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CHOKI TRADITIONAL ART SCHOOL

“Empowering the unprivileged youth as custodians of distinct culture”



WISHING YOU A VERY HAPPY SUMMER 2024!

Principal Foreword



As we reflect on an amazing year at the Choki Traditional Art School (CTAS), our hearts are filled with gratitude for the unwavering support and generosity we have received from all of you. This year, we proudly welcomed 165 students (120 boys and 45 girls) into our community. Despite having only 50 slots for new admissions, we received over 150 applications, a testament to the growing interest and need for the education we provide. While it was heartbreaking to turn away so many deserving applicants, we are incredibly grateful to have been able to enroll up to our maximum capacity, thanks to your support.

Reaching this capacity and benefiting as many students as possible each year fulfills our deepest wishes. Over the past 25 years, hundreds of youths have graduated from CTAS, their lives transformed by the skills and knowledge they acquired here. This brings us immense joy and happiness, and it is all possible because of kind individuals like you, who have made it possible to pursue this dream of equipping underprivileged youths with valuable livelihood skills. We thank you all immensely from the bottom of our hearts. Please be assured that we will continue to keep the dream of our late founder alive. As we move forward into the next 25 years and beyond, we solicit your continuous support and blessings.

Ensuring the sustainability of our school is a top priority, and we have been exploring several strategies to achieve this. One recent initiative involves creating a living museum and explore demonstration of the additional forms of the thirteen traditional arts and crafts beyond the five courses offered at the school. This approach aims to enrich the guest experience and play a critical role in sustaining this important institution. Additionally, we hope this initiative will provide students with improved learning opportunities and greater appreciation of traditional ways of life that have shaped Bhutanese culture for centuries, while also enhancing the immersive experience for our visitors.

The sales room located on the top floor of the new Multipurpose Hall, constructed with matching grant support from Mr. & Mrs. Bickell and other supporters, is expected to significantly enhance sales and contribute to sustaining the school's operational budget.

While we work hard towards full sustainability, your continued support is still solicited.

We wish you all a beautiful and blessed summer.

Thanking you and with heartfelt appreciation.

(Sonam Choki)
Principal

Progress on the Multipurpose Hall Construction

The construction of the Multipurpose Hall has made significant progress. By next March, students will enjoy their meals in a spacious hall free of congestion, and there will be ample space for cultural programs and other events, eliminating the need to step outside due to space constraints. This achievement is made possible thanks to the generosity of Mr. & Mrs. Bickell for their matching grant support, as well as all the supporters who contributed to this project, particularly Mr. Koenraad and Lynne for their fundraising efforts through CTAS Trans Bhutan Trek last year.

In addition to addressing space constraints for meals, cultural programs, and other school activities, the new hall will help overcome one of the biggest challenges: providing a suitable sales room for generating revenue. Currently, the sales room is housed in the old house, which suffered major cracks and roofing leakage from the 2011 earthquake. This location not only poses safety concerns but also creates an unfavorable ambiance for sales, with dampness damaging the products.. The school expresses immense gratitude to everyone involved for making this opportunity a reality.



Students' Art Adorns New School Building

The students are thrilled about the new multipurpose building. To enhance its traditional aesthetic, the wood carving students have taken on a special project to carve the pillars for the main entrance. This effort not only demonstrates the carving skills they've acquired but also serves as a lasting testament and gift to the school. These pillars will remind them of their school days and fill them with pride every time they visit. Similarly, the painting students are excited and looking forward to painting the building after their mid-term break.



9 Years of Growth: Ustinov Foundation's Impact on CTAS

This marks the 9th year of support from the Ustinov Foundation, whose unwavering commitment has been instrumental in advancing the tailoring and embroidery courses at CTAS. What began as support for creative tailoring has blossomed into an enriching journey, now encompassing traditional bootmaking, thangka stitching, and wood carving, greatly expanding the learning horizons of our students. The school is immensely grateful to the Foundation.



