well as women working in the field of education, health and law in Ladakh. They began by discussing the biological changes a girl experiences at puberty, how she is a vital part of her family and the community, and needs support during this time. They touched on the importance of a good relationship between a mother and her daughter(s). And most of all, on the significance of basic health education for adolescent girls at home and school and easy access to health care. While recognizing the importance of traditional wisdom of health it is also important to work with the current streams of knowledge.

For most of the participants the open discussion allowed them to talk about local issues. For me, it was an opportunity to learn more about some of these concerns and issues and how to deal with them, especially as these discussions did not exist in my school and college. Chuskit and Angmo will be doing more 'girl to girl' outreach and similar workshops in the coming years in Ladakh.

The project is supported by the professors at the Smith College Summer Science Program in Northampton, MA and the ANNpower-Vital Voice Women's Leadership Program in Washington DC.

Tsering Chonzom is Librarian and Educational Outreach Officer, LAMO.



Tsewang Chuskit and Stanzin Angmo while giving their presentation

with issues such as menstruation, birth control, and pregnancy amongst others. How do doctors in Ladakh approach women's health concerns?

She had seen that girls in rural parts of Ladakh, including some of her friends, get married at an early age, often even before they finish school, and are not ready to be wives let alone mothers. Further, they are not fully aware of various health issues and concerns associated with child bearing and

have health problems. At the same time, medical facilities for women are lacking, as are good doctors or often the doctors are male and so the women have difficulties communicating with them. She noticed that many of these issues are not spoken about in Ladakh, some are considered taboo.

Along with Stanzin Angmo from Stok, they initiated a project that looked at girl's health education and leadership empowerment. In this context a workshop was held

Art Camp and Exhibition

By Kunzang Chodak

It was the first time that my painting was being exhibited. Initially I was nervous, mainly because the painting didn't come out as expected. However, I let myself be a part of the exhibition knowing it would give me an opportunity to learn about various arts and gain in artistic knowledge. Also I enjoyed the experience of working with different artists.

For an artist seeing different things is just not enough, as indeed we need to find ways to portray what we see. I felt that consulting with other artists about their views and techniques really helped me to better tackle these issues.

I came across LAMO through a friend and am thankful because the time I spent at the camp was of great quality. Working at LAMO made my summer holidays



Tsering Motup's paintings in progress during the Art Camp in June



Above: *Touch of Infinity*, Kunzang Chodak, 2015

Below: *Identity of Ladakh*, Rigzin Paljor, 2015



meaningful and I look forward to working again at LAMO in my upcoming vacation as well. Meeting and interacting with many local artists and beginners like me was encouraging. Though my first attempt didn't go that well, I am desperately waiting to do better in the future.

Kunzang Chodak is a second year BFA student at Anitoons - The School of Art and Animation, New Delhi. He took part in LAMO's art camp in June-July 2015.

Music Matters: A LAMO-Siddhartha School Project

By Tashi Morup

Ladakhi music has a rare, special sound, of its own. An amalgamation of many influences, located as Ladakh is on the crossroads of High Asia, it has taken from other cultures but retained its individuality. But as new forms of music and media take over people's lives, children have far fewer venues to engage with their culture.

Siddhartha School, Stok, is committed to offering their students a sensitive curriculum that honours Ladakh's rich traditions and way of life, as well as opportunities



Students of Siddhartha School, Stok perform for the collaborative music project

to explore them. In 2014, the School collaborated with LAMO to work on a unique project of producing a music DVD based on the performances by students of the School. Working with local artists and musicians the students learnt several songs and played instruments such as the *daman* (kettledrum) and the *surma*. They also learnt to improvise and combine Ladakhi music with western instruments such as the guitar.

Encouraged by the results of this project, and its appreciation by various supporters, LAMO and Siddhartha decided to work together again in 2015. Through a kickstarter campaign funds were raised to produce a second DVD and partially fund the establishment of a sound studio at LAMO.

