

... OF MEMORIES AND REALIZATION ...

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Art is about looking for someone that you think you know, in an invisible crowd. This invisible crowd has its own characteristics... and people around think that you are building those characteristics or imagining them. But it is not only imagination; it actually exists because you exist. Therefore, that invisible crowd that reflects outside is in fact inside of you and vice versa i.e. who you are looking for is also looking for you. The day you find each other is the day you become an artist; then onward, no second person has to verify that you are an artist.

I met Puran Khadka, one of the most self-contemplative persons I have had the pleasure to know, around twenty years ago in an exhibition. Perhaps, it was Sirjana Art Gallery in 1997 and I think the exhibition was by artist Shyam Lal Shrestha. Times and situations were quite different back then. The resources were limited but those resources were used to the fullest. In those days, it was not about conventional approach to art; rather it was about maintaining a sense of immortality through art. The paintings by Shyam L. Shrestha dealt with the ethnic Newar culture of Nepal and even though he depicted the custom rather than the meaning of the culture; his canvases did provoke a sense of creative curiosity to the onlookers; largely due to the blend between western painting technique and eastern ways of life. Very few artists blended the two back in those

days like Shrestha did. After viewing the exhibits, Puran Khadka and I went to a nearby tea shop and conversed about art and its contagious attributions in society.

In later days, I became a constant visitor to Puran Khadka's Studio at NAFA, Naxal. One conversation in particular, I remember was about pain and its implications on human beings. Pain causes misery because it ignites anger; not pain but the anger in the long run leads us to misery. However, in modern times, we even borrow pain from others; not to share their affliction but to have soft corner towards us from the surroundings by displaying that we are also suffering. Puran Khadka agreed that true pain has a capacity to make one angry. But borrowed pain makes us coward because it stops us from facing real situation and provokes us to escape from burdening issues. And Puran Khadka attained these wisdoms from unhindered contemplations and self-conversations.

Occasionally, my visit to his studio used to coincide with another legend of an artist Uttam Nepali. He was the academician of Nepal Association of Fine Arts back then. He spoke very little yet few words were enough to put across his contemplations. In later years, I heard much about his political involvement and its relation to Nepali Art; which is an entirely different spectrum for a life of the artist. As a painter, he is a dynamic



Shyam Lal Shrestha. **Women at Tap**. Oil on canvas. 2016.

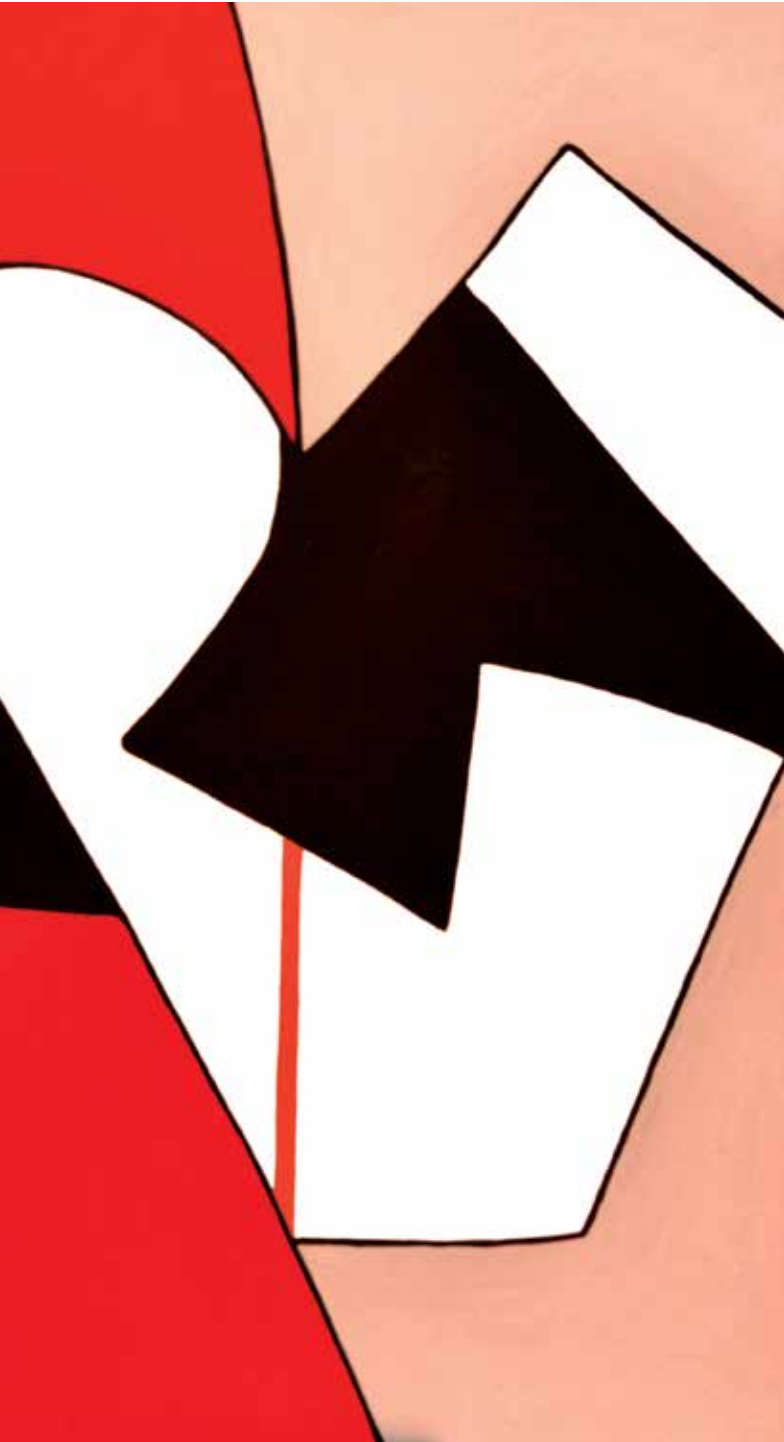
and contemplative abstract artist. His works are abstract, not only technique wise but in terms of content as well. Uttam Nepali is twenty years elder to Puran Khadka and represents the first generation of modern artists in Nepal; whereas Puran Khadka belongs to the second.

