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## Banksy and Street Art in Nepali Context

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### ABSTRACT

Street art in Nepal was initially inspired by profusion of political graffiti and not concerned with artistic sense. In recent time, gradually, street art in Nepal are also being created for the sense of aesthetic pleasure. Artist in Nepal are striving to incorporate new styles into their artwork to make it artistically attractive and unique. Foreign artist visit to Nepal, owing to absence of legislation against public painting, further intensifies entrance of western style into the Nepali art. Influence of Banksy has been no exception. Banksy is an artist of social consciousness who has special message to deliver to the large public. Nepali artists have learned, from Banksy's art, to use art as a creative expression to comment against the deep rooted social issues including government policies, religious conflicts, gender inequalities, economic disparities, etc. Artists have also used his technique, satirical way of presenting the message, powerful tags along with imagery etc. to make their artwork appealing to the public. However, while most artists acknowledged being influenced by Banksy, they emphasized it was his innovation and creativity rather than the technique that they have incorporated in their artwork. In fact, instead of being identified as a Banksy influence alone, they admit to western influence in general. Indeed, with globalization of street art, artistic knowledge has been exchanged and western touch is evident in Nepali street art. Nevertheless, Nepali artists have ensured to preserve Nepali heritage. Thus, the art today in Nepal is rather, fusion of western and Nepali traditional style.

**Keywords:** Banksy, Street Art, Graffiti Art, and Nepali Art.

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### 1. Introduction

Art indeed was not born in a day. It evolved through ages and generations from the hard work, creative devotion and contributions of legendary and iconic creative minds. And even when art in all times is considered a universal language; various cultures and societies have undoubtedly had much influences in the shaping of the art in their respected areas. Art surely function differently in different surroundings as artists come from different ways of lives and mind set. This is where, in order to understand the flow and advancement of art in today's fragmented world full of social, cultural, political, environment transformations, their needs to be comparative surveys of art and artists of various places. I am commencing a comparative survey on the artworks by Banksy and the condition of street art in Nepal. Here we will be shedding light on one of the iconic and most controversial street

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and graffiti artist who rose to limelight highlighting corruption and inequality in society with a smattering of humor in his art (Abel, 1978).

Street art, also refers to as post-graffiti or neo-graffiti, is a visual art created in an unsanctioned public place. Graffiti on the other hand, refers to the act of marking other people's property, without their consent, with writing, symbols or graphics (Morgan A & Louis E. (2009). The differences between the two are not generalizable or easily delineated. While graffiti art is rooted more in the traditional tags, bombs, and pieces, "street art" is more figurative and includes different medium like stencils, Wheat pasting, wood blocking, Yarn bombing, Mosaic, flash mobbing etc. (Conklin 2012). Rob White has, indeed, described street art as a —well organized, skilled activity which has a strong aesthetic dimension, informed by techniques, learning strategies, evaluation, and group forums (White 2000).

Banksy is born in Bristol, England, around 1974. He was topic of discussion in art field by late 1990s through his provocative stenciled pieces. Political and social messages delivered in humorous way not only gained Banksy a lot of admiration but also gained strong controversies (Adam, 2011). He was admired as well as criticized for the same reason, i.e. sociopolitical theme of his artwork and medium in which the art was expressed- "street walls" (Abel, 1978; Adam, 2011). I am in an attempt to understand the universal context of Banksy's artworks and approach towards creativity and in sort- its impermanency since that's what Banksy hints via his approach to art, i.e. - impermanency and uncertainty. Comparing these two aspects might bring us closer to the idea of how Banksy's approach is relevant to Nepali context, in order to approach towards the universal nature of art; no matter where art is created or in whatever context, it surely moves, influences or at least affects us in various ways and levels.

If one visually or thematically compares the art of Banksy to the newer generations of artists from Nepal, surely one would not draw any similarities. However, art and the definitions of it has become very broad and dynamic today that art is not merely limited to visuals, themes or even the processes which has been used while creating it. Art today is about introducing newer and/or ancient languages that is about to get introduced to us or which has been lost in the sea of time due to layers and waves of human civilizations. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that art amongst myriad definitions; it is also about contextualizing the universality of human approach towards their respective surroundings in various time-space continuums.

Here we are dealing with uncertainty, impermanency and mystery, which Banksy's art subtly emanates, and if one closely observes, those are the qualities which various cultural aspects of Nepal also deals with and these attributions metaphorically shine through various Nepali artists.

In a country like Nepal where the ancient culture and its various traditions are still influencing modern society, the vague messages these customs suggests surely become evident in the artworks of contemporary artists of Nepal.

