

## Press Release

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# Inaugural National Pavilion of Nepal to Debut at the 59<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia

NEPAL – Nepal’s Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, the Nepal Academy of Fine Arts, the Siddhartha Arts Foundation, and the Rubin Museum of Art are honored to announce that the first-ever Nepal Pavilion will debut at the **59<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia** in 2022.

**Tales of Muted Spirits – Dispersed Threads – Twisted Shangri-La** will be curated by artists **Sheelasha Rajbhandari and Hit Man Gurung**, and will feature the work of artist **Tsherin Sherpa**.

The inaugural Nepal Pavilion will be presented at **Sant’Anna Project Space One**, located on Fondamenta S. Anna in the area between the Arsenale and Giardini – the two main venues of La Biennale di Venezia.

Appointed by Nepal’s **Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation**, the project is co-commissioned by the **Nepal Academy of Fine Arts** and the **Siddhartha Arts Foundation**, with lead global support from the **Rubin Museum of Art**.

Trained in the art of thangka painting, **Tsherin Sherpa** (born in Kathmandu, 1968) is regarded today as one of Nepal’s foremost contemporary artists. For the **Biennale Arte 2022**, he will collaborate with artists across the country to draw upon materials from a shared history and incorporate accounts encoded in oral cultures, woven languages, and quotidian rituals to implicate an intersectional and intertwined past that problematizes contradictory conceptualizations of Nepal as well as the broader Himalayan region.

The highlands of Asia have always emanated a sense of mystique, sacredness, and remoteness. However, fluidity, mobility, and an exchange of knowledge have flourished between communities for centuries. Often these complexities get obfuscated through a “Shangri-La” effect, which persists in popular imaginations. This fetishization triggers paradoxical representations of Himalayan communities as primitive, yet wise; lacking historical accounts, yet rich in spiritual wisdom; sturdy physically, yet bereft materially.

**Curators Sheelasha Rajbhandari and Hit Man Gurung** emphasize: “In contradiction to a mythical utopia –shrouded in happiness, longevity, and bliss – is the reality of an intricately interconnected peoples who have repeatedly experienced displacement, loss, and the insurmountable task of reconstituting their lives. From the 19th to 20th centuries many Indigenous groups in Nepal were purposefully excluded and oppressed through state

mechanisms that benefited both regional and colonial powers. When opportunity arose to exploit their art and livelihood through international trade, it created a scenario that essentialized and packaged numerous art practices into consumable goods, while simultaneously eroding their spiritual and vernacular meanings for the people who produce them.”

**Artist Tsherin Sherpa adds:** “International understanding of Nepali art remains plagued by a Western conceptualization of the Himalayan region: a pervasive, romanticized vision that frames Nepal as static, pure and untouched by time and modernity. We need to create a space to reflect and re-evaluate these biases.”

Nepal’s participation at the 59th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia resonates with recent initiatives that foster a global visibility for Nepal’s burgeoning contemporary art scene, such efforts include the *Nepal Art Now* exhibition at the Weltmuseum Wien in 2019 and the ongoing Kathmandu Triennale 2077.

**Jorrit Britschgi, Executive Director of the Rubin Museum of Art, said:** “The inaugural Nepal Pavilion will provide artists with an invaluable international platform to showcase their work whilst positioning the country to contribute to a broader narrative on contemporary art that moves away from a Eurocentric art history and discourse. The pavilion will also help to raise the profile of Nepal as one of the most vibrant countries for the production, promotion and presentation of contemporary art.”

The Biennale Arte 2022 will run from April 23 through November 27, 2022.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

**Tsherin Sherpa** was born in Kathmandu in 1968, where he currently resides. He was trained in *thangka* painting by his father Master Urgen Dorje, eventually drawing on this vocabulary to create artworks that incorporate Buddhist iconography and pop culture references. His works offer an interplay and tension between sacred/secular, traditional/contemporary, settlement/movement. Sherpa’s practice stems from his personal experiences within the Himalayan Diaspora as well as the nomadic history of Himalayan peoples. His experimentations with visual languages adapt, reimagine, and reappropriate identities, symbols, colors, and gestures to surpass their chronological and cultural constrictions.

He has been a part of Yokohama Triennale (2020); Yinchuan Biennale (2018); Kathmandu Triennale (2017); Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Brisbane (2015-16); and Dhaka Art Summit (2014). Sherpa has also exhibited at Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (2019); Rubin Museum of Art (2019); Asian Art Museum, San Francisco (2019); Weltmuseum Wien (2019); Kunstmuseum Bochum (2018); Berkeley Art Museum (2018). His works are in the collections of Victoria & Albert Museum; Rubin Museum of Art; Queensland Art Gallery & Gallery of Modern Art; Asian Art Museum, San Francisco; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts; and World Museum, Liverpool. In 2018 he undertook a residency at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford; and in February 2022 the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts will present his first museum retrospective. Sherpa is represented by Rossi & Rossi.

