

Separating Myth From Reality

KATHMANDU, Oct 29: *Tomorrow, Friday, October 30, 2009 marks both a culmination and a beginning in the contemporary art scene of Nepal. A year-and-a-half-long perseverance to organize the biggest international art festival in Nepal will come to an end with its inauguration at the Nepal Art Council (NAC) at 3 pm.*

And at the same time, the festival sets in a new foundation for an art movement that promises much to the advancement of Nepali artists in the global arena of art. This international art festival entitled "Separating Myth from Reality: Status of Women" is the baby of Sangeeta Thapa, the curator of Siddhartha Art Gallery (SAG) at Baber Mahal Revisited in Kathmandu. An avid lover of art, Thapa has made major contributions to contemporary art in Nepal, and is currently working to establish the **Kathmandu Contemporary Art Centre**.

"When I first wrote down the proposal, it was an idea for an exhibition. But the responses were overwhelming, and it eventually became a festival," she says, sitting cross-legged on the floor, and continues, "But with the magnitude of the positive responses also came several unprecedented challenges and unaccounted-for expenses, from shipment issues to renting generators, that I wasn't prepared for."

The past few days have been very stressful for Thapa as she, for instance, had trouble releasing artworks of Dutch participants from the airport customs office. "A Canadian artist sent her work two months back through postal registration, and we still haven't received it, and I doubt we'll have it here in time for the exhibition," she shares, managing to maintain a cheerful disposition.

Truly international in nature, the art festival has 108 participants from 25 countries in Asia, North America, South America, Europe, and Africa, and 33 international artists will be in Nepal for the inauguration. The artworks are not limited to paintings only but range from on-site installations, performance pieces, video art, photographs, and sculptures. They will be exhibited across six venues in Kathmandu and Patan, making it a rather dynamic festival. Lectures and presentations will also be held during the period of the exhibition.

Several local artists and students from Kathmandu University Center for Art and Design (KUart) have been helping SAG hang the artworks under the supervision of KUart academic program coordinator Sujan Chitrakar. They have been hopping from one gallery to another, organizing and installing the works according to countries.

"Initially, I had only planned to exhibit at SAG and Nepal Art Council, but we kept on expanding," says Thapa. Well, two venues can hardly accommodate works enlisted in

a 276-page catalogue. The highest number of participants is from Nepal, topping the list at 44. "I wanted to give the Nepali artists a sense of ownership for this festival, but my priority was on quality over quantity," she explains, revealing that she had to reject a couple of works by Nepali artists. "This is a festival of international standards." Most of the international artists in the festival are old acquaintances of Thapa, who has garnered an international reputation over the years, while some were referred to her by other artists and galleries.



All the venues, private and government-owned, have been vamped up for the international art festival; but little help came from the latter. "I wasn't expecting to clean the lawn and paint the entire exterior as well as interior of the NAC, which belongs to the government," says Thapa with exasperation. The same goes for the Nepal Association of Fine Arts (NAFA) in Naxal. The lack of any form of support from Nepal Tourism Board and the Ministry of Culture for such an international event of national pride not only reflects on their incompetence but also deprives the event of exploiting all avenues and potentials of achieving global success.

Although a lot of support has come from private companies, it is barely enough to meet the huge monetary costs. The possibility of raising funds through the sales of artworks is out of the question in Nepal where the marketability of art is next to nil, and artworks are hardly considered to be valuable assets worthy of investment. Nonetheless, Thapa's hopes are optimistic. "As soon as we wrap up this festival, we're going to create a committee to organize a Kathmandu Biennale in 2011, and everyone is welcome to give suggestions," she announced to a group of artists and supporters gathered at Martin Chautari in Thapathali, Kathmandu, on Tuesday, October 27.

The Kathmandu Biennale 2011 will coincide with Visit Nepal Year 2011. But aid from the government for the event remains elusive. "I strongly believe that we have enough people who are capable of putting on a biennale, and there will be challenges; but we need to rise up to meet them," puts in Thapa affirmatively. A Kathmandu Art Biennale is indeed overdue when festivals such as Film South Asia and the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival have been flourishing in Nepal for years now. "Nepal, historically, used to a center for arts, and Nepali artists had a certain respect all over the world. But we've lost that recognition in the present day," says Thapa. "We hope that this festival will send a global message that says, 'We're here!'"