In order to comprehend the themes and situations that some of the Nepali artists of this generation imply and compare it with Banksy's, one has to analyze how art in Nepal evolved from modern to ultra-modern; both technique and concept-wise.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Emergence of street art**

The history of street art originated with tagging, or scratching names on public property (Anastasiou, 2017). Graffiti artists in the 1970s and 1980s began to inspire people like Keith Haring, who did chalk drawings in the New York City subway system before rising to prominence in the art world (Aplpaslan, 2006). From the 1970's until late 1990s, graffiti was the primary form of illegal art to be found in the streets. Nonetheless started a new urban art movement to develop alongside graffiti in the late 1990s/early 2000 which is now known as street art (Bangdel, 2010). Street art is visual art created in public locations, usually unsanctioned artwork executed outside of the context of traditional art venues. Other terms for this type of art include "independent public art", "post-graffiti", and "neo-graffiti", and are closely related with guerrilla art (Bartholome, & Snyder, 2004).

Street art is art created on surfaces in public places like exterior building walls, highway overpasses, and sidewalks (BBC News, 2015). Street art tends to happen in urban areas, and yes, it's connected in certain ways to graffiti. Street art is usually created as a means to convey a message

connected to political ideas or social commentaries (Brewer, 1992). Not all street art involves painting. It can be done with stickers spread over surfaces or by methods like yarn bombing, a process where artists cover things like trees and telephone poles with colorful fibers and knitting (BBC News, 2015; Brewer, 1992). Street art can also be done using stencils, where the creator repeats the image all over a surface to make a statement (Bridge & Watson, 2002).

## 2.2 Emergence of Graffiti art

The history of graffiti is originated firstly drawings on walls appeared in caves thousands of years ago (Brown, 2003). Later the Ancient Romans and Greeks wrote their names and protest poems on buildings (Cedar, 2008). The new art form really took off in the 1970s, when people began writing their names, or 'tags', on buildings all over the city (Chitrakar, 2004).

The underground art of graffiti has its origins within the late 1960s in Philadelphia, through "bombing". Writers Cornbread and Cool Earl went about town writing their names simply to achieve attention from the community and media (Brown, 2003; Chitrakar, 2004).

The first modern graffiti writer is widely considered to be Cornbread, a high school student from Philadelphia, who in 1967 started tagging city walls to get the attention of a girl. But it was only in the 1980s that galleries began to showcase graffiti as artwork (Gavin, 2007).

## 2.3 Differences between Street art and graffiti art

Street art is usually painted with permission or commissioned, whereas Graffiti is word-based and Street Art is image-based. "A lot of really famous graffiti artists do this for someone legally because maybe their illegal work received a lot of attention, like Meres," said Stavsky (Gleaton, 2012).

The first difference between graffiti and street art is to be found in the forms and techniques. Whereas graffiti mainly uses the form of a tag and the varieties of a tag like a throw-up and a piece, uses street art a lot of creative forms, the forms differ from stencil art to street sculptures and wheat pastes. Street art is not limited by any technique or focus. The consequence is that the public graffiti and street artists are different (Gurung, 2011).

Secondly, where the graffiti writers only try to reach his own subculture, for example other gangs in gang-related graffiti, tries the street artist to reach the entire public of the city. They use street art as a forum for their creativity and to send out a message to the city councils that they are reclaiming the city and rebel against the uniformity of the city (Hannan 2013). Their motivation differs from the motivation of a graffiti writer, a street artist has the desire to participate in an art form and wants to share his artwork with the public instead of a graffiti writer who often writes graffiti out of boredom, rebellion and as an expression of disobedience (Gurung, 2011; Hannan 2013).

Graffiti writing and street art are often confused with one another. Both are subversive art movements where work is displayed in public rather than a gallery setting (Hans, 2009; Laurel, 2010). While graffiti artists place their work in public, generally speaking they are not interested in the public understanding their work; they want to speak to other graffiti artists (Seres, 2018). Street artists want everyone to view and be engaged by their work. They are trying to make a statement. Graffiti writing and street art are closely related contemporary art movements, however, they differ in terms of technique, function and intent (Kohlstedt, 2007).

For the transparency of this paper a distinction in mere graffiti and artistic graffiti will be made in this paragraph and not in paragraph about graffiti. This distinction needs to be made because some graffiti will also fall under the street art movement. There are two basic forms of graffiti, mere and artistic graffiti. One could think of putting your name on a wall or spraying a love statement on building as examples of mere graffiti, this will most definitely not be seen as art. Artistic graffiti on the other hand might be seen as art and maybe even as street art. Modern graffiti artists also use paint, chalk, light and video projection and so forth as their media for graffiti (Seres, 2018; Kohlstedt, 2007).

## 2.4 Evolution of graffiti and street art in Nepal

The trend of creating murals on the walls is evident in Nepal from ancient times. Ancient murals were more religious in nature depicting gods and deities. It would showcase four important elements like birth, death, life and wishes of men (Nepal Academy of Fine Arts, 2008). Many such murals used to be found inside temples. But there are also some temples that display murals outside; one is the case in

Bagh Bhairav temple at Kirtipur (Kirtipur, 2011). Over the time, Nepali visual art shifted from being religious to secular, objective to subjective, referential to abstract and so on. Public places were considered slowly as a medium to showcase the art. The artwork becomes more message driven. Gradually, western artist visited Nepal and inspired more and more young artist which catalyzes street art movement in Nepal. According to the New York Times, street art started booming in Nepal when French artist Space Invader put up some installations in Kathmandu back in 2008 which inspired locals to engage (Brownell, 2014). Later another French artist Bruno Levy painted the street of Kathmandu for his 2011 Bigfoot project (Brownell, 2014).

