



Sharada Man Shrestha. *Owl*, 2023. Mixed-media, 228 cm x 121 cm.

Sharada Man Shrestha: The Artist Who Transforms Junks and Scraps into Aesthetic Objects

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Abstract

Contemporary Nepali artist Sharada Man Shrestha uses scraps, junks, leftovers and found objects in his sculptures, paintings and installations. He transforms junks and leftovers into beautiful and fine aesthetic objects. The scraps and junks in mess distract the pedestrians but his artworks provide aesthetic pleasure to the viewers. Use of such materials in art contributes to manage the junks and scraps, recycle the used things, save the resources, reduce the environmental pollution, create cultural identity of the artist and the nation and earn livelihood for the artist. Shrestha has created both figurative and abstract artworks using scraps like used bottles, tires, pipes, grinding wheels and thrown away motorcycle parts. He has created high relief, low relief and freestanding sculptures. Due to the presence of physical material in the works rather than the creation of illusion through colors and light, the creative works provide a sense of connectedness to the earth. This article explores the principles behind the use of junks and interprets the artworks of Sharada Man Shrestha and shows how junks get transformed into the aesthetic objects. Since the thesis statement is supported through the interpretation of artworks, it is a qualitative research.

Keywords: junk art, aesthetic object, art and reality, recycling, blurring the boundary

Sharada Man Shrestha's artworks have unique identity, for they are created using junks and scraps and they represent the nature and culture of Nepal. Innovative creative works evolve out of the discarded things. In addition to aesthetic pleasure, these experimental works have multiple importance and significances.

Before exploring Shrestha's artworks in detail, it would be worth introducing the artist and his creativity in general.

Shrestha was born in Kathmandu in 1953. He studied Fine Arts in Lalit Kala Mahavidhyalaya (now Lalitkala Cmapus, Tribhuvan University), Bhotahity,

Kathmandu. He acquired basic skills and knowledge of arts and crafts in this formal institution and expanded his creative horizon with his own effort including self-study, interaction with senior arts, travel and experimentation with new media, forms and techniques (Sirjana, 2023). His artworks have carved his distinct space in the history of Nepali art (Bhandari, 2022). He has participated in various art exhibitions, workshops and symposiums

As an artist and art educator, Sharada Man Shrestha has contributed for the development of Nepali art in multiple ways. Currently he is a faculty member in Sirjana College of Fine Arts, Kathmandu (Sirjanā, 2022).

He has been honored with more than thirty distinguished awards. His artworks have been exhibited in more than 100 exhibitions held in Nepal and abroad. In most of his sculptures, artist Sharada Man Shrestha uses waste materials like plastic bottles, tires and parts of motorcycles (<https://english.onlinekhabar.com/sirjana-2023-sirjana-college.html>).

Versatile artist Sharada Man Shrestha uses multiple tools, media and techniques. He has handled multiple visual art genres like painting, sculpture and installation. His works are rooted to Nepali culture, tradition and nature and coming up to modern forms. He has made beautiful sculptures using scrap, junk and waste material (Sirjanā, 2022).

His artworks are dynamic and lively. To

make sculptures, he uses iron sheets, pipes, stone, clay, plastic and metal rods (Bhandari, 2022). His sculptures provide aesthetic pleasure due to the composition of organic forms. Nature and culture are the source of inspiration for the artist. He explores both figurative and abstract forms. Another subject matter of his artworks is Nepali architecture including temples, stupa and traditional houses. His sculptures include low relief, high relief and free standing figures. The inanimate things are transformed into animate lively images.

Research Methodology

The research area of this study includes the artworks of Sharada Man Shrestha that use junks, scraps, found things and the real objects of the world. The theories related to junk art and inter-art are used as tool for interpretation of Shrestha's works. The theories connect one art genre to other art genre, connect life, reality and real objects to the artworks. This research is qualitative, for it interprets the artworks to support the thesis statement, and there can be multiple interpretations of a single artwork. Works of art are primary sources, and books and articles on art history and critical theory are secondary sources.

Integration of Junks and Real Objects in Works of Art

Before interpreting and discussing Sharada Man Shrestha's artworks, it would be worth exploring the tradition of using junks, scraps and the objects

in the works art. During the first decade of twentieth century, Cubists used sand particles on their canvas. Sometimes, they also made collage of wooden boards and fabric on the canvas. Traditionally, a painting is supposed to use only color on the canvas but Cubists like Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque used the real things like sands, wooden blocks and garment in their creations. The two-dimensional art like painting has three dimensions like sculpture. They blurred the boundary between paintings and sculpture, and art and real objects of the world (Sharma, 2009). Dadaists like Marcel Duchamp also used junks in his arts. He exhibited urinal as work of art.

