

Spring 2025 Arts of Asia Lecture Series  
Visualizing the Divine  
Sponsored by the *Society for Asian Art*

**Contemporary Nepali Art: Connecting the Past and Present**  
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The artistic milieu of Nepal has been very vibrant since the early ages of the first millennium. The incumbent Kings and aristocracy were devout followers of Brahmanism as well as Buddhism. They commissioned images of gods and goddesses, temples, monasteries and other architectural edifice, effecting a dynamic environment of religious arts. Since then, the continuity of these practices has engaged artists and artisans to hone their skills and advance their ingenuity, making the Kathmandu Valley, with seven World Heritage Monument Zones, to be the first in Asia to receive the UNESCO World Heritage Site (Cultural) inscription in 1979. This vibrant culture is not limited to the tangible heritages only, in fact, the affluent intangible cultural heritage of Nepal is what keep the tangible heritage alive and happening. What makes Nepal unique in the world cultural map is the status of community ownership of heritages and their living practices. Thus, in this valley of living culture, the artistic genius has been passed down through generations to be practiced avidly till today. Some followed the age-old traditions, while others infused them with contemporary modifications.

The arts of Nepal in its variety of forms—sculptures in terracotta, wood, stone and metal as well as paintings on walls, manuscript illuminations and cloth—have withstood the test of time. They are noted for their excellent execution of the minutest details of physiognomy and anatomy in a suitable environment. They have evolved to be a cumulative combination and exchange of various resources, gathering momentum from one work to another, evolving to an indigenous aesthetic style that exposes unique creativity and skill, and which distinguishes Nepali art from the rest made in the regions around it. The continuity of artistic practices and consistency in style till present times is a testament to its social and cultural value, which has surpassed its spiritual and aesthetic grandeur and since antiquity remains an identifying factor of this Himalayan nation.

This presentation will take you through a visual narration of the arts of Nepal from the 5th century up to the present day. The focus will be on three exhibitions curated by me in the

recent past; *Nepal Art Now*, 2019 at Weltmuseum, Vienna, *Deities of Nepal I & II*, 2022, 2024 at Nepal Art Council, Kathmandu and *Nepal, Where the Gods Reside* 2023, Bihar Museum Biennale, Bihar Museum, India.

### **Suggested readings**

Chitrakar, Madan. *Nepali Painting*, Through the Ages. Nepal: Patan Museum, 2017.

Huntington, John C, and Dina Bangdel. *Circle of Bliss: Buddhist Meditational Art*. Belgium: Serindia Publications, 2003.

Kramrisch, Stella. *Art of Nepal*. Austria: Asia House Gallery, 1964.

Macdonald, A.W, and Anne Vergati Btahl. *Newār Art*, n.d.

'*Mirrors of the Sacred: Continuity of Traditional Painting in Contemporary Nepal – Nepal Art Council*'. Accessed 11 December 2020. <https://www.nepalartcouncil.org.np/mirrors-of-the-sacred-continuity-of-traditional-painting-in-contemporary-nepal/>.

Pratapaditya Pal. *Art of Nepal*. USA: Los Angeles County Museum of Arts, 1985.

Vajracharya, Gautama V. *Nepalese Seasons, Rains and Rituals*. Rubin Museum of Art, 2016.