

VOL. 1

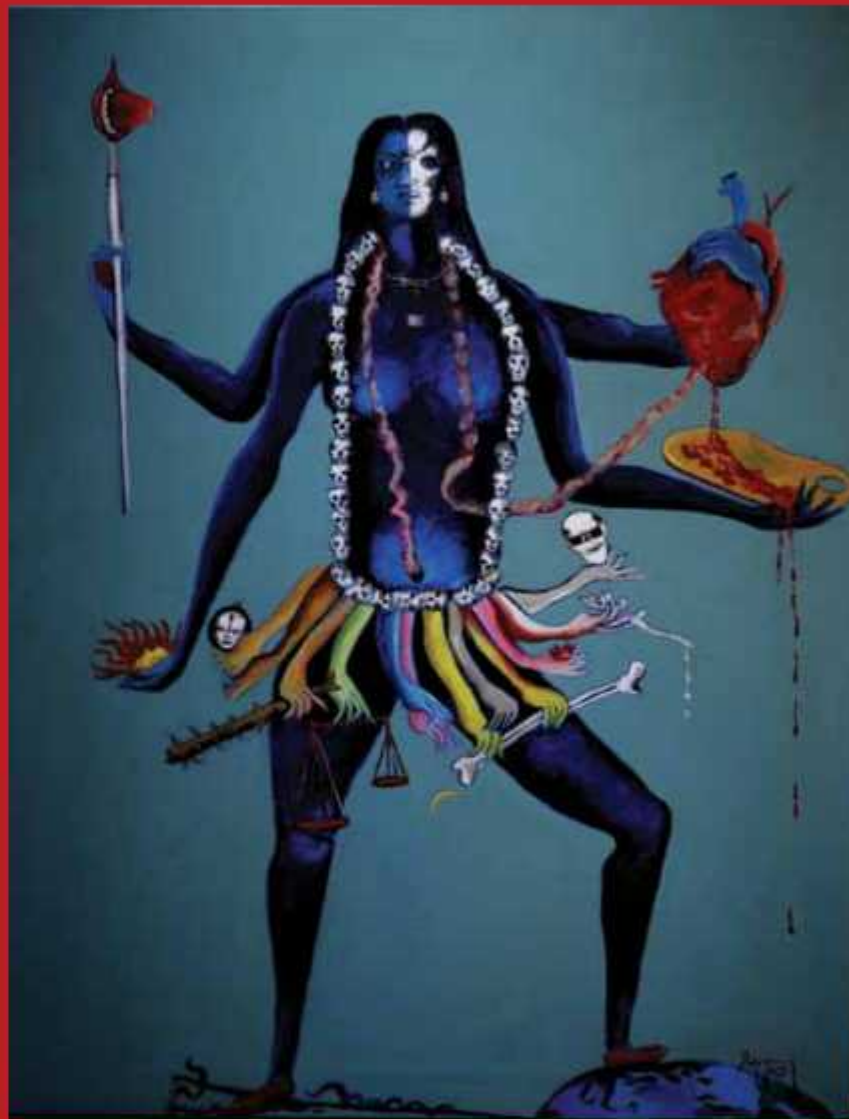
# Ragini Upadhyay

A RETROSPECTIVE OF AN ARTIST  
(1978 AD-2023 AD)

8-22 MARCH, 2023  
Nepal Art Council

Organized by

 **Siddhortha  
ART GALLERY**





# Ragini Upadhyay

A RETROSPECTIVE OF AN ARTIST  
(1978 AD-2023 AD)



## **Why did I become Kali?**

When the clouds of my dreams melted  
When the peace of my moon fell to earth  
When the blood of my heart dropped on my pallet

Why did I become Kali?

When my placenta became injured  
When my Motherhood bled  
When the rose of my life disappeared  
When I became too tired to carry all the  
dead skulls of my love at once

Why did I become Kali?

When the Sun became Fire on my hand  
When innocent daughters were raped  
When injustice toward women prevailed  
When time entered the black of my night

Then my brush became the red tongue of Kali  
I showed myself as Kali  
That night I became KALI

-Ragini Upadhyay

*(The painting on the front cover page depicts this poem.)*



My life has been art and art has been my life. I have never stopped transforming my thoughts and emotions into pictures that narrate many stories. I initiate them, and the spectator has to complete them.

**Ragini Upadhayay**

Artist



राष्ट्रपति भवन  
महाराजगञ्ज, काठमाडौं, नेपाल ।

मिति: २०७९/११/१५

## शुभकामना

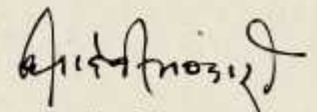
नेपाली चित्रकला क्षेत्रकी प्रसिद्ध हस्ताक्षर एवं नेपाल ललितकला प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठानकी पूर्व कुलपति रागिनी उपाध्याय ग्रेलाले अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय महिला दिवस (८ मार्च)को सन्दर्भमा आफ्नो कला यात्राका विभिन्न कालखण्डमा सिर्जित चित्रकलाहरूको एकल प्रदर्शनी गर्न लागेको र प्रदर्शनीमा संलग्न कलाकृतिहरूको संग्रह पुस्तिका समेत प्रकाशन हुन लागेकोमा खुसी व्यक्त गर्दछु ।

कलाका विभिन्न विधाहरू जस्तै चित्रकला पनि हाम्रो संस्कृतिको अभिन्न अङ्गको रूपमा रहेको छ । प्राचीन कालदेखि नै मानव जातिले चित्रमाफत आफूलाई अभिव्यक्त गर्दै आएको छ । लेख्य भाषाको सुरुवात हुनुअघि चित्रलाई नै मानव संवाद र सञ्चारको माध्यम रहेको मानिन्छ । सभ्यताको विकाससँगै चित्रकलाको स्वरूपमा आएको रूपान्तरणलाई आधुनिक चित्रकलाले व्यापक समेटेको छ । नेपालका सन्दर्भमा रागिनी उपाध्याय र उहाँ जस्तै कलाकारहरूले त्यस व्यापकतालाई प्रतिनिधित्व गर्नुभएको छ भन्ने मलाई लाग्दछ ।

आधुनिक नेपाली चित्रकलाको विकासमा रागिनी उपाध्यायको योगदान महत्त्वपूर्ण रहेको छ । समाज र सभ्यताकै किम्वदन्ती, कथा एवं पौराणिकताबाट ग्रहण गरिएका विम्बलाई सामाजिक रूपान्तरणका लागि सशक्त ढङ्गले प्रयोग गर्न सक्ने क्षमताले रागिनी उपाध्यायलाई विशिष्ट पहिचान दिएको छ । कलाका माध्यमबाट लैङ्गिक सशक्तीकरण, सामाजिक न्याय र प्रकृति संरक्षणको पैरवी गर्दै समाजका विसङ्गत पक्षहरूमाथि तीव्र आलोचनात्मक चेतनाको अभिव्यक्ति उहाँका चित्रकलाको विशेषता रहेको मैले पाएको छु ।

उत्कृष्ट कला साधकका रूपमा परिचित रागिनी उपाध्यायको एकल चित्रकला प्रदर्शनी पूर्ण सफल हुने विश्वास सहित उहाँको उत्तरोत्तर प्रगतिको कामना गर्दछु ।

धन्यवाद ।

  
विद्यादेवी भण्डारी





Government of Nepal  
**Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation**

Singhadurbar, Kathmandu, Nepal



**Message**

**Sudan Kirati**  
**Minister**

Ref. No.:

I am immensely pleased to know that well known Nepalese Artist Ragini Upadhyay, former chancellor of Nepal Academy of Fine Arts is having her Retrospective Exhibition on International Women's Day. There will be 45 years of her works displayed at Nepal Art Council, organized by Siddhartha Art Gallery, Nepal.

History has taught us that glory of a nation or a civilization is always best known by the art and artists of a country than any other set of people. Changes in politics or in a society do take place occasionally in their own ways. But the artists never cease to keep on enriching the country with their pursuits - regardless of happenings.

In Nepali context too, eminent artist Ragini Upadhyay remains one of a very few prominent and a visible examples in this regard. Regardless of many ups and downs the country has witnessed in its polity in the last few decades, Ragini has stood firm and continually pursued artistic efforts; and has constantly expressed her creative responses to all those happenings and many more through her vast array of 'Art'. It is gratifying to note that the wealth of artistic expressions of Ragini is known all over the country, and internationally.

It is heartening to note that Ragini's memorable works have won appreciation from the concerned writers. I am sure that the Retrospective solo exhibition would be an immensely helpful guide to understand and appreciate her works on contemporary arts better. I am confident that Ragini's Solo Retrospective Exhibition would stand as a historic document in the annals of Nepali Art as a whole.

