



## Abstract Paintings and Nepali Context

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### Abstract

*Abstract art as discussed in this essay covers a period of time that spans about sixty years. The introduction of the abstract art in Nepal marks a certain opening in both art education and practice among the artists. The initial challenge of the abstract art was to make it a familiar subject both among the art lovers as well as among those who respected art but were not able to appreciate it fully. A challenging period came when artists began to work towards making abstract art an acceptable and a very useful artistic practice. The tension between skill of the artists and the indifference of the public is a universal problem. But now the gap is being narrowed down everywhere. The concept of abstract art in Nepal comes from education in schools in Europe and India in the initial phase and later in Nepal itself where art pedagogy became a norm in different art schools and colleges. But artists freely made their paintings abstract as the commonly accepted mode of art. Artists of different generations execute abstract paintings without being critical or interpretative about it. But now things are changing in Nepal. New generation artists who are oriented to the abstract and free forms of art are working to develop a system by putting together the art education, practice and very importantly, the level of public acceptance for that. We should carefully review the history and the present status of that. We should also make the art works 'desirable'. The other important character of Nepali abstract painting is that the artists always work in the contact zones of the representational and the expressionist features. I have interpreted that meeting point as a contact zone. This article attempts to give examples of that dynamic process. Nepali abstract paintings mark a new mode of artistic dynamism in Nepal.*

**Keywords: contact zone, abstract painting, art education, twilight zones, double bind, figurative and abstract, modern sculptural forms**

Uttam Nepali, *Meditation*, 2011, acrylics on canvas, 70 cm x 60 cm

## Prologue

A consensus has emerged among the Nepali artists and art reviewers that abstract painting is the mark of a more advanced, progressive and consummate state of art. A review of the texts and common opinions shows that abstract art ushered in a new era in the world of Nepali paintings, and that has opened up new possibilities for experimentation in art. This concept of modernism is entirely drawn from the Western orientation in paintings. My theory is that this concept of abstraction in art comes in Nepal from education in schools in Europe and India in the initial phase and later in Nepal itself where art pedagogy became a norm in different art schools and colleges. But artists freely made their paintings abstract in the commonly accepted mode of art.

Artists of different generations execute abstract paintings without being critical or interpretative about it. But there is one event, one painting exhibition that is mentioned as a small event of historical importance in Nepal. The common point of reference among us is one exhibition of paintings that was little unusual in nature. Both those who were not familiar with the modernist style in art, and those who were little familiar considered the exhibition a unique event. That was an exhibition of paintings that was abstract and semi-abstract in nature. Art critics and artists mention that exhibition as an event heralding modernism in Nepali paintings, and abstract painting was used as a metaphor that became a common usage. Abstract painting is used as

metonymy in the language of modern Nepali art. A brief history follows.

## Brief historical reference

The first exhibition of abstract paintings executed by Lain Singh Bangdel happened in Nepal in 1962. The venue was the familiar hall of Tri-Chandra College known as Saraswoti Sadan. The abstract paintings naturally did not receive wide attention because the audience were not prepared for them here. Nowhere did the abstract paintings always attract the wide audience. They were the responses of the artists to the changing consciousness and the challenging times. But the paintings did not always embody the avant-gardist spirit, a spirit of rebellion and rage and thrust of experimentation in art, which is commonly known to be the case in Western art. But the decision of the artist to make abstract paintings was considered an adventure. We have to see the background to examine how Bangdel did execute the abstract and semi-abstract works of art. Art critics have written about the educational background of Bangdel and the story of his hard work and endeavour to achieve that (Singh 1976; Subedi 2017a; Bangdel 1992).

The artists and painters in general have a consensus about that. The late King Mahendra inaugurated the exhibition. Those who had seen the exhibition told me it was a sheer novelty. The late Rishikesh Shah had directly encountered the paintings and had spoken about them at some point remarked that it was



**Lain Singh Bangdel**, oil on canvas

a bold experiment in art. Bangdel and Shah narrated about the response of the king who was not used to any form of art except for the fine portraits and landscapes. A surprised King Mahendra, Bangdel said to me, wanted to buy one of abstract paintings. But Bangdel did not sell it; but later he presented it to him. Another connoisseur was the doyen of Nepali drama, a painter of portraits and landscapes, Bala Krishna Sama (1902-1981) called the paintings brilliant works of art that evoked the Indic aesthetic tradition and combined that with Western modernism. These were also some of the comments I heard from people who appreciated them for their novelty. But it was not possible to expect critical comments from art critics at that time.

