



Visual Rhythm in Krishna Prakash Shah's Abstract Paintings

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Abstract

Krishna Prakash Shah's abstract paintings present visual rhythm in the canvas that provides a sensation of music, melody and motion. Lines, colors and shapes are running and flowing in a spontaneous manner as fluid without any obstacle on their way. Due to harmony and cohesion among colors and shapes, the visual compositions create a friendly atmosphere and comfort to our eyes. The artworks have such a power that invites the viewers to enter the canvas and explore the unknown world, having an adventurous imaginary journey. The viewers become the characters who travel back and forth along with the swinging shapes and lines. Due to the aesthetic experience of visual rhythm, the viewers become the one with the viewed artwork. The distance between the subject and the object is lost since the viewers assimilate with the artwork. The dynamic lines, colors and shapes are flowing spontaneously. This motion and flow suggest the visual melody and music. The scope of the study includes Krishna Shah's abstract paintings which have been explored from the perspective of visual rhythm and music as a tool for interpreting artworks. The study is qualitative since the artworks have the possibility of multiple interpretations. This paper, thus, attempts to trace the visual rhythm in his abstract compositions and their aesthetic values.

Keywords: *Abstract painting, visual rhythm, motion, melody, cohesion, spontaneity*

Introduction: Krishna Prakash Shah and His Artworks

Krishna Prakash Shah is a renowned contemporary Nepali artist. His abstract paintings present visual melody that provides aesthetic pleasure for art's own sake. Before supporting this statement through analysis and interpretation of artworks, it would be worth introducing his works briefly. Most of his compositions do not refer to the objects and events of the external world. The colors and shapes themselves are the contents of the works. The fluid colors facilitate the imaginative flight. Keshab Raj Khanal states that Krishna Shah has captured positive feelings in his abstract compositions providing visual shapes to his sensations ("Canvas" 79). He was more affected by inner sensations rather than the subject matters of the external world. In his artworks, there is the confluence of feeling and meditative mood (Khanal, "Chitrama

Antarmanko Abhibyakti" 34-35). The artist eliminates references to the things in the world to depict invisible aspects through colors and abstract shapes. He captures the inner sensation in the colors when his heart overflows with emotions (Shah, "Interview"). He attempts to present motion in the colors. His paintings are abstract created using flow technique (N.B. Gurung, *Sahityapost.com*). While getting the color flow, he leaves blank spaces as required and wipes colors on the canvas. Controlling the flow of colors to derive required shapes is his technique of creation.

Krishna Shah's paintings are abstract that do not represent the objects of nature. Lines, colors, shapes and images do not refer to the real things but stand for their own sake (Krishna Shah, "Presentation of Inner Feelings" 4). Abstract images and colors present the feelings of the artist ("Aawaran Kalakar Parichaya" 3). The compositions create an atmosphere of spirituality and meditation. Shah himself states:

When any subject touches my heart, I create my art like flowing in the river catching the sensation created by the thing. When I am unable to present my feelings in words, my paintings can be the powerful medium of expression through the sensation of colors. The combination of colors in my compositions connotes the self-realization instead of the mundane subject of men. ("Interview")

Shah's abstract paintings provide pleasure and peace. The spontaneous flow of colors gives life to his paintings (Sharma, "Playfulness and Plurality" 124). He expresses his delight, enthusiasm and emotions through his abstract forms. The artist attempts to assimilate his own emotions with abstract images in floating colors. His colorful compositions provide relief to the viewers from pain and suffering for some moments.

The viewers can dive deep into the raptures of the color sensation of his compositions. The more one views the works the more one reaches the depth. The more the colors in paintings provide aesthetic pleasure the less one searches for their significances (Sashi Shah 3). The ecstasy is its own significance. One would like to dissolve oneself in the abstract images of painting (Krishna Shah, "About my Creations" 6). The paintings cannot be understood by relating them to the external world through reasoning but by diving into the artworks themselves.