By 2011, several artists got involved in early independent street art projects. Local artist Mr. K, and international artists Bruno Levy and Rainbow Warrior did various projects in cooperation and on their own. These artists are ones who can be confidently connected to the emergence of street art in Kathmandu in 2010 (Earle, 2016). Street art has rapidly grown since then in terms of number of pieces produced and the popularity among the public, private and political sectors. Various International artist has visited Nepal and jolt down their work independently as well as in collaboration with other local artists and organizations. The collective effort of these artists is evident in the street of Kathmandu valley. In fact, street art today is not only restricted to Kathmandu Valley. It is slowly spreading from Kathmandu to Pokhara and other less “urban” places. Artudio’s Dholaka outreach center and the Prasad Project’s exploration of new places for community art are the example of spread of street art around Nepal. In addition, more and more international support is increasing to the develop the street art movement in Nepal (Bangdel, 2010). It has also led Nepali street artist like Romel Bhattarai, Kiran Maharjan, Sneha Shraस्था (aka Imagine) and Aditya Aryal (aka SadhuX) to get involved in international projects (Earle, 2016; Kathmandu Triennale, 2014; Shea, 2019).

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Hypothesis**

Nepal street art has emerged over the years. Traditional Nepali street art, which had reflection of Nepalese culture, tradition and religion, has contemporized by incorporating Western style into its native style form. The street art in Nepal now looks more a blend in of Nepalese traditional style with that of Western style. In fact, the author believes, in recent years, new generation Nepali street artist are, increasingly, being influenced by Banksy’s artwork and it can be seen in their work. The objective of this study is to validate this observation, i.e., the impact of Banksy’s style of street art in modern Nepali street art.

#### **3.2 Study area**

The study area for the survey of the street wall paintings was three districts: Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur of Kathmandu valley covering an area of 220 square miles (570 km<sup>2</sup>). However, artist involved could be from any part from Nepal. Nepal is a small country with Kathmandu as its capital. Most of the artistic institution, galleries, and street art walls are present in Kathmandu valley. Street art has just recently begun to spread to other parts of the Country. Therefore, study area was confined to Kathmandu.

#### **3.3 Data collection**

This study plan adopted a qualitative phenomenological methodology. The primary data sources included personal interviews with street artists and direct observations. With the help of structured interviews, opinions of participants on impact of Banksy’s and western artists on new generation street artist in Nepal was collected. The artists who were interviewed were selected randomly. The street art galleries, and different areas of Kathmandu valley with painted street walls were visited to collect the artwork and then analyzed for western influence. The secondary data sources included grey literature, published books, journals, newspaper, reports, and the internet.

#### **3.4 Data analysis**

Artwork form different galleries and paintings on the walls of different streets in Kathmandu valley were analyzed in terms of technique, theme and messages. Newer generation street artists were contacted for interviews. ShadhuX and Kiran Maharjan were the artists interviewed by the author. Both



of them are actively involved with the street art through their respective organization and independent work. Interviews of few other artist published elsewhere were also analyzed to get broader picture of the situation of the street art in Nepal. Moreover, Literature on street art of Nepal was reviewed to analyze the evolution of street art in Nepal.

### **3.5 Limitations**

First, the literature on street art of Nepal (previous research and documentation) is very less. New sources and blogs organization web pages and Facebook profiles are the only evident sources of documenting street art in Nepal. Second, the study area only includes Kathmandu valley. Although, street art in Nepal is mostly confined to Kathmandu valley, exclusion of street art from other parts of Nepal could have affected overall observation made in this study. Third, number of street artists interviewed is less and their opinion might be biased depending upon the extent of influence of western street art on them. Finally, the interpretation of the collected artwork, interviews and literature is done only by the author and is subjected to biasness.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 The Advent of modern situations of art in Nepali context**