Uttam Nepali painted from the mind. Once, he mentioned to me that emotions need to be intellectualized before being articulated. This process is even more important to artists, as emotions fuel and intellect motivates them. His abstract canvas appears like a fluid which constantly seems changing its appearance. There is another instance; he told me that in order to sense a writer in you, first and foremost you have to know how lifeless words are. Then this feeling has to be transformed in realizing

how heavy and active words can be, and then you have to be able to sponge out the heaviness of words by assembling them into your sentence... then you would have given your portion of life and experience to your chosen words. The same go with motifs; metaphors and colors that make a good painting... Nothing is easy...after understanding that it's not easy, then you get accustomed to it and it won't be a burden to you... the journey would be joyful.

Those days still feels like yesterday; but years have gone by. There are ordinary Tuesdays and then there is this one particular Tuesday of 5th of July 2016. This is the day when I received the news that Puran Khadka just left the world. It was only the past Sunday that we met at his apartment. After strolling for a while we had tea,





Puran Khadka.
The Wholeness.
Acrylic on canvas, 2016



Uttam Nepali. **Untitled**. Acrylic on canvas. 2000.

his favorite habit. He spoke about how difficult it is to maintain creative understanding and keep on practicing art. He spoke of his struggle and how he had realized the sense of 'I' which goes beyond the temporal self or the material concept of me and mine. Therefore, his colors and forms were transforming into minimal, cutting off all the cacophonies that distract. And also by listening to one subtle whisper that takes an enormous concentration and patience to find out. His red, grey, black and white color scheme

has become the innate nature now. Few days ago, as I was thinking about Puran Khadka's works, suddenly memories of Uttam Nepali popped up in my mind; perhaps, because they both are world class abstract painters. A year back, I abruptly met Uttam Nepali outside of a temple in my neighborhood. A man, who once was commanding, now had sunken with age. We had met multiple times; spoke and argued over our opinions but now he couldn't recognize me. I slowly walked back

home after my brief Namaste to him. And I thought what did these great men achieve?.....They achieved immortality.....because even after all of us are long gone and memories are perished; the vibes of realization that they have nurtured will not only remain but will subtly take care of the coming generation also. With all these thoughts swirling in my mind, for a spur of a moment, I found myself in the corridors of Sirjana Art Gallery twenty years ago. Back then it had not yet been converted into a college. The most prime gallery in Nepal, it welcomed all the leading creative minds in Nepali art. And in that corridor the voices of Puran Khadka and Uttam Nepali spoke to me. Perhaps, those voices were my own; echoes of the conversations that we had. And these self-conversations and contemplations have given me a sense of unification, even if they are not here or even with their memory loss, we are all one and absolute. This is when the crowd perished and I as a whole appear. And this is exactly when my sense bow down to Puran Khadka and Uttam Nepali...



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Saroj Bajracharya is an artist, a writer and a 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 2 books titled **Future of History** and **A Concise Introduction to Nepali Modern Sculpture** to his credit.*

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