There are both things in the world: the visible and the invisible. The visible things are easier to describe in words than the invisible things. Krishna Shah makes visible to the invisible things in his paintings (Khanal, "Chitrama Antarmanko Abhibyakti" 34). The rise and fall of human sentiments along with pain and pleasure are presented in colors (Adhikari 7). Shah's paintings provide the feeling of comfort, solace and peace of mind.

Shah's abstract artworks free the viewers from the sense of specific time and space, for the images and colors in the canvas do not refer to the worldly objects and events (*Ausstellung Nepal* 7). They are not either about the past and the future events. There is no need to spend time and effort searching for the objective representation of recognizable things of our world. One takes part in the spontaneous movement of the color at the first sight ("Shahka Chitrabare Antarkriya" 16). The colors and forms themselves are the essence and contents. One color walks hand in hand with the other in harmony. One image aptly fits with the other, creating cohesion and pattern (Sharma, "Exploring Ourselves" 8). As one element elegantly connects to the next, all the parts hang in harmony as the cells and organs in a living being (*Kalkar Kultur* 16). He made

daring experiments with colors and ventured out into the open space in the face of all risks defying any prohibition. The review of available literature depicts that Shah's works are studied from various perspectives, but the rhythmic aspects of his works have not been explored well. This study attempts to fill this gap by tracing the visual rhythm in his artworks, finding the ways of creating rhythm and their impact.

Abstract Art and Rhythm

The abstract painting disconnects itself from the objects and events of the world, and forms and colors do not become the means but ends in themselves. The artistic "form is significant not because it informs about our world but because the form is its own significance" (Martin and Jacobus 75). By eliminating the reference to everything, the abstract painters liberate us from the habits of referring to specific objects and events. The radiant and vivid values of the sensuous are enjoyed for their own sake, satisfying a primal fundamental need. Abstractions can help behold and treasure the images of the sensuous transforming us into participators. In the abstract painting, the sensation is not caused by the objects and events but by the abstract images, colors, lines and brushstrokes.

The abstract painting does not depict recognizable scenes or objects, but instead is made up of lines, colors and shapes that exist for their own expressive sake. The composition abandons the concept of art as the imitation of nature and makes little or no reference to the external visual world. Such works are non-figurative, non-representational and non-objective.

The abstract painting is an art of pure form without content, in which "only aesthetic elements seem to be present" (Schapiro 185). The abstract form makes the viewers free from the "tyranny of time and space and the fury of functions" (Martin and Jacobus 81). The contemplation of a non-objective picture offers a complete rest to the mind from earthly troubles and thought. In this sense, the abstract painting works as an instrument for meditation. In Kandinsky's compositions, the "fluidity of painting" is like the "lyricism of music" (Matthews and Platt 534).

Rhythm is one of the elements of art that is found in most of the genres of art like music, dance, poem, prose, painting, sculpture and architecture. It is the melody created by movement and pattern. It is heard and felt in music and recitation of poems. In painting, the flowing and moving lines, colors and shapes create a visual rhythm that is felt like music (Martin and Jacobus 81). It is also the formal quality of a work of art that is enjoyed although one may not understand the contents and themes. Sometimes, we listen to some songs, but we do not understand them. Yet, we keep on listening to them and enjoying them. This happens due to the rhythmic quality of the music and songs. There is repetition, coherence, cohesion and contrast in the motion.

