Namaste
from the Alice Boner Institute, (ABI) Varanasi!

The last 20 months has been a rollercoaster ride, as plans to revive the institution and build an active residency programme were put into action! For nearly the first nine months, repair and renovation work consumed us along with small and large disasters that tested our crisis management skills to the limit. Renovating an old house, I have learnt, is harder than building a new one, let alone making it an arts residency. It was only by October 2016, when the flood waters had receded, and our new bore-well replenished our water tanks, that we could invite our first resident Suzanne Zahnd to ABI- two months later than scheduled. In other words...we were ready in ‘Benares time’!

Meanwhile, in early April 2016, ABI was formally registered as the Alice Boner Society, under the Societies Registration Act of 1860, and an Advisory Committee of reputed members from the field of arts and academia in Varanasi was constituted. There were also local collaborations with the Raighat Basant School as well as international students of the Wisconsin Study abroad programme in sharing the life and journey of Alice Boner in Varanasi. With the opening of the ABI library as a public art reference library, there is regular footfall of students and scholars utilizing the space for research.

In September 2016, the Alice Boner Exhibition successfully travelled to the National Museum, Delhi, and a series of outreach events, including a symposium titled ‘Dialogues on Alice Boner’, a classical music concert and a public lecture on exhibition design at Khaj International Artist Residency, by designers from the Museum Rietberg was organized! In February 2017, the same exhibition came home to Benaras and was opened at the Bharat Kala Bhavan Museum by the Ambassador of Switzerland to India and Bhutan, H.E Dr. Andreas Baum and Prof. Girish Chandra Tripathi, Vice Chancellor, Banaras Hindu University.

2017 has also seen numerous ‘Assi Evenings’, an attempt to open the Institute terrace to intimate engagement of cultural and academic pursuits. A performance by Delhi based Sudhaya Foundation, a talk on museums and communities by Dr. Sabyasachi Mukherjee, Director of the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya, among other more intimate evenings of poetry and music.

And now the rollercoaster ride continues in the months ahead. Residencies continue to grow with two new partners: Goethe-Institut, Delhi and the Shelagh Cluett’s Trust, London are two partners who will support artists, musicians, writers, photographers to come live and work in Varanasi. February 2018 will see a month-long course on lived Sanskrit practices jointly organized by Heidelberg University, Würzburg University, Banaras Hindu University, and the Alice Boner Institute, Varanasi. A ten day miniature painting workshop with the Museum Rietberg, Zurich is also in the offering!

This newsletter gives a glimpse into the last 20 months, documenting the process of slow revival at the Institute. There is much to look forward to as we make Alice Boner’s home, into an abode for creative and cultural encounter.

Director
Introduction

The Alice Boner Institute is a research and residency space for artists, writers and scholars located at Assi Ghat in Varanasi, India. Administered under the aegis of the Alice Boner Society, this Institute aims to promote art and culture by providing support to scholars and artists to realize their innovative research projects while facilitating the engagement of lectures, seminars, exhibitions, discussions, audio-visual shows, symposia, courses etc. The Institute, stands as a repository for the artistic traditions of India through published books, manuscripts and a rich art collection.

In April 2016, under the leadership of its new Director, ABI was registered as the Alice Boner Society, Registration No: 35/2016-17, with registered address as B-1/159, Assi Ghat, Varanasi 221005.

This society has on its advisory board the following members: Dr. Bettina Sharada Bäumer (Padmashri), Scholar on Indian Arts and Indology; Mrs. Manju Sundaram, Senior Musicologist; Dr. Anjan Chakraverty, Professor and Former Dean, Faculty of Visual Arts, Benaras Hindu University; Mr. Shashank Singh, Proprietor, Hotel Ganges View; Mr. Vivek Srivastav, Advocate, High Court of Allahabad; Mr. Rakesh Singh, Proprietor, The Harmony Bookshop and Mr. Harsha Vinay, Director, Alice Boner Institute.
Repair & Infrastructure

Since January 2016, one of the main focuses at the Alice Boner home has been in repairing the building structure, fixing walls, rooms, broken pipes, plumbing lines, disposal of broken furniture, shelves etc.

The aim was to begin with the first and second floors, creating two units – a living space, studio, and bathroom - for future residents. In addition to this, refurbishment of the interiors, and initiating work towards a venue space on the terrace was also planned.

The large water tank has been removed, offering a bigger open space on the terrace. A partly-shaded structure can now be installed allowing for a make-shift venue for ABI.

New Three-Phase Electricity Connection
Repair & Infrastructure

A complete pest-control treatment of the house has been undertaken, and the structure of the house has been renovated in parts. Newly redesigned bathrooms and fittings, fresh cement plastering for select walls, modular electrical fittings with provision for air conditioning, new lights, and refurbished windows are some of the changes carried out. While preparation of the interior is ongoing, I am happy to say that a major portion of the repair work has been completed.

New toilet fittings along with changes in design have been incorporated to allow for more space.
Residencies

ABI offers residencies for international and national writers, artists, scholars, artisans, practitioners who wish to live and work in Varanasi for a length of time. During the course of their stay, residents are expected to engage with other local institutional networks in Varanasi as well as hold presentations, readings, and workshops for a public audience.

Residents at the Institute are provided with comfortable living, and studio facilities, apart from hot meals from our in-house kitchen, wi-fi, laundry and other services.

