



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Australian Himalayan Foundation

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SILENT WHISPERS



THE AUSTRALIAN HIMALAYAN FOUNDATION ART AWARD SUPPORTING YOUNG ARTISTS IN THE HIMALAYAN REGION

The Himalayan Art Award was established in December 2008 by Margie Thomas. She established the award in memory of her close personal friend and renowned travel artist Murray Zaroni, a friend of the Australian Himalayan Foundation (AHF) who had visited and sketched in the Himalaya on a number of occasions. It was a way of honoring Murray and his wishes to support young artists who might struggle to find the time and/or resources to express their talent. Margie has close ties both professionally and personally with Nepal and couldn't think of a better place to kick-start the Art Award.

With the invaluable assistance and guidance of Ms. Sangeeta Thapa, Director and Curator of Siddhartha Gallery and a driving force in the art scene in Kathmandu, two young Nepalese artists were interviewed, selected, and granted the award. The inaugural award was established by Murray's estate to encourage and enable these young artists to continue their art and allow time to focus on producing a body of work.

Integral to the award was an obligation by the artist(s) to donate to the AHF one major and one minor work, which was auctioned at a fundraising evening in Australia. The funds raised from the auction were then allocated to sponsor the award the following year. Therefore, the award has been self-sustaining. This year the AHF has found a benefactor interested in the arts, who is sponsoring the award in 2025.

MUNA BHADEL

AUGUST 18 — SEPTEMBER 18, 2024



GALLERY INTRODUCTION

Sangeeta Thapa

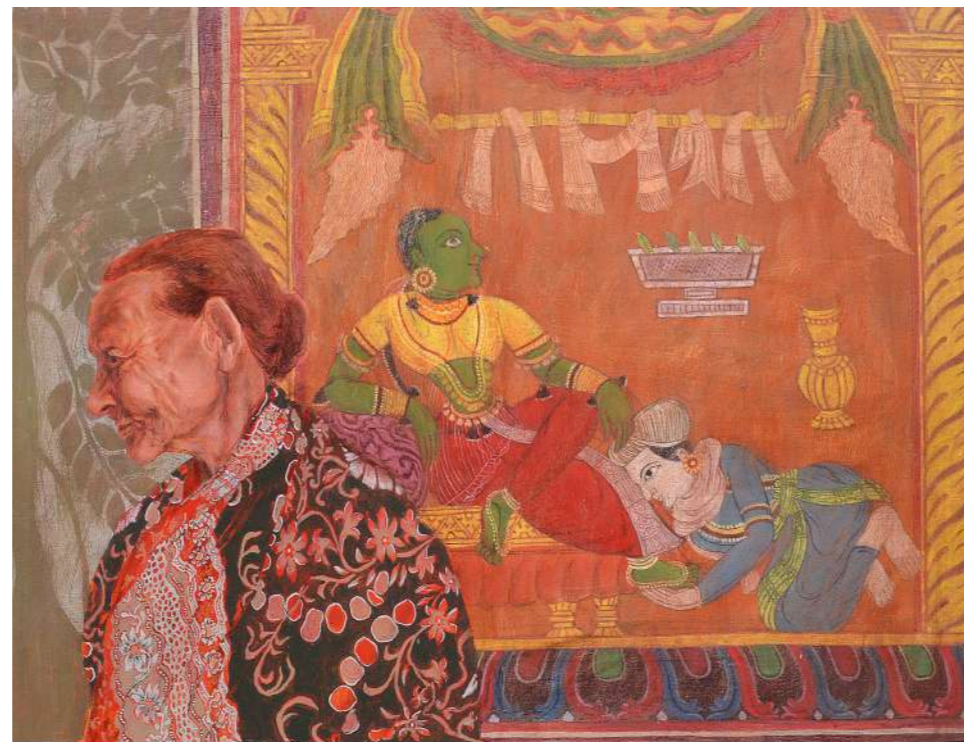
Founder Director-Siddhartha Art Gallery | Siddhartha Arts Foundation

