



1. What is Beartsy and how did it begin?

Be artsy is a non-profit organisation developing creativity projects with the aim of providing different experiences and training opportunities to communities which would otherwise not be able to access them. We do not aim to only teach art just for the sake of art itself, but we also intend to provide communities with the tools to improve communication and effect the changes within they deem necessary. In a nutshell, we wish to empower local communities through art with a special emphasis on women. Hence, our current emphasis on the topic of menstruation and hygienic care through the Chhaupadi project in Nepal.

It all began towards the end of 2014, when co-founder Clara GO's Creativity Photo Project – the embryo of what would eventually become be artsy – was first set up and has, since then, been bringing participatory photography workshops to several Asian countries.

After two years and many experiences, Clara suggested to a group of people who were already collaborating with her or who wanted to work on like-minded projects to create more steady collaborations and join energies. We came to realise that we not only needed a legal framework – in order to grow and develop our projects more appropriately –, but also that there was a gap within the third sector we were attempting to fill – that is: reaching out to communities through artistic expression. Reaching out, above all, to women all over the world, because they tend to simultaneously be the ones pulling their weight behind communities and the ones more overlooked by NGOs.

To sum up, artsy is a group of people with different artistic backgrounds, who have come together to create cooperation projects aimed at minorities and communities at risk of exclusion.

2. Could you elaborate about your project Rato Batlin?

Project Rato Baltin is a project focused on the topic of menstruation in West Nepal. In this area the practice of Chhaupadi is particularly harsh on girls and women. Chhau means menstruation and padi means a woman. According to this practice, girls are considered to be impure while they're menstruating and are deprived from their most basic needs for a period of 7 to 10 days.

Our aim is bringing hygienic, to them, and will introduce menstrual cups – which were donated by our strategic partner Ruby Cup. There are several reasons why we decided to name it the Red Bucket Project (Rato Baltin in Nepalese).

First, because red is a relevant colour in Nepal: it is used very frequently, even in its flag, and is one of the colours most favoured by girls and women. Secondly, because red is a colour which is related to menstruation for obvious reasons.

And finally, because we will hand the girls undergoing training a kit that will be contained in a bucket – hence, the red bucket. Said kit will consist of the bucket itself – which will serve the purposes of containing the rest of the items when not in use, be a means for the girls to carry water to wash themselves and use at the latrine, and also where they can boil water to sterilise the cups once a month –; a menstrual cup; a towel; and a bar of soap.

We will complement the distribution and implementation of menstrual cups in the area with the help of participative photography: this will allow the girls themselves to spot what could be improved while they are menstruating (through participatory needs assessment).

The workshops will be held by local women and young girls from every community, with the help of local Nurses and volunteers who will give detailed instructions to participants on the use of the menstrual cup and on the menstrual and hygienic educational part of the program.

The final Photo Exhibition will take place in the middle of the village involving the whole community. Another aspect we will work on is the adaptation of latrines in schools to make them girl-friendly. This will involve getting them to have water and a latch on the door, so they can wash and change comfortably.

Besides workshops, and in order to achieve a long-term impact, there will be an in-school nurse visiting approximately once per month, when the girls will be asked about their experiences with the menstrual cup and their questions or needs. We already count with a network of local doctors and teachers willing to help us with both training and the implementation of the menstrual cup. They will be the first ones to use the cups, so they will serve as an example to the girls and will also be better geared towards answering any queries during the training and follow-up.

This project will be implemented in several stages in order to both expand the number of girls and women reached and be able to follow up on the focus groups. We intend to eventually have trained enough local nurses and women so that they can, in turn, do the training and follow-up and continue the project on their own.

The idea and long term goal is to mitigate the negative effects of Chhaupadi.

3. Why did you choose to work in Nepal?

As mentioned above, Clara GO has been offering her Creativity photo Project for the past two years in several Asian countries. Last year she did so in Nepal, including the far West. There, she experienced the living conditions in the area first-hand and eventually found out about the practice of Chhaupadi. This made a profound impact on her, as did on the rest of us when she relayed it. We considered this issue was pressing enough for us to take action and help improve the living conditions of women and girls in the area.

