



Hari Prasad Sharma, *Musical Troupe*, Oil on canvas.
(Source: Sharma, Hari P. 2022, *Nepal Down the Ages*. New Delhi: Adarsha Books.)

Exhibition Review

Nepal through the Ages: Reviving Ancient and Medieval Culture and Architecture: A Painting Exhibition of the Complete Works of Senior Artist, Hari Prasad Sharma organized by Nepal Heritage Society, Himal Association and Social Science Baha on September 6 – 26, 2019 at Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal

Painting Exhibition on Art through the Ages by Hari Prasad Sharma

Swosti Rajbhandari Kayastha

When we talk about artworks, they are usually self-expressions or statement made by the artist. As for the works of Hari Prasad Sharma, my observance is that they have a flavour of both. They are self-expressions, in the sense, of their content. They serve as visual narratives to the many events of history of Nepal in their traditional architectural settings. These visuals are not random interpretations made by the artist but well researched by visiting sites, reading texts, recollecting from memories and even taking aid of google map. They are then composed on the canvas by the artist as per the environment of the times. The statements put forward are the visual documentation of recorded historical events.

When we have a close look at the paintings of Hari Prasad Sharma, what

we notice are symmetrical, yet complex compositions. Symmetrical because it is easy to divide the compositions into mostly vertical halves and complex since the artist takes special care not to omit any props that are required to complete the historical context. For example, in the painting of Prithivi Narayan Shah giving Dinya Upadesh to his courtiers in the chamber whose minute interior details are meticulously thought of such as the play of light and shade, the props and courtiers, and the view of the hills outside the window.

The lines are the dominant features and binding elements of the composition and provide perception. The line also leads the viewer's eyes around the canvas, and in the paintings of Sharma, the lines converging, most often in the centre of the compositions, serving to add space



Hari Prasad Sharma, *Ashoka's Pilgrimage to Lumbini, Nepal*, Oil on canvas.
(Source: Sharma, Hari P., 2022, *Nepal Down the Ages*. New Delhi: Adarsha Books.)

and feel of 3-dimension, hence, the repeated use of lines. The dramatic use of light and shade, or the technique of chiaroscuro which results in well-defined shadows, adding strong contrast serves to add volume and depth to the paintings. The artist is very careful to show a single source of light, outside the image in the day light scenes and the night scenes are illuminated mostly with oil wick lamps within the composition. This creates a unity in the fall of the shadow, adding a balance to the compositions and providing an illusion of wider space. This Baroque style (1600), a style that is elaborate and highly detailed, characterized by the interplay of light adds exaggerated motion and clear detail producing a sense of drama, exuberance,

and grandeur in his paintings.

The artist takes great care to present the colours of reality in his paintings, representing the real world. Therefore, most of the paintings depict a panoply of colours in their true settings. However, a likeness for red is noticed to break the monotony or add contrast to the narratives and sometimes to highlight something (like in the painting of Laura Bell).

The main theme of the artworks themselves seldom needs interpretations, as they represent a visual narrative of historical events of the past. However, it is important to look at the symbols used by the artist to depict the various eras



Hari Prasad Sharma, *Mandev Establishing the Garud Pedestal*, Oil on canvas.
(Source: Sharma, Hari P., 2022, *Nepal Down the Ages*. New Delhi: Adarsha Books.)

when the events took place. The use of these symbols is the result of the different types of research that Sharma visualizes these narratives. Since his paintings are of ancient periods, he consults the literary sources and existing heritage and architectural settings to contextualize his works. A big challenge is to capture and depict the past settings when they are constantly changing.

Having provided an insight into the use of the elements of art by the artist, one might wonder what is Sharma's inspiration or which school of art his paintings follow. If we closely look at his paintings, they do not literally follow any oriental or occidental school or style of art. Untouched by any influence in his

style, he creates a style of his own. We can say his works are directly inspired to commemorate past events and provide a visual narrative to them. In this sense, his art will never go out of style as they continue to explore historical and cultural events of our country.

Hari Prasad Sharma studied art from the early age of 8 under an artist Jeev Ratna Shakya. And at the age of 11 enrolled at Juddha Kala Pathshala in the year 2005 V.S. After 5 years he graduated receiving the Kala Kaushal (a degree of that time). His interest in art was discouraged by his grandfather who thought art belonged to the Chitrakar community and that Brahmins were supposed to study the Vedas. Despite this discouragement,



Hari Prasad Sharma, *Bouddhanath*, Oil on canvas.

