



National Museum, New Delhi  
in collaboration with  
Museum Rietberg, Zurich  
Alice Boner Institute, Varanasi  
presents  
**Alice From Switzerland**  
**A Visionary Artist and Scholar  
across Two Continents**  
at  
Special Exhibition Hall, First Floor,  
National Museum, Janpath,  
New Delhi - 110011  
**2 September to 30 October 2016**  
Exhibition open daily from 10 am to 5 pm  
(Closed on Mondays and National Holidays)



National Museum  
New Delhi



museum rietberg



Alice Boner Institute  
Varanasi



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
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Embassy of Switzerland in India

## ALICE FROM SWITZERLAND: A VISIONARY ARTIST AND SCHOLAR ACROSS CONTINENTS

**This exhibition introduces the Swiss artist Alice Boner (1889 - 1981) who became a true cultural ambassador. Even though her life and work is most fascinating she remained little-known. The encounter with Uday Shankar, their common travel to India and her commitment for his dance troupe gave her life the crucial twist. Being an artist herself she became a patron who supported other artists. She settled in Varanasi and thereafter contributed significantly to a worldwide sensitisation and understanding of India's art.**

Alice Boner (1889-1981) was a passionate Swiss painter and sculptor, art historian and indologist. She completed her training as a painter and sculptor in Munich, Brussels and Basel. Like many other artists of her

time she was fascinated by non-European art. However, for Alice Boner it was not merely a journey, but a decision to inhabit a different way of living. In search for a more natural life in harmony she migrated to India to fully immerse herself in the Indian way of life in 1935. She moved into an old house in Varanasi which remained her home until 1978. As such Alice Boner is without any doubt one of the most remarkable Swiss women of her times.

The exhibition reveals her participation in a broad trans-cultural exchange with intellectuals and art historians from India and Europe such as Ananda Coomaraswamy, Stella Kramrisch and Alain Daniélou. Of special interest is to analyse how Alice Boner shaped the European perception of India and contributed to the establishment of Indian art as an academic discipline.

Once one grasps the remarkable range of contributions Alice Boner made as an artist, patron, researcher and ambassador it is difficult to understand why she isn't better-known. An exhibition can help to remedy this shortcoming. A person who got awarded by the University of Zurich with a honorary degree of Doctor of Philosophy in 1969 and who received the Padma Bhushan from the President of India, Shri V. V. Giri in 1974 for her outstanding life's work should be widely known.

It is also important to not only see Alice Boner's life as the story of an upper-class European going to India, but to bring out her deep involvement with Indian intellectuals of her time. Alice Boner published with Pandit Sadashiv Rath Sharma the *Shilpaprakasha* and the *Vastu-Upanishad*. In this perspective of interaction and exchange, Alice Boner significantly shaped our understanding of India's art history. She not only explored, documented and published on temple sculptures, architecture or Kathakali but also shared her findings and ideas with leading scholars like Ananda Coomaraswamy or Stella Kramrisch. Like her colleagues she donated her collection of Indian antiquities to a public art museum. In doing so, Alice Boner contributed to a new perception on Indian art, which still largely dominates today's academic discourse. Therefore it is important to critically evaluate this academic discourse on Indian sacred art and show how Alice Boner also tried to offer new approaches. Alice Boner examined Hindu temple sculptures as works of art, which follow certain principles. An understanding of compositional pattern helps to discover meanings, which one doesn't necessarily see at the first encounter with the object. In this sense, the exhibition invites the audience to look beyond.

Finally the exhibition wants to make the audience aware that Alice Boner's legacy is preserved at the Alice Boner Gallery at the Bharat Kala Bhavan and the Alice Boner Institute in Varanasi, as well as at the Museum Rietberg in Zurich. Alice Boner continues to connect Switzerland and India through in many ways. The Museum Rietberg and the Alice Boner Institute are open to the public and encourage researchers to work with the material.

The main idea of the exhibition is to show how Alice Boner promoted cultural knowledge and understanding between East and West. Her close friend Alfred Wuerfel once said: "If it is true that culture is a vehicle of international understanding and those promoting it are its ambassadors, then Alice Boner, indeed, deserves to be called an Ambassador of Indian culture!"

The exhibition is based on Alice Boner's photographs and illustrated with her artistic creations as well as personal documents, most of them kept and preserved in the Museum Rietberg in Zurich.

The major themes are: her life, her work as an artist, her interest in and her influence on Indian performing arts, her study of Indian architecture, her role as a cultural ambassador and her legacy.

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