4. What are your current plans for Rato Baltin?

Rato Baltin is a recently created project, and we are currently in the process of raising funds at <http://www.migranodearena.org/en/challenge/13821/higiene-menstrual-en-nepal-chhaupadi>

[_rato-baltin/](#) (English version when scrolling down), or through direct donations, online shop sales and photography exhibitions (these are only in Spain for now).

From February to April or May (the Nepalese government recently changed the dates of school holidays and we are adapting to the new schedule) the first stage of implementation is going to take place. Our starting point will be 2 VDC (municipalities) in Achcham and Kalikot. These will be our pilot projects and the focal points from which we will keep implementing and expanding the project. We will start with 4 or 5 focus groups of around 20-25 girls, who will take part in the photography projects and be handed the kit mentioned above. They will also receive training by local nurses on how to use the menstrual cup and appropriate hygienic measures.

Simultaneously, sex-ed lessons will be taught in schools, aimed at both male and female students, in order to dispel myths around menstruation.

From there, local nurses will periodically follow up on the girls using the cups, in order to assist them with any problems or doubts they may have, and report to us to allow us to spot whether we need to rectify any parts of our training.

Members of the artsy will go back to the area every 4 to 6 months (the access there is difficult and during certain parts of the year cannot be accessed at all, so there are windows of time where we can actually be on the ground depending on the weather). The following stages will be both in order to follow up on the girls already using the kit and to introduce it and offer the workshops to more girls.

5. What challenges have you faced so far in running this project?

First of all, raising funds and getting exposure, which is an ongoing process.

Moreover, organising a project involving a considerable number of people as we are doing, can be difficult in a culture where schedules are relative. For instance, we found out that 2 months before the end of the school year, exam dates are not yet set, and the government just recently changed the starting date of holiday season.

The area we are working at is isolated to the point that people from other areas of Nepal don't know much about it. We could not even find a driver who would take us by jeep to the area from Kathmandu – which would have been a lot more convenient, since we are carrying a lot of material and a team of people. Since this was not possible, the team will travel by bus from Kathmandu (a journey lasting between 16 and 20 hours) and then take another bus to the area the project will be implemented (and additional 18 hour-trip).

6. Do you think cross-cultural issues or working in a different culture away from yours has helped or been an obstacle?

It can be both. Different languages and cultural practices can be a source for misunderstandings, but they are also enormously enriching and, if done respectfully and with an open disposition, it can be a huge and beautiful learning experience for both sides. Our intention in this matter is to be respectful of local cultures and beliefs. We ideally intend not to show our cultural perspective, but attempt to widen theirs by showing local people how various cultures deal with similar issues differently without imposing one particular view.

7. What are the clearest challenges faced by women globally, according to you?

This is a huge topic. I would say reaching equality is the one that pretty much would sum it up. Violence against women – whether sexual, physical or verbal – is spread pretty much everywhere. The scale and intensity of it may vary from country to country, but it still exists regardless. The fact that women’s bodies and their right to decide on them freely are still being questioned and even prevented by law. Control on reproduction and menstrual health. Access to education and financial resources. The right of gay, queer and trans women to even exist and be respected. The fact that women belonging to minorities suffer exponentially from any women-related problems. The list is endless.

8. Menstruation is a tabooed topic especially in South Asia. How do you get past the taboo?

We had the immense privilege of being introduced to Western Nepal by Dr Keshav Bhattarai (who unfortunately died prematurely of a heart attack last autumn, right when we were in the midst of planning the project). He helped Clara during her first trip to the area and voiced his full backing to our project. He was very concerned about life conditions of women in the whole area of West and Mid-Nepal. Even though he passed away, we have the backing of a whole network of friends and acquaintances of both Dr Keshav and Clara, who are equally interested in improving women’s lives. These include doctors, nurses, health volunteers, teachers and journalists of all castes.

Thus, a relevant part of the community is already involved, and we hope to be able to involve everyone else thanks to our educational program and participatory photography workshops.

Our aim is to explain menstruation – what it is, why it happens, how do we deal with it – as clearly as possible to both boys and girls. We believe information is key

and, by offering it, we might be able to help normalise menstruation and dispel the myths surrounding it.