### **Nepali connoisseurs**

Bala Krishna Sama wrote a historical account of the abstract paintings exhibition of Bangdel after five years. I considered it a brilliant commentary about abstract art. Sama raised a very important question about abstract art. He asked, "Why do painters and sculptors shift first from abstract to fine and to abstract from the fine forms?" Though he did not answer the questions he interpreted the phenomenon in the following manner that I want to cite from one of my previous articles with apologies to the readers who may have already read it. To be precise, I am doing so to introduce the discussions about the beginning of abstract work of art or paintings.

He (Sama) mentions the abstract and symbolic characters of Hindu icons like the *rudrākshya* and *sāligrām* – the former is prayer beads and the latter a fossilized shell or stone, and he goes on to say the concept of abstraction is not alien to us. He claims, by the same token, the Nepali connoisseurs find it easier to understand Picasso. I find this claim a little romantic on the part of Sama, because there were very few art viewers at that time and fewer still from those who had even seen any pictures of Picasso's paintings. But Sama makes his point here by saying that Laxman Shrestha's paintings are abstract and he has seen his future in that form. He further says, "My conviction is Laxman Shrestha by painting abstract pictures of the mind on the grey walls with his brilliant imagination and great talent has enhanced the prestige of the Nepali art world." Sama's sense of the similarity of literary and artistic form finds a tremendous expression in the analogy that he sees between the great Sanskrit poet Kalidasa's poem '*Rativilāp*' and Jackson Pollock's paintings. There is similarity in their way of presenting the picture of the mind. I feel amazed today by recalling the talent and the range of understanding of art of this dramatist of the erstwhile era in Nepal (Subedi 2017b: 9-10).

The stress here is on the novelty of experimentation. However, the above exhibition of abstract paintings was

the milestone. Soon after this came the exhibitions of the abstract paintings executed by other artists. The most prominent was those of Uttam Nepali in Kathmandu. A tradition of exhibiting abstract paintings became a norm, and it was the result of education in art in Indian schools and universities as mentioned earlier.

The iconographic drawings and paintings with religious and tantric motifs printed in different books of art are semi-abstract in nature. Their detailed photos are printed in different books of art written by both native and non-native writers. There is no space to mention them here. However, I would like to refer to Pratapaditya Pal's tome entitled 'Art of Nepal' (1985) here just by way of giving some examples. The abstract forms of the ancient images from today's perspective provide an evidence of the existence and continuity of the tradition. The writers in their various contributions have discussed the forms of tantric art, Newar art, paintings of the Himalayan region and sculptural forms in Kathmandu (Pal 2004). They demonstrate the nature of abstraction in art. But that is a different category of abstract art that is mentioned here for the purpose of suggesting that abstract art is not necessarily a modernist invention. But we must admit that the Western abstract art has been the most dominant form that has become a universal subject.

Artists and critics of Nepali abstract paintings appear to combine two elements in the early phase of its use. They were considered as making a

combination of unique mode of gaze and the expression of a certain rage against the traditional norms and forms of art. But the element of rage was less pronounced than a new mode of experiments in technique and a desire to create new forms in art. My view is that Nepali abstract paintings came partly as a result of education especially in Western art and partly as the need to give continuity of the tradition. But there was a strong desire to make new experiments in style and the use of unconventional motifs in paintings. In this short article I want to make some interpretations about this dual nature of the abstract paintings of Nepal. I have drawn my examples from the works of some leading painters of different generations to substantiate my argument that abstract paintings in Nepal demonstrate passion and mission on the one hand and experimental zeal on the other. However, a combination of both appears to guide a number of good art works.