We can feel the rhythm in people's speech. We feel the rhythm in sea waves. We perceive the rhythm in people's movements. A farmer digs the field in a rhythmic manner. He seems to be enjoying his digging. The skyline of the mountains has rhythm. There are a gradual increase and decrease in shapes, sounds and movement. Our thinking can be rhythmic. A carpenter is whistling softly while carving wood with his tool. Walking is different from dancing because of rhythm. A poem differs from everyday speech because of rhythm. Both of them may have rhythm but it is dominant in poetry. The rhythm is dynamic and lively. Without rhythm, both art and life appear to be dry,

discordant and lifeless. On verbal arts, music is created through the use of rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, assonance, rising and falling of tones and syllables. On visual arts, rhythm is created with the repetition and patterns of flowing lines, colors and shapes (Sharma, *Nepali Painting* 76). About the importance of rhythm in his art, the poet-painter Rabindranath Tagore himself stated:

My pictures are my versification in lines. If by chance they are entitled to claim recognition, it must be primarily for some rhythmic significance of form which is ultimate and not for any interpretation of an idea or representation of fact. The only training which I had in young days was the training in rhythm, the rhythm in thought, the rhythm in sound. One thing which is common to all arts is the principle of rhythm which transforms inert materials into living creations. (qtd. in Archer 51)

Spontaneous and flowing colors, lines and brushstrokes create rhythm in his artworks. Kandinsky states that abstract painting presents inner life along with spirituality, intuition, emotion, spontaneity and rhythm aroused by colors and design. Kandinsky relates musical instrument, hands and cords with color, eyes and vibration: "Color is powerful which directly influences the soul. Color is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand which plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibration in the soul" (25). Kandinsky has compared the abstract art with music. The creativity of an artist is similar to the creativity of the musician. In the abstract paintings, the flow of colors, lines and shapes is presented in a rhythmic manner giving a sense of music and melody.

Tracing Rhythm in Shah's Abstract Compositions

Krishna Shah's abstract paintings present a sense of visual rhythm and melody through spontaneous and flowing shapes and fluid colors. The lines, colors and shapes move to create a pattern. The dynamic visuals suggest a sort of pulse and cadence. The eyes move with the tune of running colors balanced by the occasional texture. His painting *Rhythm* (Fig. 1) presents the visual rhythm of flowing shapes from center to periphery. The light originating at the center is being spread around. This gives a sense of music and motion emerging from silence and solace of mind. Something flashes forth in the mind and circulates the energy within the self and around the world with sonorous sound and musical motion, giving a swing and the jolt to the self, providing the aesthetic pleasure of a work of art that allows following the self and being the one with the aesthetic work. There are motion and rhythm in the constituents of the overall composition as well. The white oval shape on the left goes round and round at an unprompted pace. The dark sweeping lines below move along the white shape pointing toward the center making curvature. The dynamic blue colors above run in rhythm suggesting the life in themselves. There is a gradual transition in colors suggesting linearity, harmony and connection.

The movement of colors takes us to the unknown time and space of our imagination. The animated shapes of the paintings constantly move toward the edges and center. The viewers themselves happen to be the colors and dynamic shapes. Hence, the viewing subject assimilates itself with the viewed object, the work of art.



Fig.1. Krishna Prakash Shah, *Rhythm* (2011).

After exploring colorful clouds and the whirling waves, one takes rest having comfort and solace. New trails for travel are still open for the explorer. One takes another trip over the dynamic colors following the rhythm of glides along with ups and downs. The melodious movement goes on and on. It is worthless to ask for the significance of the painting, for the joy of the rhythm is its own significance.



Fig.2. Krishna Prakash Shah, *Explosion* (2010).

Krishna Shah's painting *Explosion* (Fig. 2) presents the rhythm of released energy in the dynamic colors and shapes. The all-inclusive composition is volatile as if the surface of the earth is moving in a powerful earthquake. The colors and playful shapes provide the impression of sea, sky, hills, woods and thunderstorms. All of them move like volcanic lava. It gives a sense of sublime beyond our experience and imagination. The entire picture surface can be divided into two parts. The lower part is moving toward the right and the upper part is gliding toward the left.