LECTURE SERIES AT KATHMANDU CONTEMPORARY ART CENTRE

Saturday, October 31

3:10 pm - Dr. Abhi Subedi (Nepal)

Myths and methods of female representation in Nepali art

3:45 pm - Dr. Geeti Sen (India)

Women or goddess? Representing women in Indian art

4:20 pm - Maria Roosen (Holland)

Tools for feelings

Sunday, November 1

3:10 pm - Anoli Perera (Sri Lanka)

Contemporary Sri Lankan art—Art as a narrative of socio-cultural and political anxieties

3:45 pm - Maureen Drdak (USA)

Transformative potential of the Goddess iconography of Nepal; A call for renewed examination for social and cultural transformation

4:20 pm - Dr. Salima Hashmi (Pakistan)

Problems of representing Pakistani art

Monday, November 2

3:10 pm - Dr. Leena Saraste (Finland)

Photographing in refugee camps. Discovering and interpreting

3:45 pm - Ashmina Ranjit (Nepal)

Cultural body—The feminine in the political and socio-cultural context

4:20 pm - Madan Chitrakar (Nepal)

Concluding remarks

Separating myth from reality

Status of Women, International Art Festival

Organized by Siddhartha Art Gallery - October 30 to November 10, 2009

Countries Participating:

Afghanistan, Aruba, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Canada, China, Cuba, Curacao, Finland, France, Hungary, India, Iran, Jordon, Mauritius, Nepal, Netherlands, Pakistan, Palestine, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Syria, Taiwan, United Kingdom, United States of America.

Artists Participating:

Kathmandu Contemporary Art Centre, Sanepa

Sally Bierman, Australia, Photography
Janet Cardiff, Canada, Mixed Media
Glenda Leon, Cuba, Video Installation
Shakuntala Kulkarni, India, Multi-Media Presentation
Sujan Chitrakar, Nepal, Video Installation
Monther Jahwreb, Palestine, Video Installation
Tracey Rose, South Africa, Video Installation
Randah Maddah, Syria, Sculpture

Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisted

Paula Sengupta, India, Installation
Krishna Luchoomun, Mauritius, Video Installation
Sauganga Darshandhari, Nepal, Prints
Amber Hammad, Pakistan, Digital C Type Prints
Ayesha Naveed, Pakistan, Mixed Media on Cloth
Mariam Abraaz, Pakistan, Digital C Type Prints
Mariam Abraaz, Pakistan, Digital C Type Prints
Saba Khan, Pakistan, Painting
Seema Nustrat, Pakistan, Installation
Anoli Perera, Sri Lanka, Mixed Media
Lakeesha Fernando, Sri Lanka, Mixed Media
Menika van der Pooten, Sri Lanka, Photography
Niranjan Gunasinghe, Sri Lanka, Mixed Media
Veidehi Rajasingham, Sri Lanka, Mixed Media Prints

Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal

Jang Yung, China, Painting
Pur Bu, China, Painting

Yi Liu, China, Painting
Liu Ye, China, Painting
Leena Saraste, Finland, Photography
Anupam Sud, India, Intaglio Prints
Chandrima Bhattacharya, India, Painting
Jaya Ganguly, India, Painting
Jayashree Chakravarty, India, Mixed Media on Handmade Paper
Kanchan Chander, India, Mixed Media on Inkjet Paper
Majari Chakravarti, India, Painting
Rima Kundu, India, Mixed Media on Paper
Satish Sharma, India, Photography
Seema Kohli, India, Mixed Media on Canvas
Sukla Sen Poddar, India, Drawing
Tooraj Khamenehzad, Iran, Photography
Ashmina Ranjit, Nepal, Installation
Deependra Muni Bajracharya, Nepal, Photography
Kalapremi Shrestha, Nepal, Installation
Kashish Das Shrestha, Nepal, Photography
Kishore Kayastha, Nepal, Photography
Min Ratna Bajracharya, Nepal, Photography
Sunil Sigdel, Nepal, Painting
Darja Vos, Netherlands, Drawing
Desiree de Baar, Netherlands, Installation
Joncquil de Vries, Netherlands, Installation and Performance
Maria Roosen, Netherlands, Installation
Margret Wibmer, Netherlands, Sculpture
Celia Washington, UK, Mixed Media
Loren Beven, UK, Installation
Thomas Kelly, USA, Photography