Prominent art experts assert that the modern art began in Nepal during the mid-20th century. This was the time when Rana authority was dethroned and Nepal entered into a democratic political phase. Shedding light to this statement, the British had colonized this side of the subcontinent and even though Nepal was not colonized, it surely was affected. During this time, the Shah dynasty was in reign; however, in the mid-19th century the Rana aristocrat took over the power of the state and reduced authority of the Shah dynasty merely to name (Shakya, 2011). During this period, in order to maintain harmony with the British authority, the Ranas introduced the western techniques and tendencies in art, which were largely to do with portraits and figure paintings of either the royals or the elites. Previously, traditional art was very much prevalent here; either it was Pauwa, which is a traditional painting depicting Buddhist or Hindu deities or some symbolic religious structures (Stowers, 1997). Traditional art had religious qualities to it and the fundamental characteristics of this quality were the idea of sacredness and the utilitarian value of worshipping the created forms (Chitrakar, 2014). Such art forms were unique and in order to create these, an artist had to go through some religious processes. All these facets were deeply connected to the roots of Nepal and its thousand years of evolving cultures and customs that found their ways from various dynasties such as the Kirants, the Lichchavis and the Mallas (Turner, 2018). However, when the Shahs took over, traditional art and culture were shifted to the back seat, whereas diplomacy and politics were given priority. And as soon as the Ranas gained control of the power of the state, their primary concern was to keep harmony with the British Empire. While doing so, various western techniques in art and architecture were introduced and traditional artists even though carried out the genuine ancient art of Nepal; the state itself was less interested in promoting it. Rather, they commissioned artists to paint portraits, landscapes, and paintings on hunting series because they thought that all this would keep them up with the global community. After the decline of the Rana power in the mid-20th century, the Shah came to power again and even though few initiations were taken to promote the then evolving modern art (the western influenced art) in Nepal, traditional arts and artists were on their own. Therefore, from this analysis one can find out that the traditional art in Nepal has moved along in parallel ways with the western modern influenced art. However, during the 1960s A.D. the first generation of modern artists have had connected the traditional motifs in their modern artworks. Most of the artists of this generation went abroad to gain knowledge in art and returned back home to practice it (Neuendorf, 2014).

It was only during the dawn of the new millennium that the ideas of postmodern approach began to be incorporated by artists in their artworks in Nepal. Art organization called Sutra initiated various none conventional art events that redefined the art of Nepal. It would not be irrelevant here to mention that Banksy's artworks are also very none conventional in approach and style, since he remains anonymous and his art methods very versatile. However, apart from the fact that he is also an avid practitioner of street art and Nepal presently is also rapidly opening up to this approach in art; there are very less similarities between Banksy and the local artists and art scene of Nepal. Nonetheless, in a

pursuit to explore newer territory in art, local artists here are beginning to enthusiastically explore and practice street art (Turner, 2018; Neuendorf, 2014).

#### 4.2 Connecting the concept of street art with ancient times

The trend of creating murals on the walls is evident in Nepal from ancient times. Be it in the mountainous regions or in Terai or even in the Himalayan regions, wall paintings were done for various religious and social reasons. Art in Nepal has had always voiced various socio-religious beliefs (Nepal Academy of Fine Arts, 2008). Particularly, around Kathmandu valley the Hindu-Buddhist practitioners used



Figure 1. Bodhisattva Manjushree, the god of wisdom, turning the lake into a valley, by Prabal Shrestha, Shramdip Purkoti and Shristi Shrestha. Near Kathmandu durbar square, Kathmandu (This piece has already been destroyed).

Source: [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/kolorkathmandu\\_b\\_3863154](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/kolorkathmandu_b_3863154).

Similarly, in Mithila culture also, Mithila arts are created on the walls for various social reasons. Be it in a wedding or holding some religious rituals such art is mandatory even till now (Vassalo, 2016). Bodhisattva Manjushree (Figure 1), painted on the wall near Kathmandu Durbar square is a classic example of traditional artwork with religious theme. Manjushree depicts the mythological belief of Goddess Manjushree creating Kathmandu valley by striking his sword into a mountain releasing lake water to reveal the valley.

#### 4.3 Nepali street art in contemporary times

Even though the art of painting on the walls goes back to ancient times, in contemporary times wall art has completely been refined in the Kathmandu valley. The basic difference between traditional art on wall and the modern one is that the traditional wall art is one way or the other connected with religion. Whereas in modern times wall art voices modern issues and even though they generally address collective reality such as religion in ancient times; in modern times, such art usually voices collective realities concerning environmental, social, health issues etc. However, some street arts are quite personal, which can include none representational, figures and patterns. These street arts are closer to painting and carries personal opinions of artists (Vesnik, 2015).

After the advent of multiparty system, various political groups began to use public walls to advertise their political views and information on walls. Such texts on walls, some also asserts as graffiti, nonetheless with a different purpose of circulating their political views. It was only after the advent of the new millennium that street art with attractive designs and patterns began to be seen on streets of Kathmandu valley (Vassalo, 2016; Vesnik, 2015).

A proper documentation and research on street arts have not been initiated yet. However, some researchers and art enthusiasts have conducted independent inquiries on these arts on the public sites. Exploring the valley, various murals, stencils and other forms of street art greets the onlookers. Such art is done on walls and in the sides of buildings.