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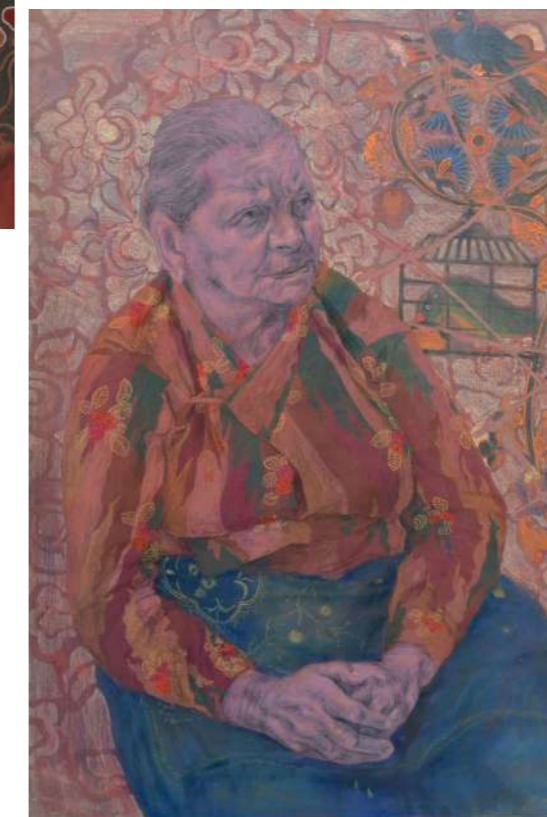
I first met Muna as a young student at Lalitkala Academy of Fine Art. In 2014, she exhibited her painting at the annual AMALGAM show organized by Siddhartha Art Gallery. A year later, the Great Earthquakes struck Nepal with tragic consequences. Some artists lost their loved ones, some lost their homes or studios, and some sustained injuries. In response to this situation, Siddhartha Art Gallery and KCAC provided three artists—Muna, Jeewan Suwal, and Sandhya Silwal—a safe space in the garden studios at Patan Museum to create works. In 2016, these three artists jointly showcased the outcome of their residency at Siddhartha Art Gallery. Later that year, Muna graduated from Lalitkala Academy and joined a Master's Program at Tribhuvan University. In 2016-17, she was a resident artist at Taragaon Museum. The resulting body of work exhibited at Taragaon Museum, was dedicated to the memory of an old bazaar in Dapcha, Namobuddha, where the artist had spent time as a child in her maternal grandmother's home. These mixed media works revealed Muna's capacity to research, experiment, and deliver a poignant testament to the loss of heritage caused by the earthquake and the impact of migration on this quaint town.

In 2018, Muna received her MFA from Tribhuvan University, and a year later, she married the artist Anil Shahi (also a recipient of the AHF art award). In 2022, Muna exhibited two portraits at the Himalayan Art Festival. In these compositions, the artist painted her sister, sensuously swathed in a variety of luscious textiles. The paintings express the connection that men and women have had with textiles since ancient times—textiles come with their own histories and represent power and status, among other things. In a section of these paintings, Muna also reconnected the portraits to the work she was making during her residency at KCAC, introducing elements of traditional Nepali paintings that she had seen in the Patan Museum and Bhaktapur Museum. These early Nepali paintings evolved with influences from India—mainly Rajasthani, Pahadi, and Mughal schools of art. By combining these elements into her works, Muna skillfully expresses a compelling layering of history, not only in the evolution of Nepali painting but also in its legacy and connection to her own work. In 2023, Muna expanded the series of sumptuous portraits of her sister and held an exhibition titled “Co-Relation Between Us” at Dalai La Gallery in Thamel.

In 2022, I remember Muna attending Bidhyaman Tamang's exhibition opening with her newborn baby swaddled in layers of clothing to guard against the November cold.



The birth of her child and the passing of her “four precious grandmothers” seem to have made a profound impact on the artist's psyche. This exhibition, ‘Silent Whispers,’ is a labour of love, as it is a deeply personal homage to Muna's grandmother. Her paintings are an observation about the cycle of life—of birth and death, of youth with all its beauty and seductions. The anointing of a woman's hair and feet is an intrinsic part of the sora singaar, a symbol of youth and sensuality. However, in Muna's works, this act of anointing is also imbued with multiple narratives: about loss and ageing, care and lack of care, kinship, community and loneliness, unfulfilled dreams, nostalgia, isolation, and longing. The paintings of ageing women seem trapped in the cage of filial duty, society, and time. Muna has also created a set of four paintings inspired by the traditional scroll paintings called bilampau. These paintings, titled “Age of Grace,” celebrate the jankhu ceremony of her grandmother, which is celebrated when a family member reaches 77 years, 7 months, and 7 days. By juxtaposing and weaving these traditional elements in her paintings, and by creating a dialogue between the past and present, Muna skillfully pays homage to her Newa tradition and heritage. But above all, her paintings make a powerful statement that the story of women remains unchanged in our ‘modern’ Nepal mandala.



ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Muna Bhadel

Visual Artist



This series, a tapestry woven with threads of deep emotional bonds, captures the poignant experiences of grandmothers as I have felt them. Though their ways of life are mirrored reflections, their journeys through time are uniquely their own. With an insatiable curiosity about these journeys, I have endeavoured to tell their tales through the lens of the imagination. These grandmothers lived lives of simplicity and contentment, deeply rooted in family and ceaselessly occupied with its care.

In the twilight of their years, they converse quietly with their own souls, reflecting on unfulfilled emotional longings that dwell only in the realm of their fantasies. In my artistic renderings, I perceive them seeking a place within the familial tapestry they once wove so meticulously, giving voice to their dreams and desires in the fragments of their memories.

These narratives breathe new life into ancient miniature paintings, serving as symbols of memories and aspirations. Through these delicate brushstrokes, their emotions are revered, and they are celebrated as the storytellers they have always been.