It is therefore, with immense delight, I wish to extend my hearty congratulations to her and best wishes for a great success for her solo Retrospective Exhibition 2023.

With best of wishes,

26 February 2023

  
(Minister)  
**Sudan Kirati**  
**Minister**



lgbzs  
Director



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02 March 2023

## MESSAGE

Ms. Ragini Upadhyay is an innovative and experimental artist who has made immense contributions to the field of contemporary art. Her painting give expressions to different philosophical ideas like the concept of *Kala* (time), and inner enemies like lust, anger, etc. that hamper the spiritual growth of a person.

One can say that her paintings are a beautiful blend of traditional ideas and modern phenomena that strikes a chord with the audience. The new catalogue also represents the wheel of time and her growth as an artist over the years. The collection is as much an emotive experience as it is an immersive experience.

I am sure that through this catalogue book and Solo Retrospective Exhibition, Ragini will be successful in reaching out to contemporary art lovers. She will be the trendsetter for aspiring young generation artists. I wholeheartedly wish her success for her Exhibition and future endeavors.

[Dr. Asawari Bapat]

## GALLERY INTRODUCTION

I first met Ragini when she exhibited her prints at the October Art Gallery at the Hotel Vajra in the early 80s. At that time, the Vajra was the very locus of creativity with its Naga theatre and its exciting calendar of artistic events. It was here that I met the artists late Manohar Man Poon, late Chandra Man Maskey, Jagdish Chitrakar, and Shashikala Tiwari, with whom I would later establish the Siddhartha Art Gallery in 1985.

Ragini's etchings and lithographs made a strong impression on me - her early works were earthy and tempestuous, dominated by dark earthy tones where half-revealed faces, voluptuous female forms, Picasso-esque minotaurs, and beasts conjured the mysterious theatrical setting of her compositions.

As I delved deeper into her work and artistic journey, I learned that my husband Sunil Thapa, and his friend Bandu Thapa had helped Ragini organize her first solo exhibition in 1979 at the Nepal Bharath Sanskritik Kendra Library.

Ragini later opened the Pumori Art Gallery at the Blue Star Hotel in Tripureshwar in 1987 which coincidentally was the same year that Shashikala Tiwari and I opened the Siddhartha Art Gallery in Kantipath. Ragini is without a doubt one of the most prominent artists in Nepal. A prolific artist, she has participated in several shows with other artists at the Siddhartha Art Gallery. It is important to note that her most important national solo exhibitions have been organized by the Siddhartha Art Gallery: *Sensitive Woman* in 1999, *Ragini's Odyssey* in 2001, *The Sun Never Dies*, *Buddha Lights and*

*Truth Shines*, *Time Wheel* in 2005 and, *Love in the Air* and *Gaijatra* in 2009. I am deeply touched that Ragini has entrusted me with organizing this retrospective of her works which spans 45 years of her career.

In our parallel journey in the art world, I have been a part of Ragini's artistic journey not only with the shows that she had at the Gallery and beyond but as a friend attending her wedding to Albert Grela in 1991, sharing the joy of the birth of her daughter Shivata in 1995, appreciating the momentum she built for empowering women artists by establishing WAGON (Women Artists Group of Nepal) and her ambitious rise as the Nation's first female Chancellor of the Nepal Academy of Fine Arts in 2015. On February 5th, 2016 Ragini tragically lost her beloved 21-year-old daughter to meningitis in Holland. The passing of her only child and the subsequent death of her Mother 6 months later, was to greatly impact her work. I remember meeting her mother when my husband and I visited Ragini to pay our condolences. This combined grief would later be channeled into the 'Ashes' series - a series I have found particularly hard to view as a friend and as a mother. On February 5th of this year, my own beloved Father passed away - coincidentally on a day that Ragini would be reflecting on a life cut too short.

A retrospective exhibition is the ultimate celebration of an artist's work - whereby the curator, organizer, or writer studies the archive of the artist's works and employs a chronological approach to unravel and delve into the artist's history in order to understand the liminal personal narratives that have played

a direct or subconscious role in shaping the artist's inspiration and body of work. Retrospective exhibitions can highlight the artist's first exposure to the arts, to understand how this may have influenced an individual's decision to make a career in the arts. Some retrospectives include both pre-academic artworks and early academic works to understand how the artist arrived at their subject matter. Some are curated specifically to shed light on a specific time period or on specific subjects: the artist's personal struggles, triumphs, travels, epiphanies, socio-political viewpoint, or on a seismic shift in the artist's life that has led to the creation of a powerful body of work. Employing the lens of time, a retrospective helps us understand and appreciate the transitions in an artist's work, the unique approach to a subject, the experimentations with different mediums, and the recurring motifs, and themes that run through an artist's compositions.

A retrospective exhibition is a milestone event in the life of any artist—as it provides the viewer or curator with a profound multifaceted vignette into the artist's ever-evolving body of work. The Siddhartha Art Gallery has had the privilege of organizing retrospective painting exhibitions of some of Nepal's foremost artists: the late Amar Chitrakar, the late Uttam Nepali, Shashi Bikram Shah, Shashikala Tiwari, the late Karna Narsingh Rana, and Birendra Pratap Singh (in 2015). This retrospective which spans the years 1978-2023, features a selection of 300 prints and paintings and is a chronological amalgamation of several periods in the artist Ragini's life. But above all, it is a narrative of a bold, socio-politically aware, and sensitive artist who has surpassed countless emotional and psychological challenges through her art.

**Sangeeta Thapa**

Founder Director, Siddhartha Art Gallery |

Siddhartha Arts Foundation

Founder Chair, Kathmandu Triennale

Co-Commissioner, Nepal Pavilion, Venice Biennale

## Sketches by the Artist (1978-1982 AD)

Lucknow College of Arts, Lucknow, India







## कोरे कैलवास पर उतरता कलाकार का संघर्ष...

रागिनी उपाध्याय, कलाजगत का आज एक बहुचर्चित नाम है। नेपाल की इस कलाकार ने अंतरराष्ट्रीय स्तर पर अपनी विशिष्ट पहचान बनाकर केवल नेपाल को ही नहीं बल्कि भारत को भी गौरवान्वित किया है। नेपाल में जन्मी रागिनी की कला शिक्षा भारत में लखनऊ स्थित कला महाविद्यालय में हुई थी, जहां प्रिंट मेकिंग का प्रशिक्षण उन्होंने मुफ्त से प्राप्त किया था। एक अरसा हो गया किन्तु मुझे आज भी स्मरण है कि नेपाल से आई यह बालिका भले ही बाहर से शांत और सहज प्रतीत होती थी, किन्तु उसके अंदर कुछ कर गुजरने की इच्छा बल पकड़ती जा रही थी। उन दिनों किसी भी कलाकार के लिये शिल्प कौशल में पारंगत होना प्राथमिकता होती थी, विशेष रूप से लखनऊ कला महाविद्यालय में जहां बंगाल वाश शैली का वर्चस्व रहा था। प्रशिक्षण पश्चिमी यथार्थवाद पर ही आधारित होता था, जिसमें तकनीकी जानकारी पर अधिक बल दिया जाता था, किन्तु रागिनी के लिये उसके अंदर जन्म लेती भावनाएं कैलवास पर उतरने के लिये अधीर हो रही थी। उसकी संवेदनशीलता और सोच से वह अन्य छात्रों से अलग थी, जो कहीं न कहीं उसकी कलाकृतियों में दिखने लगा था।

कला प्रशिक्षण एक ऐसी प्रक्रिया है जो प्रारम्भिक ज्ञान के लिये आवश्यक तो है, किन्तु किसी भी कलाकार को अपनी अलग पहचान बनाने के लिये उससे ऊपर उठना होता है और अपनी सृजन प्रक्रिया का पुनर्गठन कर एक अलग मार्ग चुनना होता है। रागिनी को इसके लिये अधिक परिश्रम नहीं करना पड़ा। वह सदैव ही संवेदनशील, जिज्ञासू और पूर्वाग्रहों से मुक्त रही थी। यद्यपि उसके प्रारम्भिक कार्यों में ही उसकी कार्य शैली और विषयवस्तु एक अलग पहचान लेकर उभर रही थी किन्तु नेपाल पहुंच कर स्वतंत्र जीवन के संघर्षों से आत्मसात होते ही उसके अंदर का कलाकार उद्देलित हो उठा।

अमृता शेरगिल भारतीय कलाकार और मैक्सिकन कलाकार फ्रीडा काहलो आधुनिक कला परिदृश्य में विशिष्ट पहचान रखती हैं और इसका कारण उनकी अपनी व्यक्तिगत जिंदगी और उनका अपना परिवेश रहा था। उनके जीवन की त्रासदी और घटित अविस्मरणीय पलों का प्रतिबिम्ब था जिससे उनकी कला को अलग पहचान और अर्थ मिला। नेपाल की कलाकार रागिनी उपाध्याय के कृतित्व में भी उनकी अपनी जिंदगी के