Our approach to abstract painting is guided by a trend that prioritised the experiment, education in Western art, and by the same token, it became the measuring standard for that. It was related to education in modern art. The only art schools for that were available either in France and Britain or India. There was no opportunity for Nepali art students to study in them in the early times. The common forms of art education available in Nepal were traditional in nature. As I have already published a long article in the earlier volume of this journal on this subject.

I do not want to discuss the subject of modernism related to education here. The focus here being abstract painting, I want to dwell more on that by alluding to the nature of paintings that are abstract in style and the treatment of the subject.

Abstract painters also made portraiture as a favourite subject. The portraits could be real or imaginary. But the principles that guided such paintings were the same. Nepali abstract painters chose both categories – real persona and imaginary. But what I find interesting in Nepali abstract paintings is the use of anthropomorphic or human form more than the conceptual form of composition. I want to examine whether we have come to a stage of abstract painting in Nepal when we could dwell on the question of its continuity and validity. Western painters and critics have already discussed it as a subject of great significance. I would like to allude to two views here before discussing the Nepali artists' perception of abstract art.

### **Some Western perceptions**

The delineation of colours and figurality in paintings and lines in drawings in the traditional art show the different kinds of anthropomorphic form. A merger of speed, in a sort of rage suggested by the bodies in a flow, tends to create the semi-abstract forms in them. This element of the speed of the body and their fluidity is what I consider as the most essential element of the abstract paintings of the Western painters. Pablo Picasso's paintings from Guernica to other paintings and portraits embody

such speed. The cause of abstraction is the selfsame speed. I do not have space here to put my argument with examples. But my understanding of the abstract paintings of the Western artists is a quest for speed that transcends the cultural borders. The use of the North African icons by Braque and Picasso who created the cubist forms in their works is related to that. The other important feature of the West as well as that of the East is that they transcend time. They are made at different times. But in modern times, the painters are reviewing and reinterpreting the above features of abstract art.

Some new perceptions that have emerged in recent times deserve mention here. The perceptions address the importance of abstract art or the theory of art that breaks boundaries of established canons. The most striking part is that reviewers turn to painters for their opinion. Picasso himself does not see 'past or future in art'. He stresses that art to qualify as art should 'always live in the present'. He takes a strong view about the concept of presentism. He says, "If the art fails to do so it must not be considered at all". To him "Art does not evolve by itself, the ideas of people change and with them their mode of expression." That is why he believes the art of the past is 'more alive today than it ever was' (Dominiczak 2012). Logically therefore abstract art represents that consciousness of the contemporaneity.

Impressionist, John Russell (1858-1930) in his book about the famous abstract modern British painter Francis Bacon (1909-1992) presents the views of this

eminent abstract portraitist, which is very revealing. Russell cites Bacon talking to David Sylvester in 1960. The great abstract painter, a portraitist believes, "We no longer accept the unitary and unambiguous and closely structured view of human personality, which portrait-painting traditionally involves." The reason for that, he says, "We disbelieve in the monolithic view of human nature." The trappings of power do not awe us anymore. The painter believes, "We see human beings flawed, variable, self-contradictory; subject to the fugitive and the contingent" (Russell 84). Anyone who browses through Bacon's abstract portraits can easily see what he means by the concept of the 'fugitive and the contingent'.

Laurie Fendrich (1999) echoes a similar concept. In her articulate article 'Why Abstract Painting Still Matters', she makes some very interesting observations to answer the above question. She says, "Before modernism, painting was the noise in the culture, because it attracted attention. Now, the culture is the noise, and painting – especially abstract painting – attracts little attention, either in the culture at large or in the art world." The virtue of abstract painting is that it 'offers us quiet, not noise'. Referring to the cultural crisis that has emerged at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, she says, the crisis is caused by "the continuous flux of everything, and the death of stillness." She asserts, none of the forms of art like abstract painting, 'installation art, computer art' no matter how smart and savvy they are

can change. By foregrounding the power of abstract painting she goes on to say, "It is a world beautifully separate from our postmodern, materialistic, morphing, ironic, hip age." To her abstract painting is the means to resist the onslaught of the 'continuous flux'.