#### 4.4 New generation Nepali Street artist and their artistic expression

At present, there are three notable organizations, Artlab, Artudio, and Sattya Media Arts Collective, which are promoting street art in Nepal. Artlab was formed by SadhuX together with his fellow colleges. SadhuX has become one of the most influential Nepali graffiti artists. In an article

published in Widewalls, his work has been described as the fusion of Banksy's style with Nepali cultural and traditional essence (Vesnik, 2015). SadhuX himself in an interview to the author (Keyal. H.) of this study, acknowledges that his past work namely, Rape me and Panda was inspired by Banksy. "In Panda like Banksy, I used collage technique while Rape me was created using stencil technique" he said. SadhuX believe that stencil technique allows him freedom to execute his idea. He said, the way Banksy take simple imagery to comment on socio-political issue has inspired him. According to SadhuX, Panda (Figure 2) was a satirical piece aimed at the umbrella movement (a political movement that emerged during the Hong Kong democracy protests of 2014) where he tried to highlighted the brutality of national police against their own native citizen. The use of national animal of China "Panda" as a subject matter to represent national citizen was quite controversial, yet, alluring to the audience. Furthermore, he used yellow background similar to representative symbol of the movement. Rape me (Figure 3), which depicts a topless Kumari, a living goddess, with scarlet letters above her reading, "Rape Me" is one of the most provocative piece in Nepal, nonetheless, the most appreciated one; SadhuX stated: "Rape is the most appreciated and sought out artwork of mine till date. It was aimed to take a jab at the hypocrisy of our society". While the work was seen as offensive by some of the people SadhuX acknowledges his respect for his goddess and the power of using her for the advancement of the message: "I am simply taking the icon of her to provoke people through a visual medium – to make the point that no female should be treated lesser than a man, no female should be abused simply because of her gender. Otherwise, it is no different that assaulting or raping your gods and goddesses, whichever they may be." However, SadhuX acknowledges that copying Banksy would not help youngster to uplift their artistic skills and it's not the style but the presentation of messages in unique and innovative way that has inspired him.



Figure 2. Panda by SadhuX dedicated to the umbrella movement (Hong Kong democracy protest 2014). Courtesy SadhuX.

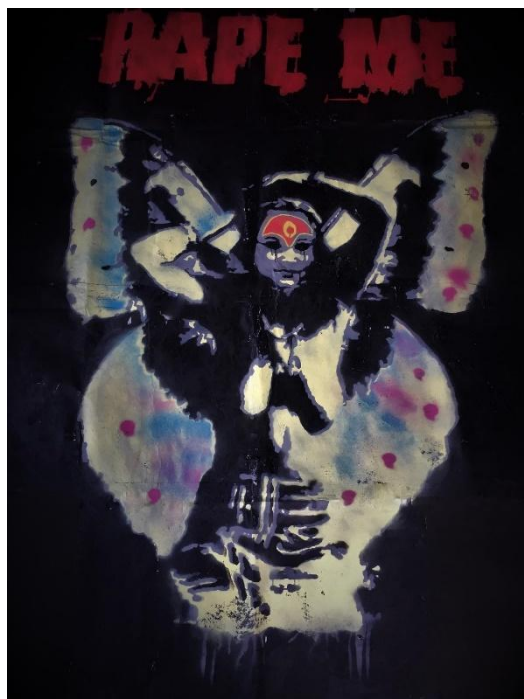


Figure 3. Rape me by SadhuX, protesting violence against women, at Baluwatar, Kathmandu (This piece has already been painted over). Courtesy: SadhuX.

Kiran Maharjan, creative Head at Artlab, is another street artist who is merging western style into Nepali traditional art. His work includes elements of street art with a sense of realism which is closer to tradition of paintings. He said, "I used to be influenced by classical European Realism, and I have always been intrigued by faces. I used to do portraits with charcoal and other mediums before I got into street art". Kiran was part of "Prasad" project by Artlab, where stylized portraits of alternative Nepali heroes were painted, to show young people that they can achieve great things and need not flee their country in search of a better life (Turner, 2015). One of the example from Prasad project is shown in Figure 4 which portrays a prominent



Nepali writer and scholar Satyamohan Joshi. A more westernized street artwork from Kiran is a set of 7 huge murals, named 7 moderate sins, representing a contemporary version of the 7 deadly sins: pride, greed, lust, envy, wrath, gluttony and sloth. The artist uses direct and vibrant colors as a background of a layered composition. There is an interplay between graphic and text-like elements, with figurative parts (Bartholome, & Snyder, 2004). According to Maharjan, 7 moderate sins was created with the Nietzsche's concept of "God is Dead". He further described the artwork to the author saying that "the religious significance of death and the consequences of man's activity in this life has diminished in recent times. And with the Absurdism of Camus, we have come in terms to death and how life is irrelevant and futile. This in the modern era of consumerism and capitalism has made people hungrier for comfort. This in turn has affected how we are furiously pursuing happiness as well. But for the longevity of happiness and comfort for us, we should consider pursuing it in moderation. Not only for ourselves but for the future generations as well". All the seven murals are mesmerizing and stylistically with western flavor. Two of the murals from this project is presented here as Figure 5 and Figure 6.