सुख दुख के पल अपने परिवेश के प्रति संवेदनशीलता कहीं न कहीं उन्हें भी इन कलाकारों के समानांतर श्रेणी में ही ले आती है।

नेपाल के नैसर्गिक किन्तु जटिल वातावरण में पली बड़ी रागिनी के लिये जन जीवन का सदैव ही बहुत महत्व रहा है। अपने इर्द-गिर्द की घटनाओं चाहे वह रोजमर्रा की जिन्दगी हो, मानवीय त्रासदी हो, राजनीतिक अथवा नेपाल में अक्सर घटने वाली प्राकृतिक आपदाएं हों रागिनी के अंतरमन को उद्देलित कर डालती है और उससे उत्पन्न हुई उत्तेजना कैनवास पर उतर कर ही शांत हो पाती है।

रागिनी एक अत्यंत जिज्ञासु और संवेदनशील कलाकार हैं। अपने परिवेश के प्रति उनकी संवेदनशीलता उनकी कलाकृतियों को सदैव प्रभावित करती रही हैं किन्तु उनके अपने जीवन की त्रासदी भी कम नहीं रहीं। वह ऐसे कठिन पलों से गुजरी हैं जहां स्वयं को समहालपाना लगभग असम्भव ही था, किन्तु रागिनी के जीवन का सबसे बड़ा सहारा उनके अंदर का कलाकार ही रहा है जो उनकी कला में स्पष्ट झलकता है। एक प्रकार से रागिनी के कला संसार पर एक विहंगम दृष्टि डाली जाय तो लगता है कि कहीं न कहीं हम उनकी जीवनी के प्रष्ठों को ही पलट रहे हों।

नेपाल सदैव ही एक स्वतंत्र हिन्दू राष्ट्र रहा है। बौद्ध धर्म का भी यहां व्यापक प्रभाव रहा। यहां के धार्मिक और आध्यात्मिक

वातावरण में एक स्वतंत्र वैचारिक सोच पनपा जिसने आम जनजीवन, कला और संस्कृति को प्रभावित किया। जिसका प्रभाव रागिनी की कलाकृतियों में भी अक्सर देखने को मिलता है। अनेक अवसरों पर धार्मिक प्रतीकों को सामयिक संदर्भ के साथ जोड़तेहुए जिस प्रकार रागिनी आकारों को समायोजित करती हैं, वह उनकी आध्यात्मिक परिपक्वता को झलकाता तो है ही साथ ही उनकी कला को एक अलग नैरेटिव भी देता है।

रागिनी के कला संसार में एक तारतम्य होने के उपरांत भी उसे अनेक भागों में विभाजित किया जा सकता है। वास्तव में इस विभाजन का कारण समय समय पर उनके जीवन में आने वाला परिवर्तन ही है। उनकी सैलानी प्रवृत्तियों ने उन्हें एक प्रकार से पूरे विश्व से जोड़ दिया है जिससे उनकी मूल नेपाली पहचान प्रभावित हुए बिना आधुनिक कला के अंतरराष्ट्रीय मानकों से जुड़ गयी है। इसमें कोई संदेह नहीं कि यदि रागिनी को आज एक अंतरराष्ट्रीय स्तर की स्थापित कलाकार की संज्ञा दी जाय तो अतिशयोक्ति नहीं होगी।

### **जय कृष्ण अग्रवाल**

पूर्व प्रधानाचार्य एवं डीन  
कला एवं शिल्प महाविद्यालय,  
लखनऊ विश्वविद्यालय,  
लखनऊ - भारत



## Hesitant Femininity (1978-1985 AD)

These works by the artists depict feelings of loneliness, despair, loss and insecurity among the women in South Asia. The social and cultural boundaries that restrict them from their childhood, teenage years and then as young women make them melancholic and often, hopeless.



*Humans* | 1981 | Lino cut | 20x20 cm



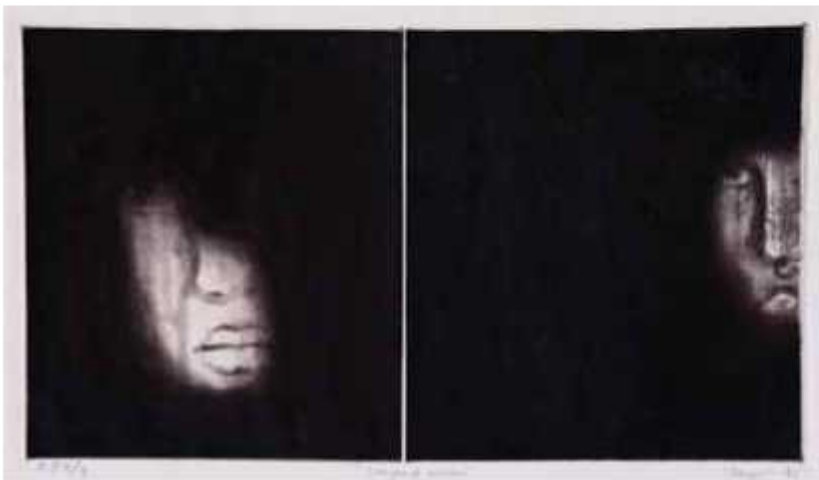
*Women and Men* | 1981 | Linocut | 25x20 cm



*Black & White* | 1978 | Linocut | 20x15 cm



*Incomplete Women* | 1979 | Linocut | 25x20 cm



*Sun & Moon* | 1985 | Glue Etching | 30x10 cm



*Faces* | 1985 | Glue Etching | 32x31 cm | Collection in Bradford Museum, U.K.



*Face to Face* | 1985 | Dry Point Glue Etching | 19x27.6 cm |  
Collection in Bradford Museum, UK



*Women in Net* | 1978 | Linocut | 15x20 cm



***Since 1994, gallery "Atelier I.S." in Walhorn (Belgium) has regularly presented the works of Ragini Upadhyay-Grela. Thus, over more than a quarter of a century, a deep friendship and connection to this extraordinary, remarkable, and strong woman has developed. Here is an artist who never fails to convince with the quality of her work and her capacity to process and integrate new themes and sources of inspiration.***

Ragini Upadhyay-Grela is currently one of the most important representatives of contemporary art in Nepal. Her works have received international recognition, travelling halfway around the world to hang in numerous museums and private collections. Nepali mythology runs like a red thread through the artist's oeuvre, as does her love for the environment. Women's struggle for equal rights has also been a focus of her pictures for many years. While her works are diverse in their expression, they clearly reference and mark the times they reflect.

Ragini Upadhyay seems to be immersed in a great flow of energy, constantly resourcing her thirst for action, giving her the strength to build up a physical as well as a spiritual presence both through and within her work. She develops her visual language with symbols that provide food for thought while vaulting cultural barriers.

Ragini experienced a deep turning point when she had to bid farewell to her beloved daughter Shivata, who died of bacterial meningitis at the age of 20. This event changed her work profoundly. A new series of pictures emerged under the title "From my heart". In these works of loss and leaving, grief, motherly love, pain, but also hope are reflected. Shivata was a life-affirming being who harboured a great desire to make the world a little

better. Ragini Upadhyay-Grela has always been involved in politics and social projects and so, inspired by her daughter's wish, she founded the "Shivata Love Foundation". The aim of this foundation is, among other things, to help young people in Nepal transcend deprived or desperate situations by promoting their schooling and artistic education. To this day, part of the proceeds from the sale of her work goes to the foundation.

Ragini Upadhyay-Grela's recent exhibitions at Atelier I.S. have been honoured by visits from, among others, two Nepalese ambassadors, Bhakta Srestha and His Excellency Lok Bahadur Thapa. In addition, fruitful exchanges with the Speaker of the East Belgian Parliament Karl-Heinz Lambertz, the East Belgian Minister of Culture Isabelle Weykmans and the East Belgian Deputy Prime Minister Antonios Antoniadis also took place.

In Autumn 2023, Atelier I.S. will be showing a cross-section of Upadhyay-Grela's works from the last few decades: watercolours, unique prints, and paintings, all of which offer insights into the different creative periods of the artist's history.

We are sure that Ragini Upadhyay-Grela will continue to work purposefully on her life and career, and as a gallery we are pleased and proud to accompany an artist of this energy and significance on her forward path.