Despite the variation and flexibility, the shapes are flowing anticlockwise. The tectonic plates cleared their ways dismantling things on their ways and have become free taking the mountain tops toward the bottom and projecting the seabed up. The entire earth seems to be moving in rhythm. This is the story of creation and destruction narrated in both visual and musical form. As one moves along the lines and colors, the person hears the music of motion and movement. Motion is the characteristics of life and change. The rhythm along with the motion provides a sense of life and joy. The canvas presents the frozen music in visual form through rhythmic colors and shapes. The musical form has soothing and consoling effects in the midst of explosion and storm.

The artworks appear ever new in the sense that we can view new images and diverse ways to go through in the subsequent viewings. One can reach the new horizon of imagination. The more one looks the more comforting shapes one visits. The painting renews one's perception breaking the monotony of daily life. The spontaneity and flowing quality of composition suggest that the shapes seem to have evolved in the process of creation without preplanning. The uninterrupted glide of the colors and images also suggests so. The sub-conscious rhythm of the artist appears in the visual form. He unravels his own internal and intangible reality on the canvas. The painting can be enjoyed for its own sake. It has the power to heal emotional wounds like music. Since the shapes do not objectively represent the things of the world, the viewers make different links in the presented visuals and create their own composition in their minds. Thus, the painting remains forever new. Different viewers may approach the painting in a different manner. Nevertheless, the rhythm is the common element that comes in the foreground of this artwork in an overt manner.



Fig. 3. Krishna Prakash Shah, *Peace* (2010).

Krishna Shah's painting *Peace* (Fig. 3) strikes balance between sound and silence, motion and rest, journey and home, and the subjective quest and the status of the achievement. Various abstract images move in rhythm and come near the center. When these dynamic shapes come near, the movement comes to the rest, the suggestion of peace. The motion creates sound whereas the standing still creates the ambiance of silence. The exploration suggests a journey whereas the achievement of the objective and

goal suggests satisfaction, comfort and rest. The music glides with melody and comes to rest. The background of the composition is light blue and light green suggesting coolness and comfort. From the vast background, minute shapes emerge, grow like seedlings, go round and round in their own space, become bigger and bigger and move toward the center suggesting spontaneity and rhythm. This is the birth, growth and rhythmic quest of the self and the world. The exploration and quest provide knowledge, wisdom and realization of the self and the external world. In this state, there is the possibility of comfort, rest and peace. This is the intuitive state of meditation that has been shown in visual form when we experience it while closing our eyes.

The background appears to be the vast sea from where the fluxes of life emerge for the moment and again vanish in the sea itself. The short music is heard, and again it is lost in eternity. The situation is analogous to the brief human effort in the vast universe. We build a building; it stands for some years but after some years it collapses and becomes one with the earth and then to the universe. We sing songs for some time, we feel the existence of life but after some time, the silence covers everything. We light the lamp but it burns off and the darkness covers everything. The life, light, the moving shapes give a sense of rhythm, music and melody. The realization of this phenomenon may provide peace to the mind. The cravings and corruption may come to rest giving way to compassion and love.

Conclusion

Krishna Shah's abstract paintings present visual rhythm that provides a sense of melody and music for their own sake. The lines, colors and shapes flow like a river, creating spontaneous motion, suggesting the musical quality, and giving aesthetic pleasure to the viewers. The patterns of images, shapes and brushstrokes create cohesion, coherence and connection among different parts giving way to harmony and rhythm. The gradation of colors suggests a sort of motion with smooth transition in space. Friendly and comfortable colors have direct impact on the viewers irrespective of subject matters. In this sense, the form has dominance over the content. The rhythmic form comes to the foreground with melodious music and motion. The shapes do not directly represent the objects and events of the external world. As a result, it is not necessary to search for the fixed meaning of the artworks. Sometimes, we listen to the songs without searching a meaning; we dance not to take the moral lesson, we view the flowers not to find the significance. In a similar manner, we can view Krishna Shah's abstract paintings for the sake of beauty and pleasure like listening to music, whistling of the wind, sliding avalanche and the running water in the river. The visual rhythm with spontaneous gestures encourages the viewer's assimilation to the artworks.

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