The different perceptions about abstract paintings highlight the power of this form and style of art. To assert that the abstract painting has the element of liberation from the chaos is to recognise the quality of the paintings of this nature. The views of the art critics and connoisseur of the West and the East cited earlier all draw their strength.

### **Some discussions about Nepali abstract paintings**

I discuss some features of the prominent modern Nepali painters, their styles, techniques and philosophy in their paintings. I would like to dwell on such points – their use and perception of abstract paintings, their creation of twilight zones, which is their double bind between the representational and the abstract modes of their paintings, their choice of abstract forms to represent the familiar reality and the iconic forms. I would like to call this the twilight zone of Nepali abstract paintings. My theory is that the most prominent feature of the abstract paintings of the modern Nepali painters is the creation of the contact zones. This may be true in the case of painters of other cultural and geographical spaces, but I believe it would be more revealing if I focus on the paintings that I am familiar with and

written their reviews for many decades, and am still writing.

Different artists have created such zones with different degrees of experimentation. But one common feature of almost all the major Nepali abstract painting is the creation of the contact zones of representational and abstract modes of paintings. Some Nepali literary writers have made overtly Western oriented interventions in such contact zones. But I find the painters' treatments of this theme of contact zone is done with greater effects, efficacy and passion than those of the modernist Nepali writers. I have treated this subject in different articles and interpretations written in Nepali and English, some of which find mention later.

I want to briefly explain my theory of contact zones in modern Nepali abstract paintings. I have not come across any discussions about contact zones in Nepali abstract paintings. I recall here the theory of a Canadian-born American academic named Mary Louise Pratt who has developed this theory of contact zone in her very widely read tome 'Imperial Eyes'. In contact zones she says (2008), "Different cultures do meet, enter into conflict and deal with each other. Peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict." Though it may sound little far-fetched to compare, I find the essence of this argument very revealing to discuss about the meeting points of cultures and



values. Nepali abstract paintings, which came late in Nepali art, bring different perceptions about culture, aesthetics and educational impacts in one composition.

Contact zones in Nepali painters become discernible in the compromise that the painter achieves between figurality or the fine forms and the abstract distortions of the same. I find the Nepali abstract paintings the most articulate medium to show such contacts. By using this theory I have attempted to study briefly the different modes of experimentations between figural and abstract forms achieved by modern Nepali painters. Even though little is written about this subject, as far as my knowledge goes, even by Indian critics, this phenomenon of the representational meetings at different points can be seen in the paintings of the Indic region. Historically speaking, works of the two Indian painters – Ravi Varma and Nandalal Bose – who were working on the twilight or the contact zones of the Western techniques and the oriental especially merit attention. I have discussed about the works of Varma in my previous article. (Subedi, "Widening sphere": 9-10). But the following lines written by Jaya Appasamy (1983:35) in the catalogue of the centenary exhibition of Nandalal Bose (1882-1966) touch on this subject of the contact zone in paintings of artists of the transitional times. The following words of Appasamy show the contact zone quite clearly:

Whereas Upanishads and other Indian doctrines conditioned his mind to evolve his theoretical

concepts, the artistic traditions of Ajanta and miniature paintings, tinged with Far Eastern-especially Chinese and Japanese technique – constituted the essential ingredients of that mature art style which now is unanimously attributed to Nandalal.

The above two painters are mentioned here because the painters oriented to modernism have used one's tradition as one important point to refer to. Such traditions espoused by the artists meet with the modernist art especially of the Western origin. Such contact zones in Indian paintings have had significant impact on Nepali paintings, some of which is discussed in my article (Subedi 2021).

Abstract art made the Nepali artists' contact zones very meaningful, creative and challenging. To see such points of contact zones in Nepali abstract paintings we should see how they have made their oeuvre abstract. A simple understanding of abstract art in Nepal is that like any other abstract paintings of the West and even of India it should follow the techniques of this genre of art without qualms. Execute abstract paintings if you want to. They did so freely, spontaneously, creatively and productively. There is no doubt about it. But the artists appear to keep certain reservations about it. The Indian examples and also the observations of the great Indian artist M F Husain also make that clear. Singh (2012:13) puts Husain's position in these words: "The language of Husain's art and the quality of his vision that does not bother about the

questions of modernity versus tradition or the figurative versus the abstract, have opened the doors for successive generation of artists to reinvent the old in the context of the new and to seek abstraction through the figurative.”