**Inge Sauren** (Gallerist, Atelier I.S.)

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## Ragini's Odyssey (1999-2000 AD)

This series was created between 1999 to 2000 influenced by the sharp turmoils in Nepali politics. Democracy had only just started spreading its wings. Unfortunately, the newly elected political leaders did not turn out to be the leaders citizens had expected them to be. *Sungur ko Mukh ma Syau (An Apple on a Pig's Mouth)* symbolizes arrogance and carelessness of Nepali politicians. This painting is now in the collection of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan.

*Chain of Corruption* represents the cycle of bribes and exploitation. The series includes *Shadow of Love* and *Women Power* that are parts of my own odyssey-Love, Power and Politics.



*Nepal Story* | 2000 | Etching Mixed Media | 49x32 cm | Private Collection



*Nepal Story* | 2000 | Etching | 32x49 cm





*An Apple on a Pig's Mouth* | 2000 | Oil on Canvas | 110×110 cm |  
Collection in Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Japan



*Chain of Corruption* | 2002 | Etching | 49×49 cm |  
Collection in World Bank, Nepal & Private

## The Sun Never Dies, Buddha Lights and Truth Shines (2002-2003 AD)

Since the beginning of time the sun has never stopped shining. It never dies. The artist believes that real and authentic truth is just as permanent as the sun. It lasts generation after generation despite the oppression, the violence or any obscurantism. The Truth is wisdom and it has to be nurtured day after day.

The Buddhas are very afflicted by the catastrophes plaguing humanity, torn apart in some pictures. Despite the turmoil, they tirelessly deliver the message of meditation, self-control, peace and compassion.

May peace prevail!



Om Mani Padme Hum | 2002 | Colograph | 14x14 inches



Maya Ko Jalo | 2002 | Colograph Mixed Media | 15x13 inches



Ragini Upadhyay's artworks are the poetic materialization of myths on canvas. Despite the denseness of figures in the paintings with their stark green, blue, yellow and red colours, her works are not burdensome for the viewer. Whether it is the portrayal of a Nepalese maiden in independent combinations of colours, or the presentation of Hindu Gods and Goddesses in a modern context - it seems as if Ragini crafts enchanting verses of life's experiences in her art.

Many of her paintings are close to realism, but along with the depiction of human anguish, there is a deep mysticism within them. In texture-oriented motifs, Ragini musically transforms the myths. Ragini's artworks are a reflection of the experiences of a woman's life in the symbolic images associated with Kamdhenu, Shakti, Saraswati, Tortoise and Lion. Ragini has lived Nepal's folk traditions, mythological references along with its contemporary contexts in the modernity of colours and lines. The nature and architecture of Nepal can be deeply felt in her artworks. It is as if, through her art, she has shaped the cultural history of Nepal in the artistic references of a woman's experiences.

The change prevalent in the public psyche due to the restoration of Democracy in Nepal can be felt in her art, along with a subtle exploration of a woman's life and perspectives. I believe, in a temporal sense, Ragini Upadhyay undertakes a journey of history and culture through her paintings. The images and symbols emerging in her paintings possess time-sensitivity as well as a folk and popular perception of culture. It is as if, instead of paintings, she composes visual essays.

#### **Dr. Rajesh Kumar Vyas**

Eminent Art Critic, Poet and Travelogue-writer of India;  
Recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award  
Email - drrajeshkumarvyas@Gmail.com

## **Ragini Upadhyay's Art**

When I first saw the art of Ragini Upadhyay I was struck by how alive it is. It breathes life and energy, sometimes with humor, heartache and sorrow, but always with the power of the artist's perceptions and feelings. Her expressive paintings and prints in mixed media take you in emotionally, and you discover the associative meanings through looking and noticing surprising things. In the series *Ashes* she pours her feelings and thoughts of being a mother, a woman, and a human being which are shaped by her unique experiences and uses a fluid visual language accessible to anyone who looks. Even without knowing the artist's life story you can sense it in her works. I find that her recent art continues to be compelling and more experienced after the period of silence and look forward to seeing more of what she creates in the future.

#### **Elena Pakhoutova**

Senior Curator,  
Rubin Museum of Art, New York  
January 14, 2023

## Time Wheel (2004-2007 AD)

Ragini theorises that time is evanescent; those people who were there in the past are no longer there today and we too will go away one day. These places will continue to exist with or without us. Time is mightier than all of us.

Abhi Subedi, 2005



*Time Wheel* | 2005 | Collage on Etching | 34x50 cm





*Kings Time Wheel | 2004 | Collage on Etching | 42x47 cm*



*Welcome Time | 2005 | Collage on Etching | 47x31 cm*



*Krishna Time Wheel | 2005 | Etching Mix Media | 30x39 cm*

I met the pleasant, friendly, gracious Ragini Upadhyay Grela about 12 years back when she had her solo exhibition based on the "Love in the Air" series in Karachi, Pakistan. The incredibly interesting compositions, with a mélange of technology and historical monuments imagery, were humorous, witty, joyful, and satirical that captured mine and critics attention.

This led me to her website, which impressed profoundly with the variety of concepts and their presentations with distinct visual vocabulary and strong compositions. Today, beginning with "The Sun Never Dies" to the recent "Ashes" series one can see the power of Ragini's restless soul to drive her energies into producing stimulating artworks. She has the ability to portray beliefs, philosophy, frustrations, chaos politics, technological progress, environmental concerns, social issues, love and even personal tragedy with very distinct and iconic imagery that carves a long lasting impression on the viewer's mind.

The retrospective that is being held in March 2023 at Siddarth Art Gallery, Nepal, will be a showcase of Ragini's remarkable talents. It will be a wonderful proof that her intriguing thoughts take her on flights of imaginations in territories of diverse themes. The resultant artworks then not only presents the aerial view of the dealt theme but dives deep with deliberate striking metaphors that are commonly understood. This pictorial treat compels the audience to discover, visualize and feel the impact of the subject.

It is also imperative to record that Ragini has carved her own style in printmaking. She continues to experiment with amalgamation of different, often unusual, materials in her prints that add curious textures and make them fascinatingly attractive. In addition, she often paints differently with few strokes on each one of the similar print, which gives them separate identity and brings an additional charm for the art collectors.

Ragini's artwork is not only an asset for Nepal, but for the entire art world. Its variable focuses and executorial skills makes it universally appealing.

**Dr. Arjumand Faisel**, MBBS, MCPS, MPH, FCPS  
Curator, Gallery 6 Islamabad

## Love in the Air (2008-2009 AD)

This series is produced in 2008. It is strongly inspired by the artist's trip to Europe. The places she visited and the difference in culture she experienced left an unerasable mark in her mind. The omnipresence of computers, mobile phones, tablets has been a great opportunity for lovers to exchange feelings and emotions easily.

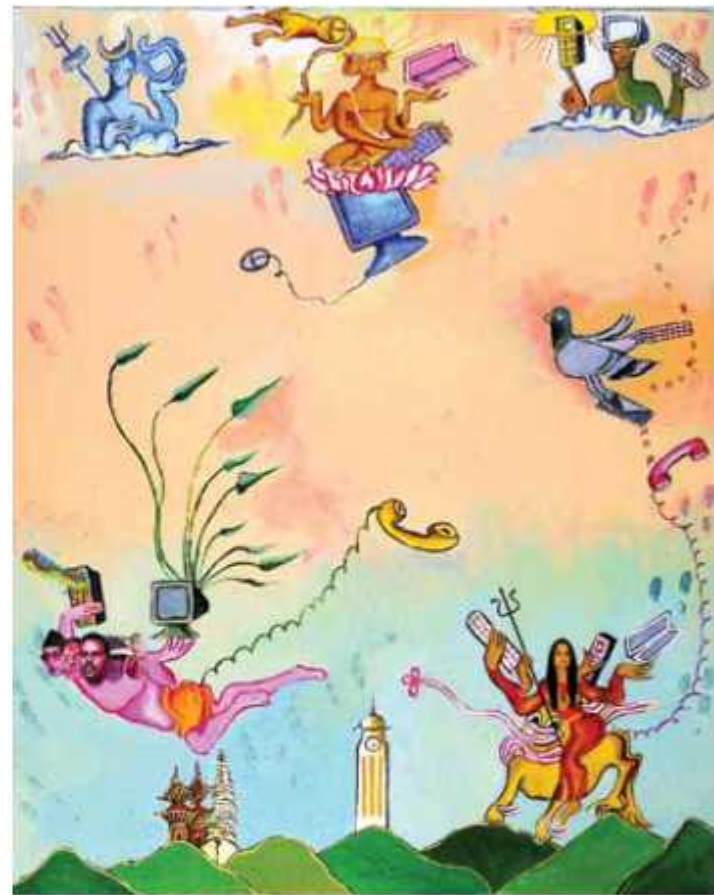


*Love in the Air-Laxmi* | 2008 | Digital on Canvas | 44x38 cm





*Power of Communication* | 2008 | Acrylic on Traditional Canvas |  
21x25 inches



*New Nepal* | 2008 | Acrylic on Traditional Canvas | 15x19 inches

## Gaijatra (2009-2010 AD)

*Gaijatra* series was created back in the year 2010 when the country was in real chaos. The series fully follows the ethos of the Gaijatra festival, a strange mixture of culture and devotion, often uses satires to ridicule the powerful. The paintings parody political fiasco of the time, especially criticizing the power-hungry politicians of Nepal.