Similarly, in the 1960s, Pop artists stick objects of daily life like electric light bulbs, neon lights, glass, sacks, wire, shoes and even stuffed dead animals on the canvas. The artworks become three dimensional. They are neither purely painting nor sculpture. Some artists combined wood, plaster and polymer paint to create artworks. These artists made the "collage of mixed media" (Daniels, 1978, p.108). Such artworks transgress the traditional boundaries among different art genres and forms (Sharma, 2019).

Pop artist broke away from subjective attitude of expressionists, surrealists and abstract expressionist artists. Pop arts take their subject matters from daily life of ordinary people, mass-produced commodities, culture and consumer society. Pop artists celebrated consumerism and worshipped materialism (Beckett, 1994, p.380).

Soup cans, coke bottles, cream pies, hoarding boards and hamburgers are familiar images and objects in pop arts. They erode the gap between art and commodity. Arts and things are combined. These creations are three dimensional. Pop arts also erode the boundary between arts and life. Life, context and surroundings are interconnected. Heterogeneous forms, media and images have been integrated. Pop artists used the images and objects of mass culture, and materials of daily life in the context (Sharma, 2009).

Found objects and waste materials were transformed into works of art. This inscribes creative identity of the artist. Experiments with waste are the metaphors for creative expressions. Found object appropriation is the focus of junk artists (Akpang, 2013). Found object arts contribute to nation, community, artist himself and the attempt of making the earth green.

The way of incorporation of found materials in the aesthetic form is the artists' concern. Industry and trade left inorganic waste that cannot assimilate to the earth. Integration of such garbage in art has multiple significances. Spirit bottles are assembled to make images of deities and shrines. This art genre, which has the trend of waste and found objects appropriation, has thrived across the industrial world and consumer of industrial commodities. Found object arts convey the distinct message in the society. Industry, transportation and suburbs facilitate for the increased consumption of mass produced

commodities, and they give way to varieties of waste. These waste, scraps and found materials are the media for artistic use. Scraps, waste, and junks, the byproducts of modern civilization are used in contemporary arts across the world. Waste is uniquely adapted into visual arts (Akpang, 2013). Discarded objects are coherently incorporated into creative arts. Waste and found objects are assembled, combined and composed into an art that provides aesthetic pleasure to the viewers. Junk arts have multiple layers of meanings.

Junk and rubbish are turned into metaphorical gold, the invaluable creative works. These works challenge the conventional attitude that art only expresses inner emotions. Sometimes, the audience can be participants. Thus, it is appropriate for collaborative creative process. The transformation of materials creates human values touching the sensibilities. Recycling of rubbish is a process of constructing value. The creative process is exploratory and playful. The artwork is directly connected to production, consumption, disposal, collection, reconstruction, and revival (Astfalck, Darbourne & Bradshaw-Heap, 2017).

Sometimes, junk art is related to the term 'Neo-dada', for Dadaists rejected all traditions and conventions and used ready-made objects in random manner. The roots of present junk arts reach to cubism, Dada, pop arts and installation arts. Dada disparaged repetition of past art practices. Dadaists subverted

the established institution of art and creativity. Robert Rauschenberg, Kurt Schwitters and Claes Oldenburg are some of the renowned artists that used scraps and junks in their works. They also created suspended assemblage of metals and junks. Rauschenberg made a boxed construction between a stuffed chicken and a pillow along with irregularly lit up colored light bulbs (Dezeuze, 2006). Some environmental arts and happenings also integrated scraps. Like Neo-dada, these artists have hunger for innovation and novelty. Some of them included broken chairs, electric lights and old socks. These artists depart from the legacy of Jackson Pollock.

In his works, Robert Rauschenberg combines table cloths, light bulbs, kitchen utensils, stuffed animals, baseball, reproductions of the works of canonical artists, commodity crates, hats, comic strips and Coca Cola bottles. Kurt Schwitters uses glass, wooden boards, cardboard, iron, horsehair, leather, mirrors, cloth and electric lights. Allan Kaprow used the objects like a dentist's drill, a car-track scraper, a meat grinder, old cars, bicycles, buses and tires (Dezeuze, 2006). Some artists used bed springs, cracked toilet bowls, billboards, and twisted and rusting scraps. Rauschenberg states that one can go and stand in an empty lot and make art out of what he finds there (qtd. in Dezeuze, 2006). Sharada Man Shrestha has taken insight from these works, and created his own artworks having unique identity and flavor.



Sharada Man Shrestha. *Peacock*, 2022. Mixed-media, 50 cm x 225 cm

Analysis and discussion of Sharada Man Shrestha's artworks

Sharada Man Shrestha's artworks present junk aesthetic in the context of contemporary Nepali arts. He embraced new and unconventional materials in his compositions. He departed from the dependence on the painterly medium. The close connection to the physical material is creative rediscovery of the past experience while we were fully blended with our surroundings. He integrated the found materials from the contemporary

industrialized urban context of Nepal. His assemblages convey an aesthetic sense through ordinary commodities. It is a rebelliousness against the pure genres of art like sculpture, painting or architecture.