Two expressions in Singh's article are interesting. One is 'to reinvent the old in the context of the new' and the other is 'to seek abstraction through the figurative'. That indicates the nature of the meeting points. This interpretation quite rightly captures the process of meeting or creating contact zones between abstract and figurative paintings in this region. Nepali abstract painters have worked more or less with the same spirit. It started with Lain Singh Bangdel who introduced abstract paintings as discussed above. But the main principal of his entire oeuvre remained one of inventing contact zones between the figurative and the abstract in his art. Bangdel (1992), Messerschmidt and Bangdel (2004) have discussed this aspect of Bangdel's paintings. An exhibition of Bangdel's art of great historical significance organised at the Nepal Art Council Gallery, Babar Mahal, Kathmandu (April 13-28, 1991) showed how he had been creating and working in different contact zones in his abstract and semi-abstract paintings. The title of the exhibition was "Bangdel Fifty Years of His Art: A Retrospective Exhibition". As I have discussed about that exhibition elsewhere, I only want to allude to how he presented his abstractionist paintings. Interestingly, the major works of that series were executed after the political change of 1990 in

Nepal. This is a significant story. I do not have space to discuss that here, but what I must mention here is that Nepali abstract painters from Bangdel to others of the new generation, semi-abstract, abstract even abstract expressionist paintings have been used by painters to express different socially and culturally oriented motifs. This should be noted as an important feature of Nepali artists' lure of abstractionism in their paintings.

The painters of the early modernist generation used abstraction in paintings more or less as a norm. The abstract painters that I encountered come from among the most familiar artists of Nepal. The paintings that they executed were exhibited in Kathmandu. Exhibition therefore is associated with Nepali abstract art.

I only want to rely on my own memories of painting exhibitions and catalogues. I must have written dozens of catalogue reviews of the modern paintings from Uttam Nepali, Sashikala Tiwari, Kiran Manandhar, Ragini Upadhyay, Sarita Dongol. I have written catalogue articles for most of Kiran's painting exhibitions. Lately I have also written a brochure text for the young artist Sagar Manandhar's paintings. I also wrote a catalogue review of Amar Chitrakar's painting exhibition at Nepal Art Council in 1992, but I am not using his paintings for discussion in this article because he did not paint in abstract style. My narrative of encounter with modern abstract Nepali paintings begins with this episode. As mentioned above Laxman Shrestha held possibly his first exhibition of modern abstract

and semi-abstract paintings in at NAFA Art Gallery in Naxal in the year 2024 BS (1967). I visited the exhibition at the suggestion of Bala Krishna Sama who had written the catalogue text for that. The exhibition of Laxman Shrestha was an eloquent event for me. As stated above, I was struck by the commentary of Bala Krishna Sama about Shrestha's paintings and his abstract art, which is mentioned earlier. No other reviews appeared at that time. That means abstract paintings had not become very familiar then. Bangdel's paintings remained unfamiliar with the Nepali art lovers at large.