In 2019, *Gaijatra* was a part of the exhibition "Nepal Art Now" in Welt Museum, Vienna.

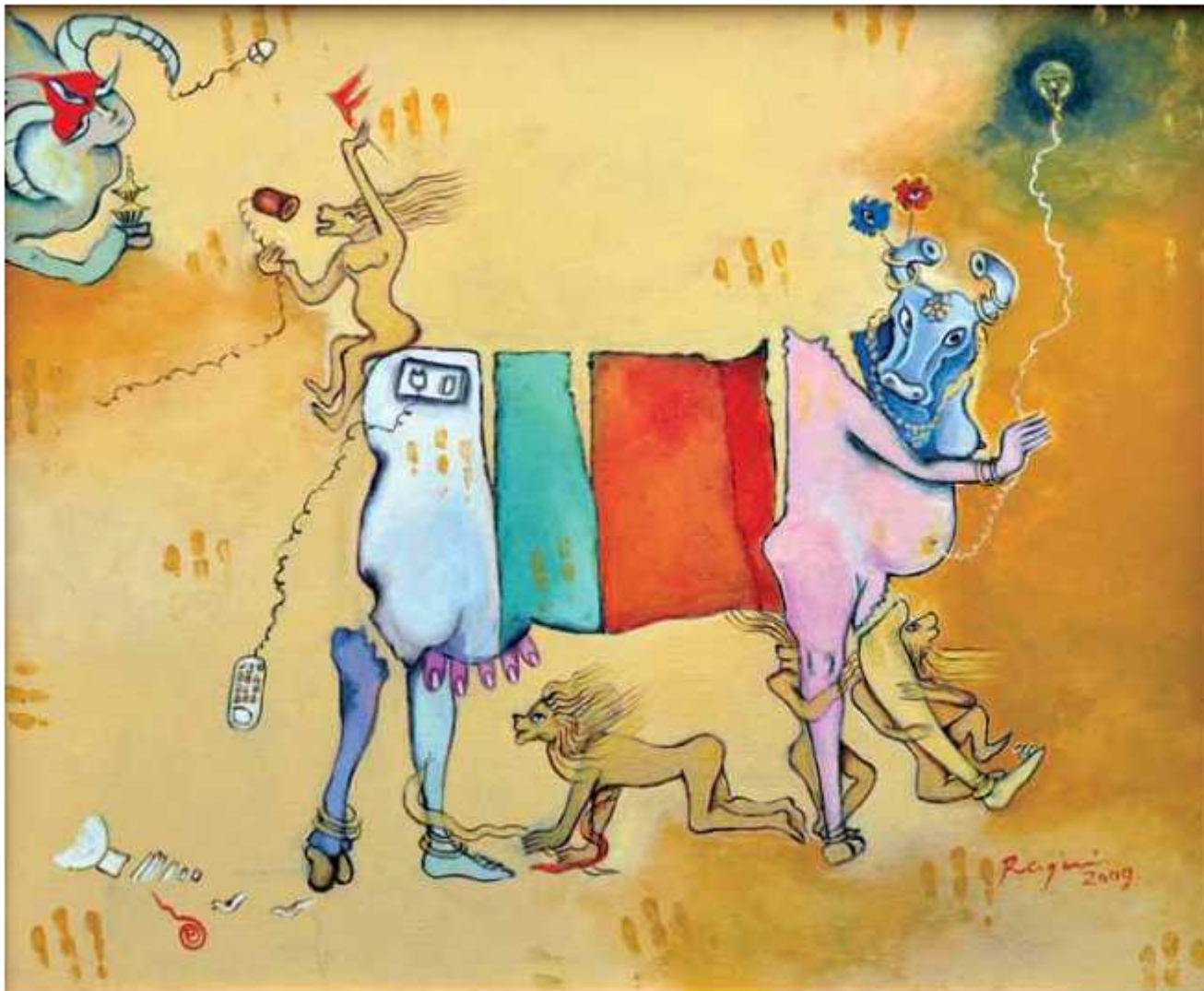


*Mother Nepal as a Horse of the Polity* | 2009 | Acrylic on Canvas | 36×30 inches



*Cross of the Sin* | 2009 | Acrylic on Canvas | 36×30 inches





*Divided Nepal* | 2009 | Acrylic on Canvas | 36x30 inches

## मिथकीय बोध की तीक्ष्णता को संप्रेषित करती रागिनी उपाध्याय ग्रैला

नेपाल के कला जगत में रागिनी उपाध्याय ग्रैला एक बेहद सम्मानित नाम हैं। अभी पिछले दिसंबर की तेरह तारीख को रागिनी जी से मुझे मिलने का सुअवसर प्राप्त हुआ। इस भेंट ने मुझे उनकी कला को और निकट से समझने का मौका दिया। रागिनी नेपाल की आधुनिक कला की विशिष्ट कलाकार हैं जो अपनी कलाकृतियों में नेपाली मिथकों, इतिहास और सामाजिक मूल्यों के ताने बाने को बड़े ही अर्थपूर्ण ढंग से उकेरती हैं।

कला से उनका लगाव बचपन से ही रहा है। लगभग पंद्रह साल की उम्र से उन्होंने विधिवत अपनी कला यात्रा शुरू की। आज सतत कला साधना ने उन्हें न केवल नेपाल वरन विश्व की एक महत्वपूर्ण कलाकार के रूप में मुकम्मल पहचान दिलवायी है। यूँ तो रागिनी कैनवास पर तैल चित्र के माध्यम से अपने को अभिव्यक्त करती हैं। किन्तु प्रिंट मेकिंग यानी छापाकला में भी विशेषज्ञता हासिल कर रखी है। इतना ही नहीं ललित कला अकादेमी, नयी दिल्ली के गद्दी कार्यशाला में भी उन्होंने अपना समय बिताया है। कतिपय इन्हीं वजहों से उनकी कलाकृतियों में विभिन्न कला माध्यमों की तकनीकी दक्षता भी परिलक्षित है। वैसे अपने सृजन क्रम में उन्होंने अन्य कला माध्यमों का भी प्रयोग किया है।

रागिनी के चित्र नेपाली समाज की संवेदनाओं को उकेरने के साथ उसके समाज में व्याप्त स्त्री की स्थिति और पर्यावरण की चिंता को बड़े ही प्रमुखता से प्रस्तुत करते हैं। इनकी कई चित्र श्रृंखला इसकी साक्षी हैं। “गार्डजत्रा” के नाम से 2009 की उनकी पेंटिंग सीरीज समाज, अर्थव्यवस्था और राजनीति में गाय के उपयोग को बड़े ही प्रमुखता से रेखांकित करती है। हालांकि

इस हेतु उन्हें अगर कट्टरपंथियों के आलोचना का शिकार होना पड़ा है तो पुरस्कार भी प्राप्त हुए हैं।

हिंदू देवी देवता को भी अपने चित्रों में रागिनी बड़े ही अर्थपूर्ण ढंग से चित्रित करती हैं। सरस्वती और काली से जुड़ी इनकी चित्रकृति में इस मिथकीय प्रयोग को देखा जा सकता है। रागिनी की सरस्वती आधुनिक काल से पूर्णतः तालमेल मिलाते दिखती हैं। इन चित्रों में सरस्वती के हाथ में मोबाइल फोन है तो सिर पर कंप्यूटर। इसे रागिनी के आधुनिक महिला के अधुनातन ज्ञान की प्राप्ति हेतु नेपाली महिलाओं के रूपांतरण को प्रगट करने का एक बेहद कलात्मक प्रयास के रूप में देखा जा सकता है। रागिनी अपने चित्रों में काली के मिथकीय स्वरूपों का भी प्रयोग करती हैं। वे खुद को भी काली का प्रतिरूप मानती हैं। काली स्त्री दुख और प्रतिरोध के सर्वश्रेष्ठ प्रतीक के रूप में उनके चित्रों में उपस्थित हैं। रागिनी अपने चित्रों में स्त्री के विभिन्न रूपों में रंग भरती उनके मल्टी स्किल्ड प्रतिभा की भी एडवोकेसी करती हैं। दरअसल रागिनी एक टोटल फेमिनिस्ट आर्टिस्ट हैं।