Breaking Barriers in Wood Carving

Pasang Lham is the lone female student in the entire carving program, serving as a role model by demonstrating that this profession is also achievable for women. Despite the physical strength required, she has coped very well and continued to the advanced program after completing the three-year certificate program. Her skill is exceptional, and her teachers have commended the quality of her work. She will be the first female student to graduate in wood carving. The school is proud of her.

Pasang was raised by her single mother after her father passed away when she was young. She has six siblings and hails from Rinchen Ding, Wangdiphodrang. Life was tough for her, but she expresses her gratitude to the school and all the supporters who made this learning opportunity available for underprivileged youth like herself. She acknowledges that without this opportunity, she would probably be in the village leading a difficult life. She is therefore immensely grateful to the school and the supporters for this life changing opportunity.



Overcoming Adversity: Nim Dorji's Journey to Success

Meet Nim Dorji, a 22-year-old from Wangdue who defies the odds. Born without one arm, Nim faced myriad challenges from a young age. Despite losing his parents early on, his elder sister's love and care couldn't shield him from the stigma and limitations imposed by his disability. But Nim refused to let his circumstances define him. With unwavering determination, he set his sights on a dream: to become a painter.

Today, Nim is a proud student excelling in his 6th Level painting studies with graduation on the horizon. "Joining CTAS has transformed my life," Nim says. "Not only am I pursuing my passion, but I'm also paving a path for a sustainable career. I'm immensely grateful to all those who believed in underprivileged youths like me and provided us with such incredible learning opportunities".

Nim said he aspires to hone his craft by working alongside professional painters. Nim's story isn't just about success—it's a testament to pride, courage, persistence, and hope. He emerged as a beacon of inspiration, determined to encourage others facing similar challenges to persevere and chase their dreams. The school is pleased to be able to extend such support and empower underprivileged youths like Nim to realize their full potential. This is all thanks to our supporters and we remain immensely grateful.



Visit by His Holiness Phra Kuba Bunchum

His Holiness Lam Phra Kuba Bunchum of Thailand visited the school on 22nd April 2024. He has always been in awe of the school and makes it a point to visit the school whenever he comes to Bhutan. His Holiness offered some donation and lunch to the students and staff, alongside bestowing blessings for the good health and prosperity of the students, staff, and all the supporters who have made such learning opportunities possible at the school.



Community Appreciation for Zero Waste Commitment

The school has diligently upheld the tradition of Zero Waste Hour every 2nd day of the new month, initiated by Her Majesty the Queen on June 2, 2019, coinciding with the coronation of His Majesty the Fourth King. This initiative aims to cultivate a behavioral shift towards proper waste management and foster a sustainable consumption lifestyle.

On this designated day, the school conducts a mass cleaning campaign within the school premises and its surrounding neighborhood. This endeavor not only contributes to maintaining a clean environment but also serves as a meaningful way for the school to engage with and support the community, reflecting our belief that the cleanliness of society mirrors its collective mindset.

In recognition of the school's consistent commitment to this cause, local government authorities have acknowledged our efforts. As an expression of gratitude for the school's community service, the office has gifted three fire extinguishers and waste bins to further support the initiative.



School Rimdro & Kanjur Recitation

The annual School Rimdro (Puja) took place on April 18, 2024. As part of the ceremony, the recitation of the 108 volumes of Kanjur was conducted. This marks the second consecutive year that this prayer recitation has been held at the school, initiated last year for the benefit of sentient beings and the well-being of students, staff and supporters both within and outside the country. Kanjur comprises the teachings of Lord Buddha, and its recitation is believed to generate immense merit. The significance of this day is amplified as it commemorates the death anniversary of Zhabdrung Nawang Namgayl, a pivotal figure in Bhutanese history who unified the country and established its spiritual and governance systems. For the students and staff, it was a deeply meaningful day of observance, marked by offerings and religious activities aimed at invoking blessings, compassion, and protection for all sentient beings.