(Source: Sharma, Hari P., 2022, *Nepal Down the Ages*. New Delhi: Adarsha Books.)

he did not stop, and he made the small drawings of Naags and Lakshmi, used during Naag Panchami and Laxmi puja, which were promoted by his father at the houses of Ranas and aristocrats. The small rewards earned from these drawings motivated Sharma's artistic journey. An inborn artist, he was quick to learn and his passion led him to carry a sketch book and pencil, and quickly sketched whatever he liked and whenever he wanted to. Unaware of western schools or any other styles of art, he copied images of deities, drew what he saw and developed his skills.

Born in a typical Newar neighbourhood of Gophal tole, Lagan, Kathmandu he grew up witnessing the various festivals celebrated by the Newars and is a fluent Newar speaker as well. Thus, from a small age he had special interest in cultural heritage. His curiosity for small

details and observant nature and the ability to make mental notes were to become his forte. For many years later, after visiting an exhibition of paintings made by Henry Oldfield (who served at the doctor in the British Residency 1850-63 in Nepal) at the Bagikhana (now the Yala Maya Kendra) at Patan in 2052-53 V.S., he and his son realized the value of paintings that represent the past. This apparently was of his interest too. Taking inspiration from this exhibition and motivation from his son he embarked on the journey to make paintings of historical events of Nepal.

He made many paintings of historical events such as Prithivi Narayan Shah giving Dibya Upadesh, Victory of Prithivi Narayan Shah over the Kathmandu Valley, Jai Prakesh Malla, Siddhartha ko grihatyag, Jung Bahadur with Laura Bell in England, Emperor



Hari Prasad Sharma, Jaya Prakash Malla and Taleju Bhawani, Oil on canvas.
(Source: Sharma, Hari P., 2022, *Nepal Down the Ages*. New Delhi: Adarsha Books.)

Ashok at Lumbini and many more. He paints realistic scenes of historical events and the cultural life of the past, without distorting the forms or colours. He pays special attention to the traditional architectural settings and the complex compositions, including every detail necessary to represent various epochs of time and environment. What makes his paintings different are the consistency in style, realistic forms, heightened use of light and shade, the use of a converging point to add a sense of depth and perspective to the composition and his ability to transform the two-dimensional canvas into the three-dimensional composition. He is able to accomplish

the reality and essence of these cultural and historical events, mostly because of his frequent visits to the houses of the Ranas and aristocrats with his grandfather and father in his childhood, his company of Newar friends, his keen eye and curious mind for details and moreover his photographic memory to recall the scenes, feelings and emotions involved in the events he witnessed in his childhood. Because of this, his artworks are able to make the viewer experience the subject, arousing emotions, thus creating a direct connection with the viewer. The attention of the viewer is caught by the little details that we often miss out when reading about the same subject.



Hari Prasad Sharma, *Diplomatic Friendship between Prithvi Narayan Shah and Jaya Prakash Malla*, Oil on canvas. (Source: Sharma, Hari P., 2022, *Nepal Down the Ages*. New Delhi: Adarsha Books.)

As we are all aware art is created for a purpose. When asked about his purpose for making these historical paintings, Sharma said, “To create something of value and make contributions to society’. Rightfully expressed his artworks serve to document the human history of our country as well as express collective memory. They seek to express important values of the society and people in a way that makes it memorable as well as reinforces values by commemorating great events. From the very beginning of existence, art has played a crucial role to record and preserve human history and so

will the artworks of Sharma. At the age of 83, he has the same zeal for creating more artworks that he had observed in his midlife.

Bishnu Prasad Sharma, the son of the artist, has made a pledge to accomplice his father in his artistic journey. Despite his own job as Professor, he finds time to take his father out to sites significant for the compositions, take pictures as references, and make literatures available for his father and also does extensive online research for the accuracy of space and time in the compositions in addition to daily his discussions with his father



रूपश्या नयाः

दोनयमाद वयाया बियास नयाःया कालदास, संकीर्त व डनडीवन

समयक्रममा नेपाल

हरिप्रसाद शर्माका चित्रकलामा नेपाली इतिहास, संस्कृति र जनजीवन

Nepal Down the Ages

Glimpses of Nepali History, Culture and Lifestyle in Paintings by

Hari Prasad Sharma

about the progress of the paintings. They both work as a duo – director and producer – without each other's support Hari Prasad Sharma's artistic journey of making historical painting would have remained incomplete.

Note:

Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) funded Social Science Baha for the publication of three hundred copies of Nepal Down the Ages: Glimpses of Nepali History, Culture and Lifestyle

in Paintings of Hari Prasad Sharma on October 12, 2020. The purpose of the publication is for the Mayor of KMC to present this souvenir to visiting foreign dignitaries. Out of 300 copies, 100 copies are super deluxe for high dignitaries and 200 copies are deluxe for dignitaries published by Social Science Baha on the basis of a one-time copyright of the artist Hari Prasad Sharma. The commercial edition of this coffee table book published by Adarsh Books is available at leading book stores in Kathmandu.