## ABOUT THE CURATORS

**Sheelasha Rajbhandari**, born in 1988 in Kathmandu, is a visual artist, cultural organizer, and co-founder of the artist collective Artree Nepal. Her longitudinal research repositions quotidian and plural narratives, by weaving folktales, oral histories, and performative rituals as a

juxtaposition to conventional historiography. Rajbhandari's practice is rooted in the experiences of women and seeks to confront how female agency and corporeality become contested political sites for contemporary nation-states; a phenomenon that parallels the dismantling of matricentric landscapes in extractive societies.

Her installation in the traveling exhibition "A beast, a god and a line" (2018-2020) was presented at Para Site, Hong Kong; TS1, Yangon; Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw; Kunsthall, Trondheim; and MALLAM Contemporary Art Museum, Chiang Mai. She has also been an artist in residence at the Bellas Artes Projects (2019) and Para Site (2017). She has furthermore exhibited at Museum of Arts and Design, New York (2022), Weltmuseum Wien (2019); Serendipity Arts Festival, Goa (2017); and Kathmandu Triennale (2017). As a part of her collective she has been a part of Dhaka Art Summit (2020) and Biennale of Sydney (2020). Rajbhandari is co-curator of the Kathmandu Triennale 2077 and 12 Baishakh-Post Earthquake Community Art Project alongside Hit Man Gurung.

**Hit Man Gurung**, born in 1984 in Lamjung, is currently based in Kathmandu. Gurung's diverse media of works are concerned with some of the most pressing political, economic, and cultural phenomena transforming Nepal's physical and societal landscapes. Particularly addressing the country's decade long People's War, several years of unstable governments, and the impact all of this has had on the personal and professional lives of Nepali citizens. In parallel, his art also speaks to the strong impact of global capitalism, the dramatic economic boom in the Middle East and Southeast Asia, an unprecedented investment in infrastructure development within the region, and an incessant demand for cheap labor; he furthermore stitches together the various patterns of mass migrations seen across Nepal. Gurung infuses his paintings, documentary photos, videos, performances and installations with political conviction and personal poetry.

He has participated in exhibitions at SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin (2020); Biennale of Sydney (2020); Artspace Sydney (2019); Weltmuseum Wien (2019); Kathmandu Triennale (2017); Yinchuan Biennale (2016); Para Site, Hong Kong (2016); Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Brisbane (2015-16); and Dhaka Art Summit (2014, 2016, 2018, 2020). He is co-founder of artist collective ArTree Nepal and a co-curator for the Kathmandu Triennale 2077 and 12 Baishakh-Post Earthquake Community Art Project alongside Sheelasha Rajbhandari.

## **ABOUT THE RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART**

The Rubin Museum of Art in Chelsea, New York City, explores and celebrates the diversity and uniqueness of Himalayan art, ideas, and cultures across history and into the present. With its globally renowned collection, largely centered around art from the Tibetan Plateau, the Rubin fosters understanding and appreciation of this region by relating its art and ideas to our shared human experience today. Inspired by the philosophical traditions of Buddhism and Hinduism and aligned with ongoing research into learning, behavior, and the brain, the Rubin offers innovative exhibitions and programs that examine provocative ideas across the arts and explore the mind. Through this work, the Museum serves as a space for reflection and personal transformation, opening windows to inner worlds so visitors can better navigate outer ones. [www.RubinMuseum.org](http://www.RubinMuseum.org)

## **ABOUT THE NEPAL ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS**

The Nepal Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) is the umbrella organization of Nepali artists, art researchers and art critics that facilitates the production and exhibition of artworks, as well as the study and research of various genres of arts. According to the Nepal Academy of Fine Arts Act 2007, NAFA has two constituent parts: the Academic Council and the Academic Assembly. The Academic Assembly makes policies and programs for the development of Nepali arts, while the Academic Council executes them in association with Nepali artists and in collaboration with other art organizations. It also monitors various art activities in the country, evaluates artworks, and awards Nepali artists.

## **ABOUT THE SIDDHARTHA ARTS FOUNDATION**

After the first Kathmandu Arts Festival in 2009, the Siddhartha Arts Foundation (SAF), a non-profit organization, was founded in 2011 with the mission to promote Nepal's arts and cultures, while establishing Kathmandu as a center for socially aware art practices. Since then, SAF hosted the 2012 Kathmandu Arts Festival, the 2017 Kathmandu Triennale, and Kathmandu Triennale 2022, developed in collaboration with curatorial and educational input from experts in the field selected and invited by a diverse board. Over the years, SAF has partnered with many artists, art institutions, and a broad network of national and international collaborators to host exhibitions, workshops, and art projects. The Foundation has been engaged in over 60 programs since its founding, and alongside the Siddhartha Art Gallery has a combined history of over 35 years investing in Nepal's art scene. SAF furthermore runs an education program to train art managers, curators, and critics through its Siddhartha Arts Foundation Education Initiative (SAFEI).

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