Teachers Day Celebration

On May 2nd, the Birth Anniversary of His late Majesty the Third King, Bhutan celebrated Teachers' Day, a poignant tribute to the vital role of educators in shaping society. The Choki Traditional Art School joined in this commemoration, orchestrating a heartfelt acknowledgment of their teachers' dedication and impact. Students took center stage, organizing a memorable day that spoke volumes of their gratitude. They expressed appreciation for their teachers' unwavering commitment, acknowledging how their guidance had transformed lives. The support and skills received had been invaluable in shaping their futures.

The day unfolded with vibrant cultural performances by the students, filled with nostalgic moments, laughter, and a delicious meal. In turn, teachers reciprocated the warmth, deeply touched by the outpouring of love and respect from their students. It was a day of mutual appreciation, underscoring the profound bond between educators and learners.



A Day of Vegan Delight

On June 27th, Veg Voyages Foundation and Vegan Travel Asia sponsored a vegan lunch for the students and staff of our school. The meal was delicious and nourishing, enjoyed by everyone. This visit, accompanied by these delightful vegan dishes, not only satisfied our appetites but also inspired the students and staff to appreciate the benefits and creativity of plant-based cuisine. It contributed to a sustainable environment while promoting compassion and love for animals. The kindness and warmth shown by our guests made the day truly special for the entire school community.

In response to this generous act, the school has pledged to serve a vegan meal at least three days a week to contribute to saving animals and the planet. We extend our heartfelt thanks to Sacred Himalaya Travels for organizing this wonderful opportunity.



Field Trip Inspires Students

To provide students with additional exposure, the school organized a one-day field trip for the winning house, divided into two groups (24th May and 27th May 2024), to visit various arts and crafts institutes in the capital, including a visit to the alumni work studio. The students found the study visit very beneficial, stating that it opened their eyes to the wider possibilities of art. They were amazed to see how the arts and crafts they learned at school are applied in dzongs, monasteries, and other display venues. This experience was very inspiring and motivated them to work harder, as they could see the big picture of how they could contribute to preserving traditions and benefiting society.



Celebrating 50 Years of Sustainable Tourism in Bhutan

This year marks the 50th anniversary of sustainable tourism in Bhutan. For five decades, Bhutan has embraced a unique approach to tourism, prioritizing sustainability and cultural preservation. As the country celebrates half a century of this harmonious journey, it is an opportune moment to recognize the significant contributions of traditional arts and crafts in promoting tourism.

In light of this, it is fitting for our school, which has dedicated the past 25 years to preserving and promoting Bhutanese traditional arts and crafts, to participate in this national celebration. To mark this milestone, the school plans to expand its offerings by showcasing additional forms of the thirteen arts and crafts beyond the five programs currently available and by inaugurating a living museum. This expansion aims to provide students with greater exposure to these traditions and address the limitations of our current program offerings.



BHUTAN
Believe



Celebrating 50 Years of Sustainable Tourism in Bhutan

The 50 years national celebration presents a wonderful opportunity for the school to explore and showcase additional arts and crafts such as bamboo weaving, wooden bowls, paper masks, and textile dyeing, among others. This will enhance students' exposure to various art forms, allowing them to explore their skills, especially junior students. This exposure can help them discover their true interests and aptitudes, guiding them toward skills they are most inclined to, ultimately providing better opportunities for success in life.



A living museum will also serve as an important platform for enriching the learning experience of the students while preserving the rich, age-old traditions of the country. This aligns perfectly with the overarching goal of the school to preserve Bhutan's cultural heritage. The school is fortunate to receive support from Mr. Raj Parekh to renovate the existing 300-year-old building, which was in dire need of repair due to roof leaks and major cracks caused by the 2011 earthquake, posing significant safety issues. As part of this important celebration and our contribution to the national effort of preserving age-old traditions, the school plans to transform this historic building into a living museum, for which some resource has to be mobilized. Therefore, any support received towards this project would be highly appreciated.

This initiative will enrich the school's cultural and educational landscape, thereby providing an immersive experience for both students and guest, and help gain a profound understanding and appreciation of the way of life of our forefathers. With modernization, ancient traditions and ways of life are evolving and, in some cases, becoming extinct. Hence, it is a timely intervention to preserve and showcase the old age lifestyle that is worth cherishing. This project will not only enrich learning experience for students within the school as well as outside youths, but will also contribute to school's long term sustainability.