रागिनी के चित्रों में हम मिथकीय प्रतीकों के साथ आधुनिक प्रतीकों की उपस्थिति के साथ मूर्त और अमूर्त चित्रण का भी संतुलित सन्वय देखते हैं। इनके चित्र लोक और समकालीन कला के एक कलात्मक फ्यूजन के रूप में भी उभरते नज़र आते हैं। हम कह सकते हैं कि रागिनी परंपरा के साथ आधुनिकता का अच्छा सम्मिश्रण करती हैं। ये अपने जड़ों से उनके जुड़े रहने को दर्शाता है तो आधुनिकता को स्वीकारने के उनके आग्रह को भी प्रगट करता है।



रागिनी नेपाल में कला शिक्षण के क्षेत्र में भी उल्लेखनीय स्थान रखती हैं। वे नेपाल के फाइन आर्ट एकेडमी की चांसलर रही हैं। अपने चार साल के कार्यकाल में रागिनी ने कला शिक्षण के क्षेत्र कई नवाचारी प्रयोग किए और उन्हें सफलता के सूत्र के रूप में स्थापित किया।

रागिनी ने अपनी कला शिक्षा कालेज आफ आर्ट्स, लखनऊ (भारत) से हासिल की। यहां से इन्होंने फाइन आर्ट्स में ग्रेजुएट की डिग्री ली। तीस सालों से ज्यादा समय से वे समकालीन कला की दुनिया में सक्रिय हैं और नित नए कृतियों के साथ उपस्थित रही हैं। अपने चित्रों से युवाओं को सकारात्मक रूप से जोड़ने वाली रागिनी का मत है कि संस्कृति को नए रूप और रंग में उकेर वो युवाओं को संस्कृति के प्रति आकर्षित करती हैं और उनसे जोड़ती भी हैं। लोक कला, मिथकीय अवधारणा और कंटंपरेरी आर्ट्स के फ्यूजन को अपनी कला में स्थान देने वाली रागिनी के कला का स्वर और तेवर विद्रोहिणी का रहा है। वे कहती भी हैं कि उनकी कला उनकी पीड़ा के घनीभूत रंगों का प्रगट रूप है। वे यह भी कहती हैं कला उनके लिए सम्पूर्ण मानवीय संवेदनाओं के प्रकटीकरण का एक सशक्त माध्यम है। कला उनकी पीड़ा, सुख और हास का इंद्रधनुष है।

अपने चित्रों में रागिनी विभिन्न प्रतीकों का प्रयोग करती हैं। विभिन्न हिंदू देवी-देवता, गाय, घड़ी, त्रिशूल आदि को वे अपनी कला से जोड़ सशक्त रूप से अभिव्यक्त करती हैं। उनकी कला का शिल्प विद्रोह का सौन्दर्य निर्मित करता है। उनकी एक और पेंटिंग सीरीज "द टाइम व्हील-2005" है। इसमें वे घड़ी को प्रतीक रूप में चित्रित करते समय के दार्शनिक तत्व को उभारती हैं। रागिनी ने न केवल घड़ी वरन सांप को भी अपनी कलाकृतियों में जगह दी है। वे कहती हैं कि सांप हमारी इच्छाओं, कामनाओं का प्रतीक है। वे भगवान शिव को सांप की माला पहने देखती हैं तो भगवान विष्णु को क्षीरसागर में नागों

की शय्या पर सोते। सांप जो मानवीय इच्छाओं का प्रतीक है उनको कंट्रोल करने की जरूरत की महत्ता को चित्रित करती उनकी कई कलाकृतियां उल्लेखनीय हैं। वे मानव जीवन की सफलता में कामनाओं के संतुलन और नियंत्रण पर बल देती हुई कृतियों के माध्यम से युवाओं को सफल जीवन के राज से रूबरू कराती हैं।

सांप के अतिरिक्त अपनी कृतियों में त्रिशूल के भी महत्व को वे रेखांकित करती हैं। उनके कला पात्र त्रिशूल को सिर पर धारण करता है। बाद में यही पात्र जलते सुरज को कपाल पर धारण करते इनकी रचनाओं में दृष्टिगोचर होते हैं। ये सारे प्रतीक उनकी मिथकीय बोध की तीक्ष्णता को संप्रेषित करते हैं, एवं उनकी चित्र कृतियों को न केवल विशेष बनाते हैं बल्कि विद्रोह के स्वर को एक नया शिल्प प्रदान करते हैं। इस तरह रागिनी एक नई कला भाषा गढ़ती हैं और आम लोगों को उनसे जोड़ती हैं।

इस तरह समग्रता में जब हम रागिनी उपाध्याय ग्रैला के पेंटिंग्स को देखते हैं तो पाते हैं कि कला जगत में अपनी उपस्थिति से उन्होंने न केवल नेपाल वरन विश्व कला को समृद्ध किया है। कला के नए स्वर, तेवर और भाषा के साथ रागिनी एक नए व्याकरण को भी गढ़ती नज़र आती हैं। हम ऐसे चित्रकार से और रचनाओं की आशा के साथ कामना करते हैं कि सतत कलाकर्म में रत रागिनी उपाध्याय ग्रैला हमेशा स्वस्थ एवं सफल रहें।

**अशोक कुमार सिन्हा**

एडीशनल डायरेक्टर,  
बिहार म्यूजियम, पटना

## Nature Speaks (2011-2019 AD)

*Nature Speaks* is inspired by nature's suffering and devastation under modernization. Felling of trees, dumping of waste in the river and sea, polluting the air endlessly in the name of so-called development and for the sake of human comfort cannot continue without consequences. Climate change is the nature's response to our cruelties and the result are unpredictable disasters like flood, drought, landslides, etc.



*Beauty in Pollution* | 2019 | Acrylic on Canvas | 26x34 inches



*Protect Our Love III* | 2011 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches





*Justice for Mother Earth* | 2019 | Acrylic on Canvas | 99x76 cm

## Suzhou Tianma Culture Communication Co. LTD

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Glad to hear that my good friend Ragini Upadhyay Grela's "Retrospective" exhibition will open on March 8, 2023.

Eight years ago, a chance encounter brought me to Ragini Upadhyay Grela's personal studio in Kathmandu, Nepal. Stepping into the courtyard, I was deeply attracted by the thick artistic atmosphere and her highly personalized works. We talked a lot that day and came up with the idea of introducing Ms. Ragini Upadhyay Grela's work to China.

At the start of the New Year in January 2016, "Wishes", the first solo exhibition of works by Ragini Upadhyay Grela in China, opened in the beautiful garden city of Suzhou. More than 200 people from government departments, artists, associations, painting and calligraphy artists, teachers and students of art colleges, people from all walks of life and more than 10 news media units attended the opening ceremony. Jiangsu Province Suzhou City, many newspapers, Internet multimedia reports. The audience kept coming. During this period the Chinese and Nepali artists exchange forum was also held. The exhibition was a great success. In September 2017, Ragini Upadhyay Grela is back in China with her new works. "From the Heart" personal works exhibition was held in Shanghai. And accepted a number of news media live interview. The work was well received by the audience.

In May 2018, after an eight-month hiatus, Ragini Upadhyay Grela personal exhibition of "Words in the Heart" is on display at the Culture and Art Center of Xianghai Zen Temple in Jiaxing, Zhejiang Province. The language of art from the Buddha's birthplace 2,500 years ago seeks soulmates in the Buddhist ashrams of China.

In January 2020, Ragini Upadhyay Grela is back in China, holding her fourth and fifth solo exhibitions "Calling" in Shanghai and Suzhou. In the cover work, the national flowers of China and Nepal, peony and cuckoo, are personified on the heads of two Chinese and Nepali girls. The picture of wearing masks and gazing at the polluted land with melancholy eyes has become an eternal symbol of history.

Five times we held the exhibition of Ragini's personal works, I have had many in-depth conversations, communication and discussions, which have given me a more in-depth and comprehensive understanding of her creative ideas, expressive intentions and artistic styles. As I wrote in the preface of the exhibition "Words of the Heart", she interprets her thinking and understanding of issues and social phenomena such as humanity, religion, environmental protection, human and nature with her unique perspective and creative forms of artistic expression. As an iconoclastic painter, Ragini Upadhyay Grela's peacock, butterfly, eye, sun, water, tree, lotus, rose, snake, heart, line and so on are endowed with profound meaning.

Wish this "Retrospective" exhibition a great success!

May the friendship between the people of China and Nepal last forever!