Kailash Shrestha, founder and initiator of Artudio, is another young Nepali street artist who needs a mention here. He started organizing and mentoring workshops on visual arts from 2010 in Artudio. With inspiration from Western graffiti artists and the local phenomenon of political graffiti, Kailash, via Artudio, began to put art in the streets in 2011 (Earle, 2016). Kailash initiated the "We Make the Nation" project when the Constituent Assembly extended the Interim Constitution of

Nepal in late May 2011. Kailash in an interview had stated that, "people then were not happy, and this artwork served

as a place for people to express their hopes and aspirations for the future of their country and themselves" (Earle, 2016). He has dotted stencil art throughout Kathmandu valley. One of his stencil from "I'm you" (Figure 7) project has a figure hiding his face to highlight the fact that even a faceless can get noticed with their work (Turner, 2015). This work resembles Banksy simplicity in its use of black



Figure 2. Street art from Prasad project at Kupondole street, Kathmandu, depicting feature of prominent Nepali personality- Satyamohan Joshi. Photograph: Hema Keyal



Figure 3. A mural from 7 Moderate sins, by Kiran Maharjan, near Boudhanath Temple, Kathmandu. Courtesy: Kiran Maharjan



Figure 4. A mural from 7 Moderate sins, by Kiran Maharjan, at Patan Dhoka, Kathmandu. Courtesy: Kiran Maharjan.



and white color with a message written in a board held by the faceless figure. Later, several different pieces were made as part of this project, the most recent being “I’m You” piece stood in solidarity with Dr. Govinda KC, senior orthopedic surgeon at Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital, who protested the corruption and failings of the health education system in Nepal (Artudio, 2020). Regarding the project Kailash said that “we have asked socio-political questions through art in public spaces”. Artudio projects also focuses on health, personal hygiene issues, for example projects on hand washing, “Uterine Prolapse, “Stop Tobacco Industry Interference” (Artudio, 2020). Mr. K, Sneha Shrestha, Shradha Shrestha, and Romel Bhattarai are among others whose have merged western style into their individual Nepali style to create artwork unique to themselves.



Figure 5. A piece from “I’m You” project by Artudio. Source: <http://artudio.net/project/street-art/>.

#### 4.5 Variations in street art in Nepal

At present, one can find several types of street art around and in few places out of Kathmandu valley. Now discussing of its types, street art today can be categorized in several kinds. One of the types of such art is done and used for informational and awareness purposes. After 2000 A.D. some artists have energetically taken over the public walls to raise awareness on various topics such as violence against women and child, and some has raised cleanliness and health issues, likewise others have voiced out environmental and over urbanization issues that are decaying the valley (Turner, 2015). Variety of projects and pieces have discussed women’s safety, place in society, social, physical, emotional and online violence against them. Some examples of such pieces in Kathmandu valley are: “A Safe City for Women” near St. Xavier’s University campus, the International Day of Action for Women’s Health piece from May 2016, the We for Constitution multi-piece mural near Tri Chandra College boundary wall, “Rape Me” by Sadhu-X, Artudio’s project during occupy Baluwatar on stopping violence against women, “Uterine Prolapse,” a project organized by Artudio etc. (Earle, 2016). Moreover, awareness regarding women empowerment has also been put into street art. Figure 8 presented herein this study is one of the

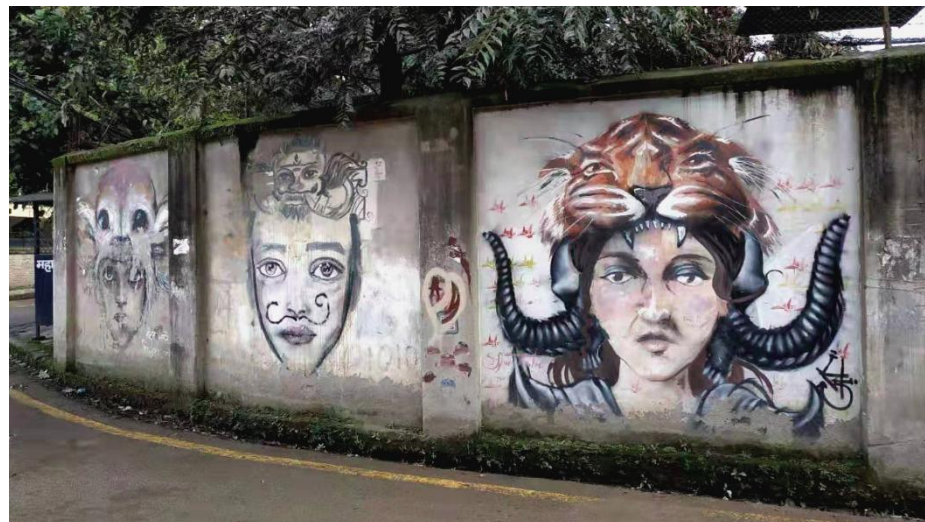


Figure 6. Street art at Jawalakhel street, Kathmandu, sowing a street art of a female with head of a Tiger to encourage females to become brave and strong. Photograph: Hema Keyal.

example, where female with Tiger head is aimed to encourage female to become as strong as tiger. Some of the street arts today are also being funded by various organizations. Nowadays, not only individual artists but also art groups are equally active coloring various portions of the public sites. Their choices are places where more public flows in so that many can view their works. However, street art is usually considered vandalism if it is done without the property owners permission. Furthermore, when one explores these art forms around the city, some are fine examples of prolific works of art in

terms of their conceptualization and execution. However, some of such art forms seem technically weak and appears to have been done by less artistically skilled individuals (Vesnik, 2015; Vincent, 2017).