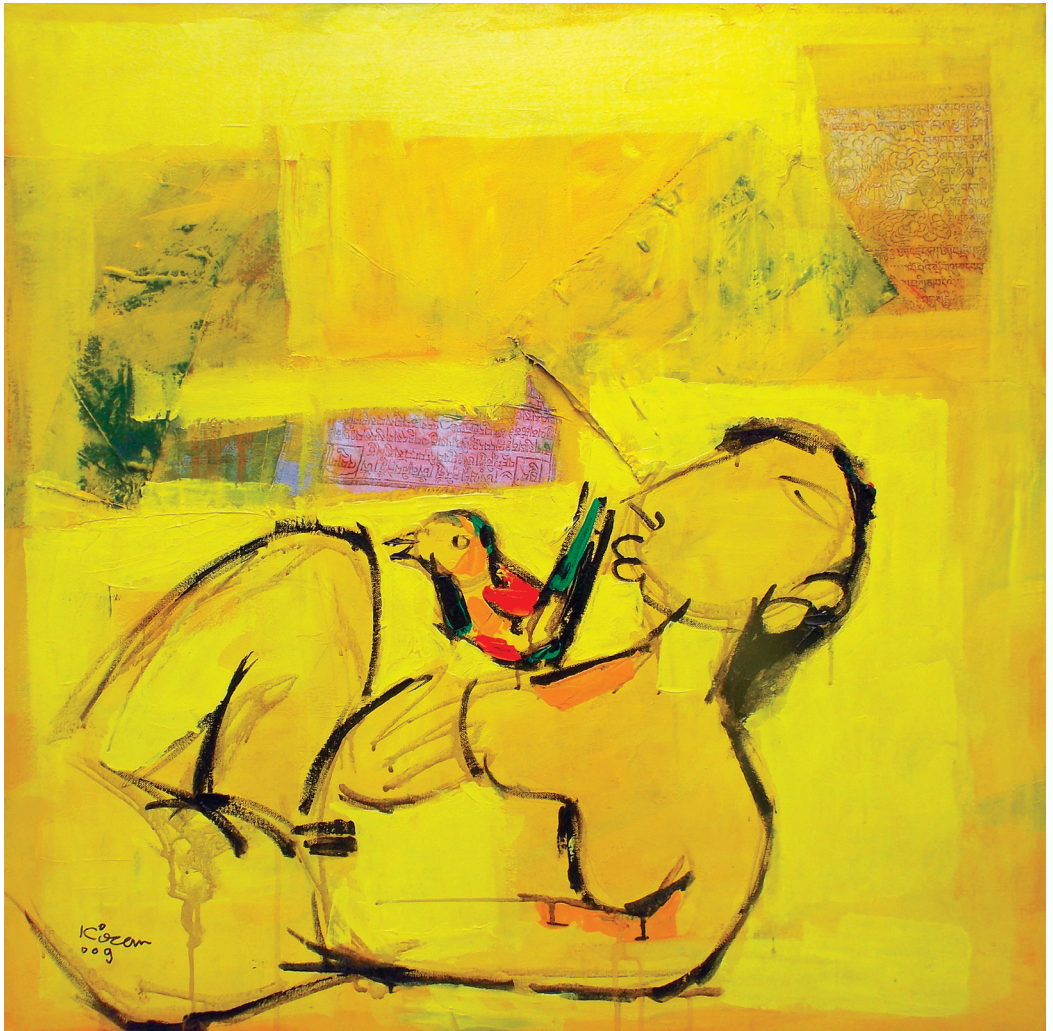
Laxman Shrestha wanted to share his abstract paintings with poets and invite their responses. Once he gave me a book entitled 'The Cartographer's Apprentice' (2000) with poems written by an Indian poet Ranjit Hoskote on his paintings. In that collection a poem entitled "Nocturne" tries to capture the meaning of Laxman's abstract painting "charcoal on paper 1998". The following lines of that poem read:

Nursing your silences, I watch night  
Wedge its broad shoulders tight  
In our window.

I have written these lines for that: "The painting of Shrestha and this poem create an atmosphere of what the poet calls a nursing of silences through the use of the quiet forms. The painting belongs to the category of abstract art, but it has entered the realm of that experience through very simple linear figurality that evokes the quietness" (Subedi, 2017b: 9). Another

example of how a modern painter wanted his abstract paintings to be interpreted or appreciated occurred in Uttam Nepali's painting exhibition in September 1975 at NAFA. Nepali exhibited thirty-two abstract paintings that used the lines of poems written by his contemporary poets. I have already cited what I wrote about that exhibition in my article in *Sirjanā* (Subedi 2017b:10). Nepali chose to transform his concept of abstract art into poetry, another medium. This desire to be understood, this interest in the shift of the medium into another genre shows the nature of Nepali's abstract art or what lies at the heart of the abstract art in Nepal. Uttam Nepali's treatment of abstract art is very unique. He glibly shifts from figurality to abstract form, which is the unique feature of Nepali's art. I recall one very eloquent example. Uttam Nepali made an exhibition of his paintings at Siddhartha Art Gallery then situated at Kantipath on April 3-10, 1992 that marked a shift from semi-figurality to abstraction. I consider that a unique feature. I find the text that I wrote for the catalogue relevant for this discussion. I cite one paragraph here:

Each canvas is a response of the poet-painter to the condition imposed upon the mind by the world. Pleasant shocks appear in the abrupt strokes and flying cubes. The texture of the canvas especially in the larger ones, record the world, its drama in the combination of brush strokes and the linings drawn by bamboo picks. The response also appears in the drama between



**Kiran Manandhar**, *Reclining Lady with a Bird*, 2009, acrylics on canvas

the space and the forms. The space between the cubes enters into a dramatic relationship with the cubes and together they give the painting solidity, and a sense of motion (Subedi 1992).

Uttam Nepali whose name comes prominently along with Bangdel

did use the abstract art as a very expressive form of the genre. Nepali treated abstract art with a poetic sensibility. I do not mean to say that almost every abstract painter of Nepal wants to project the meaning of his or her *sensa* in poetic terms. But these shifts, which occur in the latter painters' works also that I

have discussed in "Nepali Paintings and Poetry" do show a meta-artistic consciousness of the abstract painter to be evoking poetic sense of their works.

The other major abstract painters of the modern generation, who are educators of art and pioneers in a number of ways, have created their contact zones in a number of ways. I am referring to the works of Sashi Shah, Krishna Manandhar, Indra Pradhan and Batsa Gopal Vaidya known famously as SKIB-71. Other than catalogue articles that I have written for them individually at different times, I have discussed these features. I do not want to repeat the interpretations here. I want to cite the gist of my analysis here:

SKIB-71 were not seeking to be fixed in their different stylistic spheres. They had common goals, which was to achieve fluidity. But as their search for metaphor covered many areas including poetry and sculpture and works with other contemporary artists like Sashikala Tiwari and others, their images were amorphous. They did not limit themselves to any fixed forms. Even Sashi Shah's recurrent stallions are metaphors of diversity. Batsa Gopal's icons assume new meanings when they are handled with the techniques of modernist art (Subedi 2019:18).

Kiran Manandhar presents a very eloquent example of the contact zone theory that I am discussing in this article. He is probably one Nepali artist whose

paintings have made me pensive and responsive more than those of any other painters. I must have written over two-dozen exhibition catalogues and review of his paintings to this day. The major ones are included in a big tome entitled "Kiran: Saga of Modern Nepali Artist" (2006). I wrote an introduction to his tome in the context of the Nepali abstract art:

Kiran Manandhar has created fewer abstract expressionistic works than canvases that present the human psyche through the delineation of figural forms. Since female forms dominate his paintings, he has created a world of charm as well as experience representing them. He creates the consciousness of characters through a technique of merger between forms and abstraction, intensity of mood with the calmness and charm that pervades the canvas and cultural artefacts with the free interpretations of these forms. So he creates human characters in their mental and physical world, but mainly mental because each canvas is a world of the artist as well as of the human characters as conceived in the art (Subedi 2006: IX).

Manuj Babu Mishra uses figurality in paintings but those figures get metamorphosed into semi-abstract and surrealistic forms. His contact zone is tremulous. The figurality and the surrealistic abstraction meet on a turbulent zone. He does not follow the familiar mode of abstract painting; he

uses ideas to create abstraction. But they are very unstable in nature. They transcend realism through a method of emulation of reality. But that is heavily influenced by his ideas and the vision of apocalypse. I would still see his method as one of abstract arts though it is projected in a different way. That is one feature of Nepali abstract art. Ragini Upadhyay's method is also quite similar. Her apocalyptic vision, metamorphosed and anthropomorphic forms, free interpretations of myths, and also of the realist figures and images, which adopt a method of using figurality in paintings that use semi-surrealistic and abstract paintings. She appears to be working on the contact zone, which is a strong feature of Nepali abstract paintings. Ragini introduces myth and social consciousness in her paintings. She plays in the turbulent contact zone of form and anarchy.