This time the students are more engaged and involved

with the production of the music DVD, from working on the lyrics to the CD cover, recording, editing and packaging the film. LAMO has worked with the students by providing them basic training in designing CD covers and editing. Tsewang Phuntsog and Rigzin Nurboo, two versatile musicians have also been involved in this project since its inception. Along with the teachers of Siddhartha, led by Principal Norlha Ngodup and his colleague Tenzin Dhashey who were able to bring in professional musicians to teach the students traditional musical instruments. Some of the teaching staff, led by Yangchan Dolma, contributed by teaching the students dances and songs. In recent months a professional music teacher, Lobsang Dawa, has been appointed. Hence, the forthcoming DVD is a comprehensive teamwork between LAMO staff with students and teachers of Siddhartha School.

The LAMO-Siddhartha Sound Studio, which will partially open next year as funding is still being sought for its completion, once established will be a facility available to all Ladakhis to explore and record traditional and contemporary forms of music in the region, and disseminate these amongst a wider audience in Ladakh and outside. It will enable students to learn about sound and recording techniques, as well as be a facility dedicated to documenting Ladakhi music and oral traditions so that in the years to come an archive can be built up and housed at the LAMO Centre for future generations of Ladakhis to use.

This partnership between LAMO and Siddhartha School is probably the first of its kind in Ladakh, and has been made possible by the guidance and visionary approach of Khen Rinpoche Lobzang Tsetan, Founding Director, Siddhartha Cultural and Welfare Society, and the other Board members. Ultimately, the aim is to widen the scope of arts education in Ladakh where each child can be enriched by their heritage.

In the film LAMO made for the kickstarter campaign, Tsewang Dolker, one of the teachers at the School said, "I've found that music is very important for overall growth and development of a child. Our children have great zest and enthusiasm in music. So if they get a platform, if they get a chance to perform their cultural program, their confidence level will rise as well as it will inspire them to do new things."

Tashi Morup is Projects Director, LAMO.



The Wishing Tree during Dosomecho

From a far distance, it's hard to imagine that the metal structure standing tall in the LAMO courtyard is an artist's interpretation of a tree. Aren't trees supposed to be green, studded with lush green leaves? May be this one is his take on a tree during the winters. Or maybe he wants to make an important point...

In December 2014, sculptor Tsering Gurmet spent weeks collecting metal scraps which he then transformed into a tree. A metal tree made out of scrap to signify the changes taking place around us. To raise concerns related to disposal of waste, environmental degradation and pollution. To talk about the decline of greenery, particularly visible in Leh as more fields are converted for commercial use and trees being struck down, ground waters decrease and water channels being polluted. "Planting" the tree in Old Town was in recognition of the trees that once flourished there but have now disappeared.

In such a situation, a tree symbolises hope. And it was with this hope that LAMO invited the community to share their ideas and wishes for a better future. At first, some were shy and some failed to understand the concept. But as the day passed, the young and old took to the platform and spoke their hearts out. From personal desires of young boys and girls to wishes for a better future for Ladakh by concerned citizens, the branches took them all. The tree looked alive, as if it slowly started to breathe with its new and colourful leaves.

Faisal Ahmed, one of the volunteers during this public collaboration event, visited LAMO a few weeks later and realised that the tags had faded away and so had the writings. To see all the effort put in to bring the tree to life had gone wasted, but he was not sad. Instead, he preferred to believe that all those wishes have come true...

The writer Mabel Disket was Media Officer at LAMO.

Exploring Art in India

By Isaac Gergan

In order to enrich ourselves we must occasionally step out of our boundaries and comfort zones. Explore and interact with the bustling and ever changing world around us. It enables us to better perceive our positions in the world and consequently benefit and better inform what we do. Early in 2015, as the temperatures in Leh dropped below zero, LAMO gave me the opportunity to travel to various art events around India. The November to March period is ripe with vibrant events, cultural and art related among others taking place across India. I started with the India Art Fair in Delhi, then moved to Mumbai for the Kala Ghoda Arts Festival, to Kochi for the Biennial, to Bangalore to discover its Art scenes and Auroville to see Pierre Legrand at his studio. Here I want to talk a little about my experiences at two of these events.