*Tianhong Tang*

Chairman, Suzhou Tianma Culture Communication Co. LTD  
January 16, 2023



## Wishes-China Influence (2015-2016 AD)

Wishes series was created after the artist's first visit to China in 2015. It is inspired by the culture and religious beliefs of China regarding temples and nature. The artist noticed that people all over the world tied threads in temples and trees, wishing for their desires to come true. In 'Connecting Wishes' the Laughing Buddha looks below on the never ending threads of human wishes. The works depict that the nature god has been fulfilling several wishes of human beings but the wishes alas, are never ending. Now it is time for us to think about wishes of the Nature God.



*Human Wishes-1* | 2015 | Acrylic | 30x39.5 inches



*Connecting Wishes-2* | 2015 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches



Key of Wishes | 2015 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches





*Human Wishes-4* | 2015 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches



*Human Wishes-5* | 2015 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches



*Human Wishes-2* | 2015 | Acrylic | 30x39.5 inches



*Key of Wishes-3* | 2015 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches

## Motherhood (2016-2017 AD)

*Motherhood* series has been created by the artist inspired by her experience of pregnancy in the year 1995 and in the loving memory of her beloved daughter Shivata. Motherhood, for the artist, is the most beautiful gift from God. She felt a direct connection between her own body and the unborn child. While pregnant, the breast becomes very soft and tender like a lotus. Each part of the body becomes like a blossomed lotus in different colors and moods. The connection of the baby with mother's uterus, vagina, and vulva creates an immense softness and feelings of love. The journey of pregnancy to the artist was one of the most special moments of her life. Although there was no language for communication between the mother and the unborn child, the connection between two hearts made them feel complete.

Lotus also has a significant meaning in Hindu mythology.



*Blossom of My Pregnancy* | 2019 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches



*Breast in Romance* | 2019 | Acrylic | 27x35 inches





*Crying Breast* | 2019 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches





*Breast in Dream* | 2019 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches



*Pregnant Breast* | 2019 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches



*Pink Breast* | 2019 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches



*Pregnant Breast* | 2019 | Acrylic | 30x39.5 inches

## Pain and Liberation in Ragini Upadhyay's Paintings

Dr. Abhi Subedi

Ragini Upadhyay has executed paintings in different series under some important thematic nomenclatures. There are variations in the painting in each 'series' that broadly indicate the shifts in the painter's style. I visited her abode with paintings and other accoutrements lying in different rooms. I was visiting her studio and working spaces after a gap of many years. So much water has flown under the Bagmati Bridge since then. I have written several catalogue articles for her paintings for a period spanning several decades. One mantra that I have seen in Ragini's paintings over these years is her sense of continuity and her capacity to turn the various modes of consciousness into different forms of art. A brilliant artist with intaglio as her modus operandi, Rangi has made experiments with all kinds of styles and experiments over the years.

In the present series of works she has strongly turned to body as the locus or the universe of her art. The previous exteriority that characterised her paintings with sometimes politics, mismanagements and the brazen faces of the social changes has turned into the great interiority in these series of paintings. Though the viewers may get the impression of the apocalyptic imaginaire of the artist in these paintings, a careful study of them reveals a sense of amelioration and liberation that the artist has visualised through the paintings that are time sensitive and deeply felt motifs. The other aspect of these paintings is the articulation of the sense of pain projected through mainly figurality, use of

primary colours and their free admixtures. The artist has used the pigments to create not the fine and pensive sense of aesthetics but to articulate the bold themes. It seems we have lived through various overtly loud themes of sufferings and uncertainties over time such as the pandemics and ecological disasters.

Expression of pain in art is an important subject. There is an outstanding debate going on in art and literature about this. The question is, do the art works reflect the subjectivity and the personal pain of the painter? The modernist English poet T.S. Eliot famously says, the man who suffers and the mind which creates are separate. This is the mantra of the impersonality of art and literature. Pablo Picasso tried to capture the pain and horror of his native town in the Basque Province named Guernica after the German planes bombed it in the Spanish Civil war in 1937. Picasso captures the pain suffered by people in this painting, but his own pain can be gauged only by his choice of the motif and his depiction of the horrid conditions. Ragini Upadhyay's use of the style of the modernist paintings says that she has drawn wisdom and strength from the difficult moments suffered individually and collectively. But she has chosen to express her sense of pain in the paintings through the use of motifs, metaphors, figurality, colour combinations and strong brushstrokes.

In this short review I want to allude to my personal knowledge and impression about Ragini's art works in the past and how I have



found her present works maintaining the continuity and changes as demanded by our times, and very importantly, experienced by the artist herself. The artist has introduced one very powerful element in these paintings—her self, her body and the overt use of the language of that in the paintings. For heuristic reasons Ragini has named her paintings in different thematic series. The series are overtly named as melancholy, ash, corona and so on. But they are bound by the personal projection by the painter. For those of us who are familiar with her moments of personal tragedy like the demise of her daughter Shivatha by a very rare disease while she was studying in Europe away from her mother, and the story of how the artist endured the pain, the paintings become very articulate. Those who know the artist closely can say how she was devastated by the death of Shivatha who was also a talented budding artist. This reference is important to understand some of the paintings whose motifs emanate from that pain suffered by the artist mother. The paintings show how the artist turns the mother's body, her moments of endurance and pain into art. Through the projection of breasts, vagina and the pregnancy that constitute the power of mother's body do the paintings dramatize the energy. Ragini uses strong figurality and texture in the paintings for that. These elements show that mother's body is a dynamic not a static entity. Ragini has even used the iconography of Ardhanareeshvara or the image of Lord Shiva whose half is the woman or his consort Parvati or Shakti. She has played freely with this imagery to evoke the engaging power of woman.

In Ragini's paintings in these series figurality and abstract concepts become methodological components of the work of art. In that sense Ragini Upadhyay's paintings on display have strong linguistic components. Each figure, each composition with the striking linearity of the figures and the articulate use of colours and brush strokes speak loudly. That is a linguistic component of the paintings. Ragini unlike other painters is known to explain her works. I would call that meta-artistic perception. Each painting

on display is open for such meta-artistic explanation. The artist wants to tell the stories associated with tragedy, philosophy, body, maternity and the difficult times.

Ragini evokes the paintings of the Mexican painter Freda Kahlo (1907-1954) who makes paintings to depict her own physical and emotional pain caused by her multiple body surgeries and emotional damage. The ash series that speak directly through primary colours maintain a thematic continuity. The artist makes various forms of self-portraits and juxtaposes them with the themes of universal nature. Mother is at the centre. The mother figure takes various avatars from animals to the humans and the divine. Kali's imagery is very strong. The image of Kali wearing garland of human skulls is a unique experiment in this series that combines maternity, woman, grief and hard times for the humans. Ragini evokes abstract concepts like truth and fragility of life. Such abstract themes of life and death are presented in some paintings through the predominant use of blue. But the binary structure of earth and sky, cloud and water, strong projection of birth and mother's power represents the positive vision of creation and continuity.

The paintings of Ragini Upadhyay in general represent continuity in terms of her semi surrealist and figural works that combine the subtlety of her intaglio art works. But In this series Ragini has treated the predominantly strong themes of life, birth and death. The feature of continuity, however, can be seen in her treatment of motifs and her consummate styles and compositions. A poetic, calm, and nirvanic sense of life and liberation pervades behind the splash of the thematic and stylistic experiments of Ragini Upadhyay's paintings on display.

Mandikhatar  
February, 2023



## Ashes (2017-2019 AD)

Loosing her beloved daughter Shivata and her mother within the same year completely changed Ragini's world. Her creativity sought for new fields planted with sadness and a desire to reconnect with Shivata beyond death.



