



gisela graf communications

Press information

Now available at DOM publishers:

Schillerstraße 20
D-79102 Freiburg
T +49 761 791 99 09
F +49 761 791 99 08
contact@gisela-graf.com
www.gisela-graf.com

Niels Gutschow

Bhaktapur – Nepal

Urban Space and Ritual

Bhaktapur is a thriving city of 40,000 inhabitants, as one of the three royal centres of the Kathmandu Valley in the Nepalese Himalayas. Over almost two millennia, its original inhabitants of the valley, the Newars, have shaped a unique urban culture that preserved a pre-industrial lifestyle until the middle of the twentieth century. The city's festivals punctuate the calendar in such a way that urban space turns into a stage for quite a number of civic performances.

The two-volume *Bhaktapur – Nepal. Urban Space and Ritual*, illustrated with a wealth of photographic material, documents these customs over almost half a century. The author Niels Gutschow went to Bhaktapur as a member of an architecture team in 1971 to restore the Pūjārīmāṭh presbytery. Since then, his attention has been strongly linked to the seasonal festivals of Bhaktapur. He extended his work in the sense of an architectural anthropology in order to grasp the rituals of a city, which throughout the year is repeatedly the stage of complex performances. In this opulent volume, he now documents ten representative events, which he has continually photographed since the 1970s and places them in the context of his research. In these rituals, the supernaturals and humans act collectively to ensure the continuity of time and space. Among the many festivals of the year, ten occasions are selected. Of these, the celebration of the New Year (Bisketjātrā) in April, the Farewell to the Dead (Gātjātrā) in August, and the Victory of the goddess (Durgā-Dasāīn) in October are of significant meaning for the well being of the community. Moreover, the ritual of the Navadurgā Deities leaves an imprint on the spatial and temporal integrity of the urban realm over a period of nine months.

In addition to the scientific exploration of the rituals and their close connection to the city, these two volumes also document the city, which strongly changes in the context of a dynamic urbanisation. The earthquake of 25 April 2015 mainly affected the farmers' old quarters.

Niels Gutschow, born in 1941 in Hamburg as the son of an architect, first came to Nepal in 1962. In the 1970s, his research focused on Urban Space and Ritual; as well as the collection of new architecture. Gutschow lives in Tahaya near Bhaktapur, and Abtsteinach, Germany. Since 2003 he has been an Honorary Professor at the South Asia Institute of Heidelberg University.



Niels Gutschow
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