

CULTURAL HERITAGE CONSERVATION, PATAN 2018

KRIST Gabriela, Universität für angewandte Kunst Wien, Konservierung und Restaurierung

LUGER Kurt, Universität Salzburg

WEBER Johannes, Universität für angewandte Kunst Wien, Kunst und Technologie

PANDEY Satish, National Museum Institute, Janpath, New Delhi

The Institute of Conservation, University of Applied Arts Vienna, is involved in the conservation of the Patan Royal Palace since 2010. In a series of several working campaigns, funded by Eurasia-Pacific Uninet, the Institute was able to conserve important cultural heritage like the Bhandarkhal-Tank-Pavilion, the Tusha Hiti, two Stone Gates, the Golden Doorway Ensemble, wall paintings and four Stone Lions. The work was always done in close collaboration with the local partners, especially the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT) and local craftsmen. Additionally Asian partners like the National Museum Institute (NMI) and international experts were consulted and involved.

Conservation in Nepal after the earthquakes

In 2015 Nepal had to witness the destruction of entire villages and large parts of its major cities by two successive disastrous earthquakes on 25th April and 12th May. Beside the humanitarian catastrophe, important Hindu and Buddhist cultural properties were destroyed or severely damaged – among them the Durbar Square and Royal Palace in Patan. With its numerous historic temples and shrines this urban ensemble ranks among the most beautiful and architecturally intact ones in South Asia. Its global significance was recognized by its listing in 1979 as one of the seven Kathmandu Valley UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

After the natural catastrophe emergency response and first-aid measures started immediately. The Institute was involved in these efforts from the beginning on. With financial support from Austria, temporary storage (metal construction) were built where mainly water sensitive materials, like wooden beams and carved elements, can safely wait for their reuse. These were extended and adapted in 2016 and are currently additionally used as mobile studios for reconstruction works of wooden beams done by carpenters.

Following a fact-finding mission of the Institute in June 2015, work plans for the following years were drafted together with the KVPT. In order to cope with the increased amount of conservation work, two work campaigns have been scheduled each year – one in February and one in August/September. This allows a smoother work flow and reduces standstill in comprehensive conservation projects. Work which could not be completed in summer can be finished in spring. The month-long conservation campaigns have been carried out by teams of senior and junior conservators from the Institute of Conservation.

In the framework of these campaigns, all financially supported by EPU and the Austrian government, various selected earthquake-damaged monuments and works of art on the Patan Durbar Square and in the Royal Palace could be conserved, restored and re-erected:

- the partly collapsed Lion Pillar on the Durbar Square together with its fire-gilded lion sculpture
- the partly collapsed Pillar of Yoganarendra Malla, the largest of the three free-standing stone pillars on the Durbar Square, together with its fire-gilded metal sculpture of the king
- the stone sculpture of Harishankara and the Naga Throne, both of them salvaged from the debris
- the fire-gilded metal pinnacles of the two Taleju Temples being part of the Royal Palace
- the three-part ivory window ensemble at the façade of the Royal Palace
- the stone base of the collapsed Harishankara Temple
- the joints in the rooftop area of Krishna Mandir, the most prominent stone temple on the Durbar Square

In addition the exhibition modalities in the earthquake-damaged Patan Museum could be partly improved in the framework of a collection care project in 2016 and 2017. After the completion of the restoration of the museum building the collection care project should be continued. It can act as a role model for future approaches elsewhere in Nepal. All conservation work of the Institute of Conservation was intensively followed by the local community and Nepalese media.

Conservation Campaign 2018

In August/September 2018 the next conservation campaign is envisaged. A team of six senior conservators from the Institute and seven junior conservators will carry out primarily stone and metal conservation work.

One emphasis will be placed on the Vishveshvara Temple on the Durbar Square. The two-tiered temple was the first to be established by King Siddhinarasimha Malla in 1627. Its sanctum is accessible from stairs, which are flanked by a pair of elephants with riders. The temple shows elaborately carved wooden elements, stone reliefs integrated in the walls and a decorated stone basement. Although the temple withstood the earthquake, it suffered major damage on the ground floor. Due to the lateral movement in the course of the earthquake and the weight of the temple building, the masonry panels on the ground floor popped out and the structure remained resting mainly on the wooden frame. As a result the whole building sank several centimetres. After a structural restoration and reinforcement of the building done by the KVPT, the Institute of Conservation was approached to assess and conserve the stone basement. The stone blocks comprising the basement currently show cracks, detachments and sanding surfaces. Further they are heavily polluted. The Institute of Conservation will exploit knowledge gained in the conservation of the similar stone basement of the Harishankara Temple, which was treated in 2017. The conservation measures will include surface cleaning, gluing of broken parts, backfilling and micro-pointing. If required stone blocks will be dismantled for this purpose.

Further, the Golden Doorway at the façade of the Royal Palace, which acts as entrance to the Keshav Narajan Chowk and Patan Museum will be conserved. The ensemble consists of a door with a tympanon and a window above. All are made of fire-gilded repoussé work fixed on wooden substructures. The Golden Doorway can be considered one of the finest examples of metal work in Patan. Currently, various damage patterns could be observed including corrosion, deformation, holes and surface deposits.

The conservation measures will include surface cleaning, closing of cracks and holes, removal of corrosion products and reshaping of deformed parts.

Three damaged fire-gilded pinnacles of temple buildings of the Royal Palace will be conserved and prepared for their re-assembling. They are all made of fire-gilded metal and show severe cracks and deformation. The experience gained by the Institute in the framework of the conservation of the metal roofs of the Taleju Temple in 2015 is of great help in this task. Archival research will precede the practical conservation to gather information on the individual objects and monuments (e.g. on conservation history). Further all conservation measures are accompanied by detailed documentation (written and photographic). With regards to the threat of future earthquakes written and photographic documentation of Nepal's cultural heritage is an invaluable resource.

Regular Meetings

All practical conservation work is accompanied by regular meetings with the Nepalese project partners. These meetings ensure continuous exchange of information and update on challenges, problems and achievements of all partners involved. Thus smooth workflow is ensured. Further future projects can be discussed and planned properly. Beside the Institute seeks exchange with the Department of Archaeology and the UNESCO Office in Kathmandu and provides regular reporting.

The Austrian and Nepalese partners are also trying to enhance cooperation with Nepalese universities (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, Purbanchal University, Kwhopa Engineering College, Urban Design and Conservation Department), who are partly EPU members.

Output

After the earthquake in April 2015, many of the monuments comprising the valuable UNESCO World Heritage site in Patan are still in dire need of conservation and restoration measures. Thus the continuation of the already established working campaigns of the Institute of Conservation in collaboration with Nepalese partners in the following years is of utmost importance.

The achievements and successes of the altogether 8 years of collaboration and previous 3 years of earthquake response underline the value of the long-term conservation project in Patan. Numerous significant artworks could already be conserved and re-erected. All photographic documentation and reports are provided to the local partners and thus contribute to the overall documentation of this heritage site.

Altogether, the conservation efforts contributed not only to restore the ensembles former glory but also helped the local community to overcome the consequences of the disaster and get back to normality.

The project was funded by EPU from the very first hour. Only this permanent continuation allowed the establishment of the long-term relationship between the Austrian and Nepalese partners, the valuable growth of knowledge and conservation activities on the Patan Durbar Square and Royal Palace, which subsequently contribute to the overall preservation of this UNESCO World Heritage Site.