Alumni Success at National Design and Art Competition

The National Design and Art Competition (NDAC) is an annual event hosted by the Museum Division under the Department of Culture and Dzongkha Development, Ministry of Home Affairs, in collaboration with the Royal Textile Academy of Bhutan (RTA). Its primary objective is to celebrate and promote Bhutan's distinctive arts and crafts, providing artisans with a platform for recognition under the Royal Patronage of Her Majesty the Queen Mother Sangay Choden Wangchuck. The competition comprises five categories: Weaving, Embroidery, Traditional Painting, Wood Carving, and Sculpture.

NDAC is supported through funding from the Royal Government of Bhutan and Mr. & Mrs Bickell, a long-term supporter of our School. Winners in each category are awarded cash prizes and certificates personally endorsed by Her Majesty the Queen Mother Sangay Choden Wangchuck.

We are proud to announce that two of our alumni have excelled in this prestigious competition. Choki Dorji achieved the 2nd prize in Traditional Painting, while Kinley Wangchuk secured the 3rd prize in the Wood Carving category (awarded on April 4, 2024). Their accomplishments reflect the excellence of our school's education and the enduring talent nurtured within our community.



(Her Majesty Gyalyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck, Her Royal Highness Azhi Euphelma Choden Wangchuck, His Excellency the Prime Minister, Excellencies, distinguished guests, and talented artisans and art enthusiasts from across Bhutan)



Kinley Wangchuk Inspires Students and shares skills

Kinley Wangchuk is the CTAS Alumni Chairman for 2024. He graduated in the wood carving section in 2012 and has since become one of the popular wood carvers in the country. His work is featured in many temples and monasteries in Bhutan, including the iconic Semtokha Dzong, the oldest Dzong in Bhutan, built by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, who unified Bhutan in the 16th century.

Kinley Wangchuk is one of the finest artisans produced by CTAS, and the school is very proud of him. Based on the basics learned at the school, he worked with many fine wood carvers in the country, continually improving his skills. He is very grateful to the school and its supporters for the wonderful opportunity he received. Had it not been for this opportunity, his life would be totally different today. As a token of appreciation, he has been supporting the school and sharing his skills from time to time.

As Chairman of the Alumni Association this year, he has taken on the additional responsibility of mobilizing expert resources within the alumni and from outside experts in the fields of painting, wood carving, embroidery and coordinated iconography talk. He executed a project at the school for the wood carving students, carving a special dragon. He assigned the students to this project, provided instructions, visited periodically to assess and guide the process, and finally evaluated the work. He is pleased with the progress.



The students, too, are happy with the opportunity to work on the project, which has given them experience with a new design and techniques, which were truly beneficial. They are grateful to carry out such a project under the guidance of experts and are hopeful of receiving similar opportunities in the near future.



How you can help?

HELP EDUCATE AN UNDERPRIVILEGED YOUTH

You feed them for a lifetime

USD 2.6 can cover three meals, lodging and tuition for a day

USD 2850 - 5700 can support a student from three to six years.

Help make a difference in the life of a young Bhutanese youth.

Help a student become a professional painter, carver, embroider and weaver and succeed in life

If you have any questions, please email sonamctas@gmail.com



Your support so far has transformed lives of many underprivileged youths and preserved the cultural integrity of Bhutan. We look forward to your continuous support in sustaining the program.USD \$ MENTION Please support us again through any of the contacts below, which are tax deductible and will go in full to support the deserving students at CTAS:

A - Himalayan Youth Foundation US

106 S. Interlachen Avenue # 619
Winter Park, FL, 32789, USA
www.hyf-us.org

B - Himalayan Youth Foundation UK

7 Hallam Mews, London
<https://www.hyf-uk.org>

OR, You may kindly contact the school at:
Sonam Choki (sonamctas@gmail.com)
or Dorji Wangmo (dorjiwangmo197@gmail.com)



THANK YOU & KADRINCHEY LA!