

# Ladakh

The crazy project of a French woman on the roof of the world



*"The museum is the project of the monks, I felt that the collection was valuable, the project intelligent, with content, and that the monks had a good vision" says Nelly Rieuf.*

This thirty-something French woman is the MaMoMu (Matho Monastery Museum) project leader at the Monastery of Matho. She has been working for seven years to safeguard the Buddhist religious heritage and to create a unique museum, art and culture Himalayan Ladakh. A pilot project to publicize and revive ritual art objects of exceptional value.

Nelly Rieuf promotes local know-how in the construction of the museum and forms a team of 16 women aged 22 to 42 years at the difficult practice of restoration work of art. *"Following my offer of work, women, exclusively, presented themselves, it is not a choice"*. It was only afterwards that Nelly realized the extremely beneficial side for the village and equality. *"For example, one of them was beaten by her husband, from the moment she got a salary, she could then kick him! The girls can now go shopping, buy the shoes they covet, they have different handbags (laughs)"*. In parallel, Nelly is developing a water supply project for the village and accompanying pregnant women to help reduce the mortality rate of young children. It also provides travel assistance for the disabled.

Mother of two young children, the challenges to overcome for several years undermines its endurance, and they are multiple: the workload of Matho project (quite monumental), the lack of funds necessary for the operation of the teams. In everyday life, lack of running water, geographical isolation, childhood diseases, hygiene problems *"bed bugs that can really ruin sleep!"* Make the living conditions at 3 800 m altitude particularly difficult.

*"I do not have privacy, these projects require an investment of time and energy, it's not easy, but it's interesting, I do what I can do, that's it!"*.

Full text on request (17 331 characters)

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Nestled in the heart of the amazing mountains of the Indian Himalayas, Ladakh is a strategic land bordering Pakistan and China. Perched at an altitude of 3,800 m on a hill at the foot of the Stock mountain range, stands the gumpa (monastery) of Matho where Nelly Rieuf has been developing the MaMoMu project for 7 years.





One of the major creations of Nelly's teams is the Matho Museum Project, concerning the design of the museum, developed in 2011, the construction of the building, completed in 2015 with its large colorful tower and the floors of the building housing the museum, topped by the canopy opening on a panoramic roof terrace.





Placed on both sides of the Dukang entrance (the monastery's worship hall), large paintings depict the guardians of the four horizons, on the right wall are represented Virudhaka the south guardian in the face and hands blue next to Dhritarashtra the eastern goalkeeper who plays a string instrument (pipa).





The entrance of the Dukang Somar of the monastery and the statue of Buddha Sakyamuni. From recent creations, these beautiful paintings and silk brocades amaze by their details and their colors and testify to the richness of the treasures of Matho.





The central courtyard of the monastery and below the plain of the Indus. On the 1st floor, above the Dukang, the new room of worship, is the large glass room of the restoration workshop occupied by the women's team of the village of Matho.





Nelly Rieuf with Lino the youngest of her two young sons.



In the restoration workshop Nelly Rieuf assists and supervises the work of the women of the village of Matho on an extremely precious thangka of the 12th century.





In the restoration workshop Nelly Rieuf assists and supervises the work of a woman from the village of Matho on an extremely precious thanka of the 12th century.



Nelly Rieuf with Lino the youngest son of her two young sons, in the immense wooden staircase drawn by her from the Matho Museum, one of her proudest "the biggest in Ladakh! ".





Nelly Rieuf in the center, surrounded by a part of the women's team of the restoration workshop, her husband Tashi public relations manager sitting to the left, young girls volunteering in interior design and Isaac responsible for communication at the fall of 2018.





Anna, an Australian girl, works on her computer to develop the scenography of the last room of the museum, one of the most complex.





One of the rooms on the second floor of the museum under development will contain bronzes, tangkas and mandalas, as well as teaching about the development of Buddhism.





The workshop where the women of Matho take care of the restoration of objects. It is Nelly's desire to have formed local restoration teams, a rare and demanding discipline, in order to create local capacity for the preservation of works of art and for the transmission of this know-how, "Girls are trained in the transmission of knowledge".





Two women from the village of Matho, work in one of the most difficult workshops, restoring a very fragile statue, uncooked clay and plant fiber of about 200 to 300 years.





Testing Spaldong is working on the restoration of a statue representing a Sakya master, recognizable by his characteristic hat.





Sitting cross-legged, Testing Spaldon and Thinles, two women from the village of Matho, are working on the restoration of a very fragile statue, uncooked clay and plant fiber of about 200 to 300 years.









The shelves of the workshop are filled with brushes, glues, natural pigments and accessories for the restoration of works.





Dolma repairs the tears of a prayer book slip. She half-opens both sides of the thickness and inserts a piece of paper. The training is spread over a period of 7 to 8 years and ensures a future. These highly qualified skills are a guarantee of income and a guarantee of heritage preservation, but also help to create jobs for women.





Old worn and blackened thangkas by the soot wait for a restoration. These works contain a religious charge, they have been exposed to rituals. The older the object, the greater the religious burden, to which is added a great financial value. "What motivated me and seduced me is the idea of restoring objects on the spot for the owners " legitimate " works.





Dechen takes care of strengthening a fifteenth-century thangka with fabric inlays, a restoration work that will take four to five months to two. Meditation support, these paintings on fabrics generally represent a Buddhist deity.





In the women's restoration workshop of the village of Matho reinforce an extremely precious thangka of the twelfth century.





A woman from the village of Matho is busy reinforcing a thangka with fabric inlays.



Dechen Angmo returns an early twelfth-century thangka restored with fabric inlays, these paintings usually represent a Buddhist deity.





Kunzes Angmo discovers an early-16th century thangka being restored, representing a mandala of the palace of Heruka, deity of the Nyingma School.





Central detail of piece No. 77 of the collection, an eighteenth century thangka after restoration. He represents Vairocana, the primordial cosmic Buddha.



Central detail of piece No. 181 of the collection, an eighteenth-century thangka, representing Vajrakila identified by its three heads, six arms, four legs and wings.





The entrance to the Matho Museum with its low door and its traditional carved wooden lintel.





The visit to the Matho Museum will end with a library on the top floor in a glass veranda furnished with reading sofas. The canopy opening on the roof terrace will reveal an exceptional panoramic view of the Indus Valley and the surrounding peaks.





The building built within the monastery's inner surface of 225 sqm, has three levels with a theme per floor, the use of materials and local construction technique has preserved the traditional architectural unity of the monastery of the Fifteenth century. The rooms will be accessible by a staircase contained in this imposing tower.





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