The photography workshops –which are only going to be attended by girls – are also a way to get them to reflect on it and consider their experiences with menstruation. Our intention in doing so is to generate a process of reflection within the community in order for them to consider whether there are any aspects of their practice that may be improved. We do not aim at confrontation, since we believe this would generate rejection and we do not believe it is our place as foreigners to question their culture. We intend to provide hygienic and safety measures that help the girls improve their quality of life and hope that, with time, the community itself will eventually find ways to allow the practice to mutate so it stops being a traumatic and dangerous experience for girls and women.

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Scherezade Siobhan is an Indo-Rroma psychologist, writer & community catalyst and social scientist who created and curates The Mira Project as a global, cross





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dialogue on gender, street harassment, violence and women's mental health. More about her can be found [here](#).

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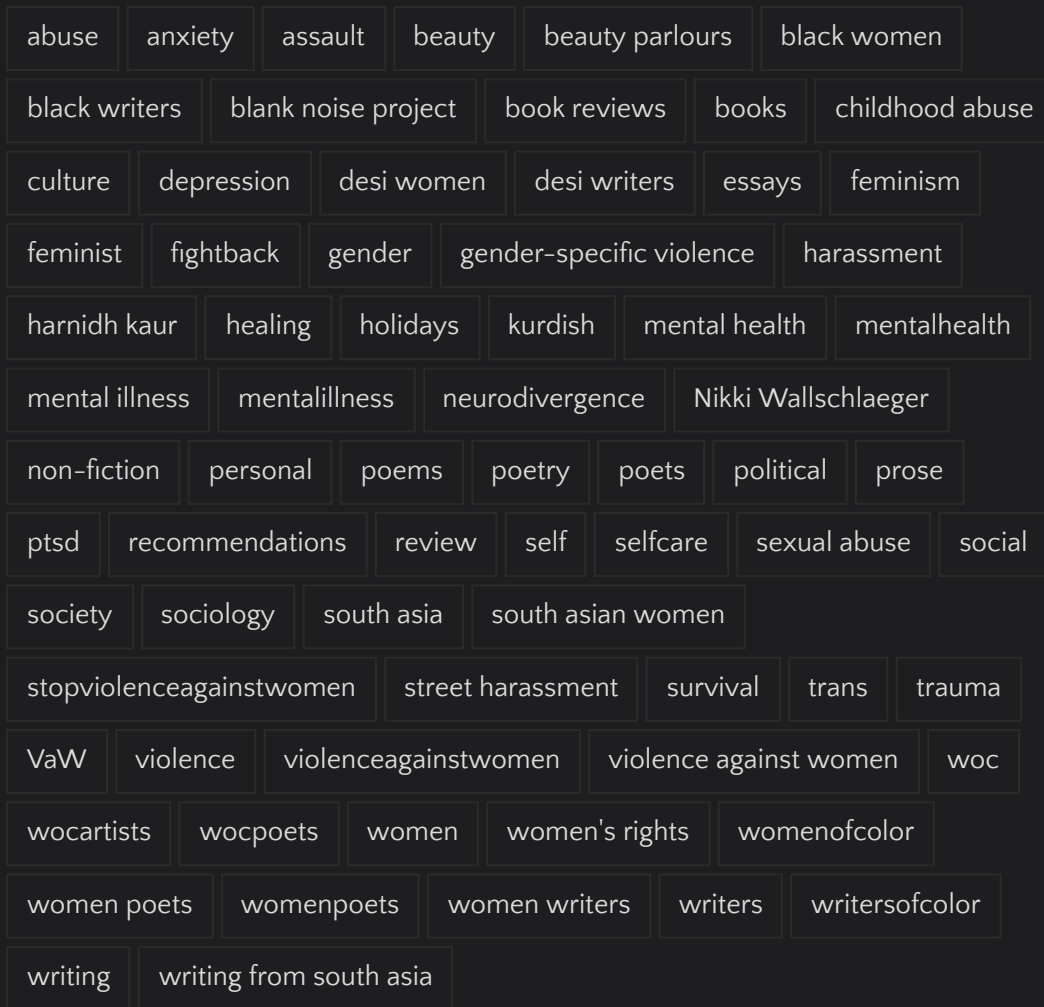
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