His artworks have broken the boundaries among different art genres like painting, sculpture and installation art. In his compositions, there are the elements of two or more art genres. Three dimensional real things are put on the two dimensional surface. The third dimension is the special property of sculpture. But we can find three dimensions even in his paintings.

Conventionally, the third dimension in the painting is the illusion created by the use of light and shade, and perspective. Multiple things coexist in the single work. The artist's creative impulse goes beyond the conventional boundaries and established codes of arts. He does not follow the conventional techniques of creativity. He experiments with new forms, techniques and medium. He does not follow established trends but attempts to set the new trend.

Assembling the junks randomly and calling it a work of art may be easy but to create a naturalistic picture out of the discarded things is the painstaking work of the artist. In his work "The Owl", Sharada Man Shrestha makes the objective representation of the bird out of tires, plastic bottles, motorcycle parts, wooden twigs, grinding wheels and titbits of metals. The artist has the sharp sense of shapes and colors. He exactly matches the things with the body parts of the owl. Looking glasses of motorcycle function as ears, eyes have been represented by grinding wheels. Pieces of plastic bottles make the body. He makes the wings using tires. The creation of such unique work needs creative insight, fine craftsmanship and patience. This work has weight, volume and tactile sensation. The owl is observing the viewers with keen sense. The texture arouses our hands to touch surface of the work. He crosses the conventional limitations of creativity. The innovation provides a sense of liveliness. The innovative patterns of things create a sort of visual rhythm in the work.

In Shrestha's artwork "Dragonfly", the insignificant creature in the margin gets prime importance from the artist. He creates this creature using metal nets, pipes, wires, metal wheels, bearings, motorcycle parts and tin cans. The wings are made out of nets. The tin cans are connected to make a tail. Tiny metal wheels function as eyes. Thin metal rods are used to make legs. From distance, it looks exactly like a flying dragonfly but in close view it looks like a helicopter flying in the sky, for it is huge as compared to the insect. The assemblage of junk becomes an interesting artwork. Similarly, the small dragonfly is transformed to a huge helicopter. The artist does not follow the traditional rules, techniques, and conventions of particular genre of art. He does not follow the tradition but creates his own rules and codes for his own work. His art form enable us to open up to new ideas and new media through cross-pollination and fusion of multiple forms and media. There is a sort of visual rhythm and coherence in combination and composition. The principle of rhythm transforms inert materials into living creations (qtd. in Archer 1989, p.50).

He has also created lively figure of peacock using tires, metal cogs, grinding wheels, disks, clutch plates and pliers. He has attached and integrated these found things on a sheet. The figure is three dimensional realistic work. The pattern of images and things in the work creates a sort of visual music.

He blends paintings and sculptures in some of his works. Due to the use



Sharada Man Shrestha. *Dragonfly*, 2023. Mixed-media, 228 cm x 121 cm.

of three dimensional material, the images, figures and scenes rise up above the surface giving a sense of relief sculpture. The work is both painting and sculpture. In such artworks, Shrestha has captured various jatras, cultural carnivals of Kathmandu valley, pagoda temples, shrines, Newar architecture and settlements, figures of divinities, stupas, cityscapes and landscapes. The mythical and cultural patterns, and archetypes link the artworks to the collective unconscious. His works present the

diversity of themes, spontaneity of creativity, confidence in composition and the refinement in craftsmanship. In his artworks, one art genre is connected to other art genres. In other words, they have inter-art relationship. His creations share media and techniques of multiple genres of art. He blurs the boundaries among various art genres focusing his expression to respond the contemporary context. His works use stone, wood, clay, pipes, nets, scraps, junks and metal sheets.

The exploitation of multimedia presents the possibilities of inter-art relationship (Sharma, 2020). Since the art form crosses the conventional boundary of creation, his artworks become experimental. The common element of all the art genres is the rhythm (Sharma, 2009). In his works, rhythm conveys a sense of visual music. Shrestha makes the collage of papers and fabric, and then sticks three dimensional objects like wood and wires on the canvas or board. His art forms do not fit into a preconceived idea of either a sculpture or painting. The artworks go beyond the defined boundary. The prime focus is on the expression of the artist. The artist responds to his context in creative manner. His artworks aesthetically attempt to create awareness about environment, recycling and saving the mother earth.

Conclusion

In his artworks, Sharada Man Shrestha transforms scraps, junks and found objects into aesthetic forms. The works not only provide aesthetic pleasure to the viewers but also contribute to recycle waste, keep the space clean, and carve cultural identity of the nation. Breaking the boundary among various art genres, the artworks emphasize the artist's inner urge for creative expression. Nature and culture of the context emerge out of the discarded commodities. Such extraordinary artworks have been possible due to the artist's critical and creative insight in response to his surroundings.



Sharada Man Shrestha. *The Corroded*, 2024.
Mixed-media, 122 cm x 121 cm.

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