



Manuj Babu Mishra. *Self portrait*. Pen & ink.

WAY OF BEING

SAROJ BAJRACHARYA

Abstract

This write up aims to understand the relationship between the ancient and the modern art in relation to the foundation of the unbound state of mind that has been flowing from primitive time in Nepal. State of mind is generally defined as the mental state or mood of a person at a particular time. But in this context, time is an extended and stretched playground for artists where they have sometimes connected and at times disconnected from their primitive native continuity of individual aesthetics and collective social beliefs. And this connection and disconnection from what appears as the ancient state of mind is rather the elementary characteristics of our society that has merged with western propagated modernity in terms of arts as well as science; we have local modern art façade which got fueled around the mid 19th century in Nepal and combusted in the mid 20th century here. When one enters into this creative façade, one can still feel the unbound state of mind that emanates mystic, relaxed and harmonious qualities in some of the artworks by local artists. When these qualities unify with popular styles of expressions in Nepal, we coincide with the Nepaliness in a work of art of recent times.

“I think I’ve had a permanent affair with the art of the past and it goes hot and cold... The truth is, the art of the past is living; the art of the past that has died is not around.”

– David Hockney, (1976 A.D.)

The date is some day of 1995 A.D. when I was in front of a Krishna Manandhar; at Sirjana Contemporary Art Gallery; these pieces of vivid canvases that dated 1970s A.D. were catalysts in introducing and encouraging the modern art in Nepal. The paintings by Manandhar depicted a landscape of the green earth from an aerial view with daubs of yellows, reds and bit of browns as well.

His style was genuinely authentic as he painted though the accumulated personal experiences that none other could have brought together in a way he did. Even

though he was depicting landscape, the emotion and the intellect he scattered in projecting the image and colors were derived from his internalization of the external reality. Thus, this piece by the artist was riveting and captivating.

Landscape paintings in abstract approach have been depicted by various artists in the past. In that sense, Manandhar’s concept in art cannot be considered original. But it sure is genuine because the visual is not only a combination of colors and forms; it is his emotion, the intellectualization of his experiences blending with his mature creative senses

David Hockney mentions in the opening of this text that nothing can completely disassociate from the past. Hence, no art can be considered original in its content as there are always several components influencing and inspiring it.



Krishna Manadhar. *Rocks.* 1975. Oil on canvas.

Therefore, art can be a great example to make us understand that things including art can be genuine but not original in its content or concept.

According to the Longman dictionary, Originality is when something is completely new and different from anything that anyone has thought of before. However, the same dictionary says genuine is an authentic feeling, desire etc. is one that you really feel, not one you pretend to feel. Setting in mind these definitions, nothing is original as everything, in one way or the other relates to the past. However, things can be

genuine or authentic when you are true to yourself and your experiences when you engage in some activities. And these definitions fit in a work of art and artists also.

The date is 2002 A.D. Manuj Babu Mishra is seated on the floor surrounded with his paintings, sketch pads and books. A scholar in his own right, his passion for art is matched by a will to interact with the visitors at Hermitage, his studio. The artist, disassociated from the world yet aware of his own connectedness with his surroundings, emphasizes the clarity before and after he engages in a work of



Madan Chitrakar. *Origin of species.* 2008. Acrylics on canvas. 99 cm x 91 cm.



Manuj Babu Mishra. *Self portrait.* Oil on canvas.

art. He believes that nothing is original; everything is a sequential outcome of something: be it living things, the nonliving or emotions, situations etc.

Amongst some specific subjects, he also usually painted anthropomorphic figures or animal human hybrids to express his friction with the world situations. Many artists from ancient times till modern have painted such figures; yet the way Mishra dealt with these animal-human hybrid visuals had a very personal story to it. He always appealed not to seek for originality but understand the uniqueness in which the art and humans in general have born and brought up. He further clarified that in order to live the present, one has to understand the past; there is no sound without an echo.

“Painting is the intermediate somewhat between a thought and a thing.”

– Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Table Talk, 1827 A.D.

Perhaps it is the intermediate that makes the thing and these thoughts genuine.

It is 2008 A.D. and I am amidst silent yet very much expressive paintings by Madan Chitrakar at Siddhartha Art Gallery. The title of the exhibition by this veteran artist was The Unspoken where the artist depicted the friction between the past and the present. In relaying across his theme, he chose the traditional practices of Nepal and how they are transforming in today’s time and age. The artist comes from a great lineage of Chitrakars who were associated with a task of painting in the medieval times in Nepal.

Besides being a painter, Madan Chitrakar is a researcher and a writer, passionate about excavating the past art of Nepal. And when he says that instead of searching for originality in a work of art, one should try to seek and see the authenticity in it; this very much affirms that art is a special expression that happens due to the integration of various human experiences.

This was evident at one incident when he was explaining how the Chitrakar caste system came into being. According to him, Chitrakars were monks who were skilled in making illustration in the ancient religious scriptures.

After years of practicing this art for the scriptures, the then authoritarian figures recognized them as skilled painters or Chitrakars. Even this clip of history suggests that the evolution of the Chitrakars is connected with various incidents in the past and thus cannot

be considered original. However, this historical information and the task they carried from centuries are undoubtedly genuine and authentic.

Once an artist reaches to the understanding of the self through rigorous practicing of art s/he will know the connectedness of the self with the surroundings. When that happens, art becomes the process of emptying the self from the conditioning of the world. This is a moment when one feels rejuvenated, unbothered of originality or imitativeness. One is inspired by everything and vice versa. An artist simply realizes the self.

“Painting is a way of being.” - Jackson Pollock, interview with Selden Rodman, 1956 A.D.

References

Dictionary of Art Quotations, Ian Crofton

Art Evolves: Nepali Modern Art, Saroj Bajracharya

Interviews with Mr. Krishna Manandhar, Mr. Manuj Babu Mishra and Mr. Madan Chitrakar



Saroj Bajracharya

Saroj Bajracharya is an artist, writer and curator. He has been active in art for more than two decades. He has been actively involved in many facets of art that include painting, writing, teaching, curating, organizing and coordinating art events and exhibitions.

*Various solo exhibitions, group shows and two books titled **Future of History** and **A Concise Introduction to Nepali Modern Sculpture** are to his credit.*