

A Mandala for Nepal



Imagine that you are spending your weekend doing weekendy sorts of things – tending your garden, going out for a meal, visiting an historic monument, playing with your children – when, in the space of a few terrifying minutes, the earth literally starts to shake. Suddenly your house has fallen down, your children are missing, other family members are dead. You have no fresh water, no food, no shelter – and no way of knowing that the ground beneath your feet won't move again. Three weeks ago the people of **Nepal** were going about their daily lives just like you; on 25th April the country suffered its worst natural disaster for 81 years, when the **Gorkha** earthquake killed more than 8,000 people and injured over 19,000. Whole villages were flattened, avalanches swept down **Mount Everest**; it is probably impossible for us to imagine the scale of devastation affecting this beautiful country. This week a further quake hit; although it was

weaker, it still killed and injured many people. Funeral pyres, says the BBC's Nepal Correspondent **Joanna Jolly**, burn day and night in **Kathmandu** – indeed there are so many bodies that some are having to be stored in forests until there is space to cremate them on the banks of the **Bagmati River**. The people of Nepal are seeing their country, and their lives, in ruins.

☒ Last week. here in Edinburgh, a group of friends decided to make their own contribution to the aid efforts for Nepal. You may remember the beautiful mandala that **Karen and Mel Shewan and Therese Muskus** made at the **Botanics** in October (if you don't, you can read about it [here](#)). Karen, Mel and Therese were already planning a rather different mandala to coincide with an exhibition, ***Inside Out***, at **The Nomad's Tent** in St Leonard's Lane, so they decided to dedicate this new project to the people of Nepal and to use it raise funds for the relief work.



The Nomad's Tent

Mandalas are symbols used in **Buddhism** and **Hinduism**; they are circles reflecting the shapes of nature, usually containing geometric patterns filled with colourful materials – plants, seeds, shells, things that will decay and form part of the cycle of life itself. Mandalas are not supposed to last; they represent the impermanence of life, and although Buddhist monks must spend years learning how to make one, their mandalas are traditionally made of sand, swept away in an instant. Nowhere has the impermanence of life been more evident of late than in Nepal; nowhere has so much been swept away.



The new mandala at The Nomad's Tent is not made of organic materials; instead, Karen, Mel, Therese and their friend **Susan Bittker** were invited to choose artefacts, decorative items and jewellery from the shop's stock. The star shapes inside the circle are marked out by white bulls and lines of marching elephants; the triangles within are filled with shiny baubles, colourful necklaces and black dragonflies. Decorated pots sit inside pretty bracelets. Beneath lie gorgeous fabrics; crimson, green and brown. And in the centre, guarded by these riches, a single vase of three yellow roses. It is a stunning, but also a contemplative, piece. As Karen says 'the creative process seems to have a calming effect and encourages reflection and meditation on the beauty around us...it triggers similar feelings in people who come along to look at the mandala'.



Aid agencies are doing all they can to help Nepal's people, but in one of the poorest countries in the world, a country whose fragile infrastructure has been largely destroyed, their work is far from easy. **Mercy Corps** is a global aid charity founded in 1979; it has one of the largest teams on the ground, and it's been working tirelessly since the first earthquake struck. Mercy Corps not only addresses urgent immediate needs but also plans for long-term recovery efforts.


The agency's European HQ is in **Sciennes**, right here in Edinburgh, and it needs funds to support this vital work. Karen, Mel and Therese invite you to visit their mandala and to donate what you can to Mercy Corps; there is a collection bucket in the shop and you can also donate online [here](#).





The mandala will be at The Nomad's Tent until the end of May;

the shop is well worth a visit in its own right – it's a wonderful showcase of rugs, kilims, bags, furniture, textiles and jewellery, and also offers a rug repair and cleaning service. The Nomad's Tent has an ethical trading policy, and also hosts many worthwhile events. In August it will host an exhibition of masks and tribal headgear as part of the **Edinburgh Festival Fringe**. Don't be deceived by the small shopfront – this place is like the Tardis, with rooms full of fabulous wares.

So why not take yourself down to St Leonard's Lane this  week? See Karen, Mel and Therese's beautiful work, remember how lucky we all are, and please give as generously as you can to help the people of Nepal. The Nomad's Tent is open 10am-5pm Monday to Saturday, 12 noon-4pm Sundays; (call 0131 662 1612 for more information).