#### 4.6 Life span of street art and ways to preserve it

The beauty and tragedy of street art in general is that it can be ephemeral; i.e.- such art is done on public walls, which can be demolished or can also be painted over. And at times such art is also done on walls of buildings, which sometimes are repainted. Therefore, like most of the postmodern arts, this one is also impermanent unlike conventional artworks such as painting or sculpture, which have comparatively longer life. And the only way this art can be documented or preserved is by taking its picture or video (Weisel, 2002).

#### 4.7 Attraction of street art in Nepal

Not only the local artists, but also artist from abroad are also attracted towards the uneven setup of the valley and the cultural combinations that this city offers to them. Perhaps the Kathmandu valley is one of the only few places where thousand years of traditional values and practices amalgamate with the ever-evolving ultra-modern development. Therefore, this unique combination of the new and the old immediately influence artists coming from abroad. This is the reason why many foreign artists have made huge walls of houses and streets their monumental canvas to bring out their expressions. In 2011 an international street artist Bruno Levy visited Kathmandu to make street art. Bruno Levy is a French filmmaker, photographer and artist. Another artist who amongst various genres also practices street art is a French artist Karl Knapp (Young, 2012).

Some of the Kathmandu first street art projects was initiated by Artudio in 2011: “We make the nation”. Later they organized “I’m You project”. Both the projects are politically motivated (Artudio, 2020). A group called Sattya Media Arts Collective has initiated few of the significant street art projects in the city, one of them being Kolor Kathmandu project that happened in 2013 AD (Bangdel, 2010). Artlab has organized Prasad projects (Turner, 2015). These projects are discussed above and some of the figures from these projects are also presented herein the present article. Several other Independent street artists are also actively putting their artwork around the walls of Kathmandu.

### 5. Discussion and conclusions

Even in the 21st century when the definition of art is changing all over the world and art and artists are becoming more accessible, Banksy is such an artist who with his prolific strategy is still able to conceal his identity from rest of the world. However, his art is widely popular and well appreciated all over the world. This aura of mystery that Banksy is able to create around his artwork due his concealed identity has only made the art enthusiast more curious towards his work. This sense of mystery brings in an idea of uncertainty within an individual bringing one closer to the concept of impermanency. This is because if one does not know where certain things are coming from, then one would also not clearly know where it would be going, or also where or when it will discontinue.

One aspect that the traditional culture of Nepal caters to an individual is a sense of mystery; primarily because it deals with esoteric concept of life, spiritual beliefs and religious rituals and practices those have been continuing from millennium. At one point, it talks about the impermanent nature of life that we live and in a more sophisticated manner it also speaks of the eternal quality of life of the soul. Perhaps this is one similarity the traditional art and Banksy have, even though the natures of mysteries of the two are different. However, they do pull the interest of the viewers. And the idea of uncertainty that both these arts of different time and space are able to create in an audience is universal. This universality is perhaps the one quality that connects all art forms.

Graffiti in Nepal was mostly political slogans that adorn many public spaces throughout the country. The Prajatantra Bhitta, or Democracy Wall, near central Kathmandu’s Ratna Park, has been a place for protest since the Panchayat era (1960s–1990s). Most slogans painted in this highly politicized space would not last more than a few days before rival political groups paint over them (Turner, 2015). Interestingly, most of the newer generation street artist in Nepal were inspired by these political graffiti. Kailash said that “I was inspired early on by the public slogans. The inspiration was, in part, to contradict said political graffiti with new creations”. Remnants of party slogans can still often be seen

beneath newer murals—a deliberate gesture by the artists to show what has inspired them, what they are painting in response to and the contrasting layers that comprise contemporary Kathmandu.

Numerous works by Sujan Dangol directly manipulate the existing political slogans. Dangol isolates a word or two from the slogans, borders it with a colorful pattern and whitewashes the surrounding text, thus reclaiming a word for a different purpose (Turner, 2015). Moreover, graffiti writing in Nepal is considered to circulate from foreign countries. In “Learning to be Modern”, Mark Liechty asserted that Nepali driven circulation of new ideas from outside the country develops a new and unique meaning of those ideas in the context of Nepal (Liechty, 2006).