This subject of contact zone in Nepali modern art requires a separate article. But the purpose of this article is not so much to write a linear history as it is to write a critical review of the different artists as it is to present certain features of their abstract paintings. To repeat my interpretation of the contact zone theory, Nepali modern painters of the first or second generations introduced and established the principle of creating twilight zones between form and abstraction.

## **Towards the conclusion**

I want to summarise my little meandering argument about the abstract paintings

and its use by Nepali painters to form my theory about Nepali abstract paintings. I have not included Nepali sculptures, which would give even more eloquent examples of the contact zone between representational and abstract forms. I would still want to refer to my article about Nepali sculpture for the purpose of more discussions:

The sculptor's question resonates in my mind – where do we stand in modern sculpture especially of stone? I would only like to write about one problematic – the identification of the twilight zones of Nepali sculptures in the context of the shift from the traditional form to the modern one. I would also like to indicate how I see the value and significance of the works of Nepali sculptors and their international partnership. ... I evaluate the stone sculptures executed on Harnamadi hill, which is indeed the subject of this essay (Subedi 2016:17).

Though I have focussed only on paintings in this article, the subject of abstraction and fine representational figurality in modern sculpture highlights even more effectively the subject of abstract art and its exercise in the contact zone.

I have used my encounters of the art exhibitions that I have seen over half a century in Nepali galleries, my individual participation in discourses and interpretations of the art works of Nepal for this study. I do not pretend to draw a definite conclusion from this study, but what I find is that abstract paintings that

are taken easily as a form of modern style and a natural indicator of advancement in modern Nepali art indicate more than that. If we study very carefully and minutely the subject of abstract form, we can find very important cultural, artistic and aesthetic dimensions of Nepali art. The ambivalent approach towards the form of abstract and semi-abstract art in Nepal can be explained by using the contact zone theory. I have been working with this theory both in art, literature and culture and discussing with graduate students doing research for some time. This article is a short presentation of that study. I have used my notes about the style and forms of abstract and semi-abstract works of artists other than those discussed in the article like Gehendra Man Amatya, Madan Chitrakar, Vijaya Thapa, Pramila Giri, Durga Baral, K. K. Karmacharya, Sharad Ranjit, Jeevan Rajopadhyaya, Navindra Man Rajbhandari, Sunil Ranjit, Nabendra Limbu, Sunita Rana, Asha Dongol, Binod Pradhan, Bhairaj Maharjan, Bidhata KC and others. There are a number of other resources that give visuals to look for the various dimensions of the Nepali abstract art. A catalogue entitled "Nepali Artists" (2014) published by Nepal Academy of Fine Arts was quite helpful for that. Besides, the collection of the catalogues of painting exhibitions of Nepali painters and sculptors can be useful resources to study this very important but ignored subject.

The most important point to remember is what the very versatile art critic John Berger calls the question of the 'desirability' of art. Berger uses the oil

painting to make his point. He says a mere discussion and practice of art is not enough. We should also see how the art works become desirable to the audience. He says, "Oil painting celebrated a new kind of wealth – which was dynamic and which found its only sanction in the supreme buying power of money. Thus painting itself had to be able to demonstrate the desirability of what money could buy. And the visual desirability of what can be bought lies in its tangibility, in how it will reward the touch, the hand, of the owner" (Berger 1972: 90).

One important question that we have not addressed and realised is how a painting 'will reward the touch, the hand, of the owner'. Though this is more of a Western approach to the execution of art works, and the role of those who desire them, we should try and understand how approachable and desirable we have been able to make them.

Doing abstract painting is joy, a rebellion and an invention of fluid and lyrical form. The pioneers of the abstract paintings have achieved that to different degrees. I feel that the Nepali abstract painters by shunning the representational forms have made creative adventures. Even though they cannot make their works desirable to a desired extent, they can create a very creative form. Painters of the Indic region have become quite successful in making their works what Berger calls desirable. Nepali painters' works too have been touched, liked and bought by unknown buyers. My conclusion is that abstract paintings are

versatile forms. We should carefully, sympathetically and proudly study the abstract paintings and maintain the continuity of karma as a meaningful activity of Nepali creative artists and the culture.

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