

TEXT OF AMBASSADOR'S SPEECH  
ON THE OCCASION OF EXHIBITION ON  
"QUILTS & PORTRAITS FROM KUTCH"

(ROUND TOWER, CPH: 10 DEC 2004 at 1600 HRS)

- ❖ Ms. Lene Bennike
- ❖ Co-workers who have helped organise this exhibition
- ❖ Management of the Round Tower
- ❖ Distinguished Guests, Ladies and gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to be present here among you on a very interesting and rather unusual occasion of an exhibition on quilts and portraits from a fascinating region of my country, the area of Kutch in the State of Gujarat, which is also where the apostle of peace, Mahatma Gandhi, was born.

2. Today's exhibition is really a story more than a display. It is a story about a community of women who have transformed the remnants of their cast-off garments and other bits of clothing to recycle them into beautiful, timeless handiworks of rural, homegrown art. Most of the time such works of folk art in the villages go unnoticed. But when it comes to item of beauty or immaculate design, you can always depend on the Danes to find it no matter how hidden or remote a corner of the world it is in. It was this quest that took Lene Bennike, an art photographer by profession, and a lover of art by design, all the way from Copenhagen to the remote countryside of Kutch tucked away in the westernmost recesses of the Indian subcontinent. Thanks to a discerning eye for design and beauty, she embarked on a journey which has now completed 10 years in time and which, she assures us, still continues. She tells the story with a style and an imprint which is uniquely her own. Her only tools in this journey were her watchful eye and a camera to capture exactly what she perceived as purveying the inner beauty. To quote her own words, "As the imposing images of the desert women came to life on the heavy, wet,

watercolour paper, I realised that I had the key to a story about proud women and their beautiful quilts. This is a story where quilts and photographs go hand in hand: each with their own slow process and deep-grained, tangible texture. The story, told with love and respect, dedicated to my dear friends in Kutch - who with their ever-open arms of hospitality and rare warmth welcomed me into their fascinating world." Lene, I am delighted to learn that you found this kind of warmth in the welcome of my country.

3. Ladies and Gentlemen,

The portraits you see are not ordinary portraits but cyanotypes - one of the oldest known photographic processes which, unlike their digital generation counterparts of today, is a completely manual process that involves a lot of painstaking effort by way of contact-print, exposing the negative to sun light or ultraviolet light and rendering the result perfect with a lovely texture. It is, therefore, self-evidently a painstaking labour of love. The quilt spreads are a shining example of the desert women's artistic capabilities that bring to light the tradition of labour intensive crafts like block printing and tie-dyeing.

4. I will not steal any more of Lene Bennike's thunder by going into further details because all of it is there for you to see, admire and appreciate. It only remains for me to express, on behalf of my Embassy and myself, our sincere appreciation for this incredible and <sup>if you will</sup> unique effort that Lene Bennike has taken in hand in a unique manner to bring to a discerning and acutely design-conscious European audiences like Denmark an art form that normally lies dormant beyond the walls of the remote villages in my country. I am sure that I echo the sentiments of all of you who, after seeing the exhibits, will agree with me that what Lene has been able to capture is not only unique and beautiful but at the same time delightful to the eyes and a feast for any lovers of folk art. My warmest and very special thanks to Lene Bennike for bring out this rather rare but nonetheless fascinating art form to all of you here in Copenhagen today.

It gives me great pleasure to announce this exhibition open and invite you to view the exhibits.