International Writer-in-residence
Suzanne zahnd
Residencies

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Art Education

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ABI in collaboration with the Visual Art dept, B.H.U participated in an interactive workshop titled ‘Voice of Change’, where students of fine arts and art history were introduced to various areas of expertise in the field of art. The resource persons of the workshop, namely Mr.Diwan Manna, Photographer and Curator, Ms.Vidya Shivdas, Curator, Mr.Sadanand Menon, Culture Critic, Mr. Suresh Jayram, Artist and Arts Administrator, addressed issues related to art criticism, rejuvenating of government institutions, creating alternate space for the arts and bridging the gap of academics and practice.

ABI in collaboration Rajghat Besant School, Krishnamurti Foundation of India participated in the Culture Week held in October to discuss the life and works of Pachna Bhushan Dr. Alice Boner with the students of Fine Arts. A presentation on Dr.Boner was made by ABI Director and an interactive session followed to understand the research undertaken by Dr.Boner in the field of sculpture and temple architecture. Students of Fine Arts from 11th and 12th STD participated in this interactive lecture.
Interaction

with International Groups

ABI in collaboration with the Wisconsin Study abroad programme, Varanasi organized a presentation for the students, on the Journey of Modern art in India. The lecture provided a brief introduction into the development of Modern Art in India from the decline of the Mughal Empire in 1700’s to the Independence of India in 1947. This also provided a context a much of the visual arts prevalent in the urban spheres of India today.

Exhibition Title  Alice from Switzerland: A Visionary Artist and Scholar across Two Continents

Alice Boner Institute, in collaboration with National Museum, Ministry of Culture, Govt of India, and Museum Rietberg, Zurich hosted an exhibition on the life and works of Padma Bhushan Dr. Alice Boner, from 1st September to 30th October 2016.

Alice From Switzerland
A Visionary Artist and Scholar across Two Continents

Inaugural Address by Dr.N.K.Sinha, Secretary, Ministry of Culture, Govt of India
Alice Boner Exhibition

The exhibition was inaugurated by Dr. Narendra Kumar Sinha, Honorable Secretary Culture, Ministry of Culture, Govt of India in presence of Dr. Gilles Roduit, Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Switzerland, Delhi. The exhibition showcased the sculptures, paintings, from the Alice Boner Institute, Varanasi and the Museum Rietberg, apart from numerous photographic prints from the Alice Boner Archive.

Exhibition Concept

This exhibition introduced the Swiss artist Alice Boner (1889-1981) who became a true cultural Ambassador during the period of her life. The encounter with Uday Shankar, their common travel to India and her commitment for his dance troupe gave her life the crucial twist. Being an artist herself she became a patron who supported other artists. She settled in Varanasi and thereafter contributed significantly to a worldwide sensitization and understanding of India’s art. Her research led her not only to the significant discovery of the principles of composition in Indian sculpture, but also to a search for the meaning of its content. For her pioneering research on Indian art, Alice Boner was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by the University of Zürich in 1969 and the Padma Bhushan by the President of India in 1974.
Symposium
Dialogues on Alice Boner

An symposium titled ‘Dialogues on Alice Boner’, was held at the National Museum Institute, National Museum, Ministry of Culture, Govt of India, to further understand the areas of scholarship and interest to Alice Boner. The photographs taken by Alice Boner, her letters and her diaries were also discussed.

Symposium

Speakers to the programme included: Prof. R.N. Misra, Eminent Art Historian and Indologist, Dr. Urmimala Sarkar, Associate Professor, Performance Studies, School of Arts and Aesthetics, in conversation with Mr. Sadanand Menon, Culture critic, and Andrea Kuratli, Photo Archives, Museum, Rietberg, Dr. Johannes Delitz, Deputy Director & Curator of South and South East Asian Art, and Nandita Raman, Image based Artist. The topics that were presented are as follows: Alice Boner on Art: Form & Composition, Uday Shankar to Contemporary: Inter-disciplinarity in Dance, and Alice Boner Archives, Journals and Role of Museum Rietberg.

From Left: Director ABI, Sadanand Menon, Prof. R.N. Misra
Public Reference Library

The Alice Boner Society maintains a free public art reference library. Initiated by the renowned scholar Padma Bhusan Alice Boner, and expanded by Padma Shri Dr. Bettina Baumer, this library houses a rare collection of books on Indian sculpture, temple architecture and aesthetics. These books have been meticulously catalogued and can now be a valuable resource for researchers and academics working in the fields of dance, music, temple architecture, and the principles of visual arts in India. This library space can also be used for seminars, talks, and other outreach activities. Students groups or artists presentations are regularly organized here for the local public.

Art Reference Library, Alice Boner Institute, Varanasi

Public Lecture

In conjunction with the exhibition, Alice from Switzerland, a public lecture on Exhibition Design for Museums was organized by ABI in collaboration with Khoj International Artists Residency, Delhi.

The designers of the exhibition Alice from Switzerland, Martin Sollberger and Mirijam Ziegler, were invited to speak about their work and the field of exhibition design in museums.
Alice Boner Exhibition: Bharat Kala Bhavan Museum, Varanasi: February 2017
Press articles
ABI activities

Interaction with School Children on Alice Boner

Student Walkthrough of the Alice Boner Exhibition

Presentation on Alice Boner for scholars

Students and scholars at a presentation on Alice Boner
ASSI evenings

A strong component of ABI’s objectives includes an interaction with a larger public through events, programmes
and performances.

The Institute terrace now forms an intimate venue space for short presentations, film screenings, and
performances with a seating capacity of 45-60 members.

The building of the Institute has interesting interior and exterior spaces, which allow privacy for study or
sometimes meeting other visitors. For residents staying at ABI, these interactive spaces then become crucial.
Press Articles on the Alice Boner Exhibition:


ALICE BONER INSTITUTE
Alice Boner Society (Regd 35/2016-17)

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