Dharavi, in Mumbai, is deemed Asia's largest slum. It is also where the Dharavi Biennale, in its second edition, was held in February. The Biennale, initiated by the ngo, SNEHA (Society for Nutrition, Education and Health Action), brought the community together over a period of two years to explore and dissect the essence and nature of life in the community. Interpretations of this ranged from sculptures to paintings, photographs, illustrations, writings, recycled materials, interactive spaces, and workshops. Color Box, the center of the biennale, located in a typical Dharavi home meant for an entire family saw itself converted to a gallery space with artwork confronting and showcasing peoples occupations, the state of affairs and its relation to the rest of Mumbai and India. Similarly two other venues looked at new designs and approaches to material, or creating spaces to confront women's concerns. The contemporary nature of these works had an immediacy aiding the constructing of meaning, laying bare the issues for an interpretation, which for a first time visitor presented an unfamiliar spectrum of the human condition. The usual gap between artist, artwork and viewer was narrowed, like the spaces we interacted in. For instance the sounds that an interactive piece generated could be heard on the street right outside, or the occupations depicted could be seen on the adjacent street, or the materials of the artwork found in their recycling plants a few blocks away. On the second floor, a puppet show took on the topic of domestic instability and a comic book illustrated various



An installation using bricks at the Student Biennale, Kochi

real life stories of domestic violence, many of whose creators we were interacting with. The unusual context for art further directing and enforcing the artwork, I felt as a stranger thrown right into the underbelly of Dharavi, overwhelmed and trying to find my footing in the chaos. It was an experience that I had to immerse in wholly, which in retrospect was perhaps how I came to learn so much about Dharavi in such a short time. I believe it was one of the few times that art was an informer of such a penetrating experience, or one that puts a stamp on memory, not as an artwork but as what it informs.

Kochi Muniurz Biennale, also in its second edition, brought artists from all around the globe to interact with



An interactive sound installation at the Dharavi Biennale

the histories and notions that circumscribe Kochi as a port and trading hub, that extended to other parts of India and the world. The Biennale spread across venues in and around Fort Kochi, Kerala, each venue a heritage structure having its own context and history. Injecting art into such a visited place was able to accommodate a first time visitor in various ways. While each artwork had its identity, it could be best understood in the entirety of the place vis-à-vis the Biennale. There needed to be a synergetic connection between the heterogeneous artworks, venues and artists.

In order to gain such an experience, one had to traverse

through the entire town. In a sense then, the individual artworks only reinforced understanding the whole, perhaps even as a performative work in itself. Mnemonically this synecdoche experience became a whole by embodying democratic and varied interpretations, relying on its individual components to reinforce the essence of the place and the Biennale's purpose.

My experiences in both these events opened up a whole box of ideas and directions for how contemporary art can be situated back in Ladakh. Among other directions, Dharavi's commitment to its community via Art could be rendered into showcasing the concerns and current situations of Ladakh's waning heritage. Kochi's construction of countless individuals reacting to a singular pretext can be interpreted to relate Ladakh's current state as one of the most frequented tourist destinations and what this means, perhaps one that encounters tourism as the new form of trade.

Ladakh, with a rich bed of history and with its deep-rooted traditions coming into contact with the contemporary world then suddenly becomes ripe with possibilities for an Art intervention. One which could nurture and shape decisions of the coming years and allow newcomers and locals to be immersed in the reality of Ladakh's past and present.

Creating a platform for Art that assists in creating new thought, an immersive experience and consequently stepping away from exotic stereotypes and romanticizing, laying the issues bare. Being able to cross-pollinate such ideas was an incredibly beneficial aspect of the winter trip; one that fostered hope and directions for future art initiatives in Ladakh. In light of Ladakh's expansions with large portions of the population coming into contact with the rest of India or the world, LAMO hopes to facilitate future interactions that with individual experiences can aid in a collective direction as we move forward.

Isaac Gergan is Program Officer, Arts, LAMO.



Bharti Kher's installation Three decimal points/ Of a minute/ Of a second/ Of a degree at the Pepper House, Kochi Muniurz Biennale