Mural art makes up the majority of the street art in Nepal and is evident in from ancient times. Wall paintings and mural in Nepal has seen a tremendous shift. Earliest art was symbolic. They depicted something but signified something else. They were all mostly religious (Nepal Academy of Fine Arts, 2008). During Rana regime, secular themes, realism and oil color replaced religious themes, symbolism and home-made colors. After the fall of the Rana regime and the establishment of democracy western influences entered in the domain of Nepali art (Bangdel, 2013). However, the murals and paintings were for personal use. Public places were used for political slogans, movies posters and advertisement. But, gradually, murals in Kathmandu has started dealing with various social issues and tell stories about people and places. Public places become a medium to showcase one’s artistry. Kiran Maharjan recalls “I was struggling and finding it difficult to showcase my artworks to an audience, so street art seemed like a viable solution. I was into characters then, so I painted this weird-looking character on an overhead bridge near my home. The fact that I didn't need permission to showcase my art turned out to be an interesting aspect of street art”. Today street of Kathmandu is bombarded with street art. Furthermore, Street art in Nepal has evolved from international artists involvement.

The international artist not only motivated Nepalese artist to use public places to express their artistic skills but also inspired them with their style of art. Foreign artist like Invader, Bruno Levy, Daas, Herakut, Julian De Casabianca and many more have visited Nepal to paint street. Nepal also started receiving foreign funds to organize street art projects. The murals of the “Kolor Kathmandu” project, which was initiated by the Sattya Media Arts Collective and funded from the Dutch Prince Claus Foundation, are currently very visible in Nepal. The project has completed 75 murals by over 65 Nepali and international artists, each representing and depicting a different region of the country, building a connection between the capital’s residents and more far-flung areas that sit outside of the dominant urban imagination (Gurung, 2013). The murals dealt with the after effects of war, continuing violence, women’s experience in different districts, heroes past and present, different Nepali cultures, economic issues, environmental issues, and religious figures among many other complex topics (Nepal Satty Media Arts Colletive, 2013). These international artists influenced the artwork of many Nepali street artist. German artist duo Hera and Akut popularly known as Herakut were among international artist involved in Kolor Kathmandu project. Natalie Wohlstadter, was the other artist who painted Bhojpur, depicting the mass suicide of Yogamaya Neupane and 68 of her followers, in order to draw attention to women’s rights and gender equality. The mural featured beautiful twisting bodies behind one central figure [46]. Painting alongside such international street artist has broadened the artistic skills of Nepali street artist. According to Kiran “Street art has come to a point where it’s not reined by boundaries.” He further told the author that “Belgium street artist ROA and French artist MTO has influenced me”. In fact, Sneha Shrestha, SadhuX and many other Nepali artists have western influence in their work, however, the core of their artwork still remain bounded by Nepali culture and tradition. As SadhuX quoted “Being influence does not mean copying someone, but being inspired by the way they have carried their artistry to the public.” He elaborated saying, “It’s not the technique but the quirky way of presenting serious issues and innovation that Banksy has in his artwork inspires him”. Sneha Shrestha work is not completely westernized, in fact it is a mixture of Boston graffiti, Turkish calligraphy and Nepali script (Kunwar, 2013). She was part of the Kolor Kathmandu project and used this style to inscribe Tanahun district with red and yellow spray paint on a Gairidhara wall. Indeed, street art in Nepal, today, is fusion of globalized graffiti culture and traditional Nepali public artistic expression. Irrespective of influence from western artistic style, Nepali street art has continued to preserve Nepali heritage. Anil Chitrakar has also mentions in his book, “we can see that as long as our artisan’s hands are around we really need not worry about our heritage being lost” (Chitrakar, 2013).



Banksy is a prolific street artist who has mesmerized art lovers around the globe and has even developed an art subculture who is dedicated to his work. In Nepal, the trend of street art and mural is gaining rapid popularity as some public walls and sides of buildings are seen with great designs, figures and patterns. Avid artists- local and foreigners alike are attracted by the uneven settings of the Kathmandu valley and have made the walls of this setting their perfect playground for street art. In addition, lack of law against public painting further encourages the international artist to swarm to Kathmandu. It has led to exchange of artistic knowledge among foreign and local artist. More Nepalese artists have become inspired by western technique and incorporated it in their art, however, without overshadowing the Nepalese culture and tradition. In the process, many artworks today around Kathmandu also showcase the glimpse of Banksy work like Rape me and Panda by SadhuX, I'm You by Kailash Shrestha, RIP by Artlab collection and so on. However, upon interviewing and reading interviews given to other magazines and news, by the several local street artists, one can assert that it's not Banksy work alone but the western style that these artists used to bring diversification in their art. Moreover, it was not just the technique of these foreign artist but the innovation and creativity that does inspire them. Nevertheless, street art in Nepal has emerged to mix of traditional artistic traditions with Hindu influences and modern techniques. Moreover, more message driven to highlight social problems.

Therefore, one can comment that while glimpse of western style like that of Banksy can be seen in many new generation artists in Nepal, the Nepali heritage always remain the center to their artwork. Deep rooted social and political issues are mostly the subject matter of their artwork, although, represented in western style. They mostly try to develop their own style by merging Nepali style to newly learned western style. This transformation of street art in Nepal, has its own unique background merged with tradition, politics and the present-day experimentation on street art. All this goes on to show that the genre of street art in Nepal has great possibility. Gradually this form of art is visibly taking its own unique identity and is attracting many local and international artists and audiences in Nepal.

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