*Shivata* | 2017 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches



*Beauty with Pain* | 2017 | Acrylic | 30x36 inches



Amma | 2017 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches



*Broken Wing of You & Me* | 2017 | Acrylic | 30x36 inches



*Lust For Life* | 2020 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches





*Broken Comb* | 2017 | Acrylic | 30x36 inches



*Kangaroo Love* | 2019 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches



*Life Forest* | 2020 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches



*God Has No Answer* | 2020 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches



*Soul & Body* | 2019 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches





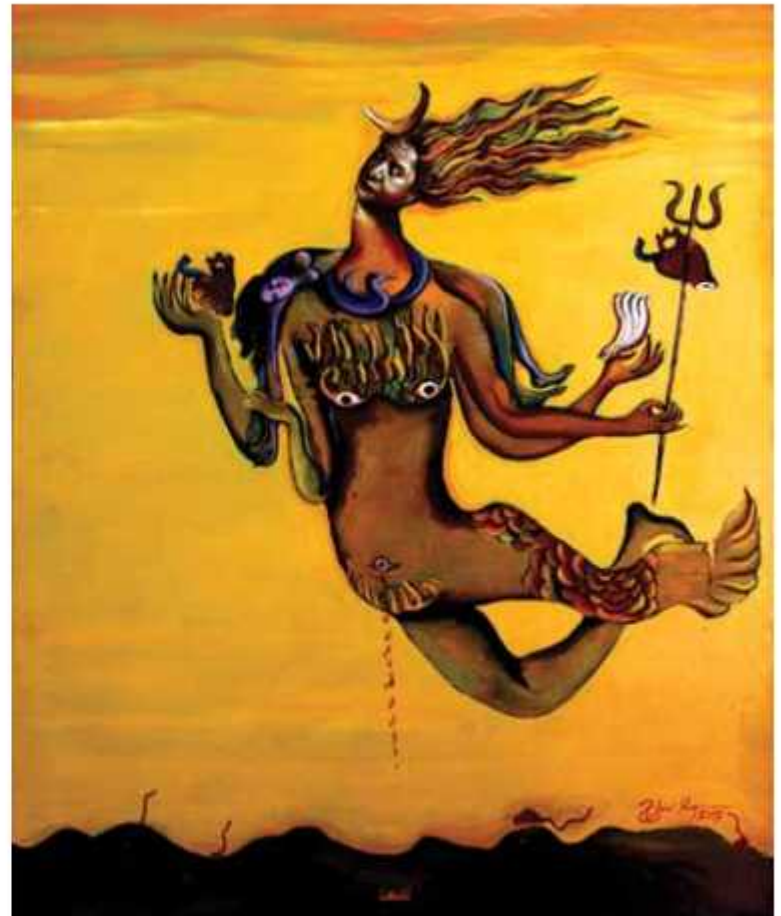
*Restless Horse* | 2018 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches



*Sky & Earth* | 2017 | Acrylic | 30x43.5 inches



*In My Heart* | 2018 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches



*Shiv Ragini* | 2017 | Acrylic | 30x36 inches



# THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS, JAMAICA, WEST INDIES

**INSTITUTE FOR GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**

**REGIONAL COORDINATING OFFICE**

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## Ragini Upadhyay—An Artist for Our Times

In January 2019, I traveled to Nepal for a sabbatical project where I would eagerly meet Ragini Upadhaya Grela, whose vibrant works in oil, acrylic, watercolor, and printmaking reveal influences from Indian, European, Nepali, Hindu and Buddhist art and artists Chagall, Van Gogh, Dali, and Amrita Shergril. Prior to traveling to Nepal to meet her, I had come across her works on the internet, following the suggestion of a Nepali colleague. Compelled and intrigued, months before my sabbatical began, I reached out to her, and we spent several months communicating via e-mail before we finally had the opportunity to meet in person. As a professor of anthropology who teaches about women in global art movements, I was curious about the growing number of women artists in Nepal, a society in which traditionally, men of a particular caste became artists. I had come across Ragini Upadhyay's work online and was drawn especially to her Nature Speak series. In this series, Ragini's images mourn for the loss of pristine nature, castigate the pollution and the degradation of our Mother Earth through her beautifully rendered anthropomorphized tree families holding one another amidst floating debris, smoke, and dying landscapes. Didactic goddesses embodied as rivers, rush through water with floating banana peels and bottles, their faces recording alarm, amplify human shortsightedness. Ragini's series opens the human heart to other living beings, demanding that we humans decenter ourselves and feel compassion for the victims of our greed. Her series spoke a universal message, while harnessing the cultural particulars of Nepal's Hindu and Buddhist spirituality to reflect in the real world, those values upheld in religious traditions.



Her spotlight on discrimination against women also emerges in these and other works as she refutes the hypocrisy of people who uphold women's beauty and power through goddesses yet inflict and ignore violence against women and girls. Her powerful social and political critique raises consciousness through stories painted in dream-like surrealism, symbolic references that are both culturally specific and universal.

Meeting in Nepal, we forged a quick bond based on shared interest and my love of her artistry. Subsequently, I invited Ragini to travel to the United States to hold her first US gallery exhibits both at Bridgewater State University in Massachusetts where I teach and at the Skye Gallery in Providence, Rhode Island where I live. Jonny Skye, gallery owner, embraced the opportunity, and Ragini sent selections of her works to prepare for a month-long showing in the spring of 2020. Alas, the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted our well-laid plans requiring postponement till spring of 2022. Still, Jonny created a beautiful exhibit titled "Intertwined" and opened it up to small numbers of viewers. Of the works in the exhibit, Jonny wrote:

Condemning the tragic human degradation of the natural world, Grela's work reminds us how we are intertwined. Her work is as relevant and essential today as ever. Humanity's confusion with power and politics separates us from the source of life, the earth, our mother, and the continuing extraction of her resources at a alarming rate—leaving behind spoiled water, air, and waste. The resulting suffering is carefully exposed in Grela's painting. Her lifelong work has and continues to call the siren. She gracefully weaves the wisdoms of Nepali culture and its symbols to remind us, more to announce, the errors of our ways and push us toward a more loving, symbiotic relationship with each other and the planet. The importance of the voices of women in contemporary art can never be understated. Grela provides us a vision and a warning while carving a pathway for many women creatives to come. Honoring her accomplished, artistic career, given the struggles inherent and her prolific practice, is more than well deserved.

Explaining her issue-based art in a public lecture on The Challenges of Women Artists in South Asia on March 16, 2022, Ragini explained her creative process to a rapt audience. In a moment in real time that seemed to simulate her artwork itself, Ragini shared how she herself became an embodiment of the Goddess of Time, Kali who transforms darkness into light through her fierce love of all of creation. There Ragini stood, her arms out with her fists clenched, mirroring for us how the spirit of Kali entered her, inspired her, became her muse, compelling her paintbrush not only as a warning, but to call forth beauty, daring us to dream a new world into existence as she has on her canvasses, leading the way.



Diana J. Fox, PhD  
University Director, IGDS-RCO

## Corona Tears (2020-2022 AD)

*Corona Tears* was created in 2020 after Covid-19 pandemic. The artist understood that the pandemic and the subsequent tears we shed because of it was a result of the pain and suffering we as humans, have brought to animals and nature. It is our *Karma*, the offering that we bestowed to the animals has returned to us. Now it is time to think about respecting all the animals and nature to create balance on earth.



*Corona Safety Love* | 2020 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches



*Karma Wheel* | 2020 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches



*Mother Nature in Corona Time* | 2020 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches





Corona Safety Tools | 2020 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches



Lockdown Kiss | 2020 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches



*Rope of Karma* | 2020 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches





*Breast of Earth* | 2021 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches



*God & Goddess on the Earth* | 2020 | Acrylic | 30x40 inches



## **RAGINI UPADHAYAY**

(Artist/Printmaker)

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Facebook : <https://www.facebook.com/raginiu>

**Former Chancellor**, Nepal Academy of Fine Arts (2014-2018)

**Former President**, Women Artists' Group of Nepal (WAGON)

**Former Director**, Artist Proof Gallery, Nepal

**Member**, BP Koirala India-Nepal Foundation (BPKF)

**President**, Shivata Love Foundation, Nepal

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## **EDUCATION**

1982 Graduated in Fine Arts from Lucknow College of Arts and Crafts,  
Lucknow, India

1983-85 Studied the Print's Techniques at the Artist Corner-Lalit Kala  
Academy, Garhi, New Delhi, India

1987 Peacock Printmaker, Aberdeen, Scotland, Fellowship Sponsored by  
the British Council

1988 Oxford Printmaker, England, Fellowship Sponsored by the British  
Council

1989 Kunste Akademie, Stuttgart, Sponsored by Deutsch-Nepalischen  
Hilfsgemeinschaft E.V., Stuttgart, Germany

## PROFESSIONAL APPOINTMENTS

- 1992 Guest Artist at the Radier Werkstadt, Kampen Sylt, Germany  
1994 Guest Artist at the Radier Werkstadt, Kampen Sylt, Germany  
1996 Guest Artist at the Radier Werkstadt, Kampen Sylt, Germany  
1996 Visiting Lecturer at the Lahti's Fine Art Institute and Türku Fine Art Institute, Finland  
1996 Visiting Lecturer at Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, Karachi, Pakistan  
1998 Presentation on Women Issue Paintings at Kulturmagasinet Museum, Helsingborg, Sweden  
1999 Talk Program on 'Ragini Art' at Kulturmagasinet Museum, Helsingborg, Sweden  
2006 Visiting Lecturer at Karachi School of Arts, Karachi, Pakistan  
2007 Workshop on Nepali Paper on Etching at Institute of Art and Design, University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Pakistan  
2008 Presentation on Nepalese Contemporary Women Artists at International Art Conference, Jamshoro, Sindh, Pakistan  
2009 Presentation on 'Ragini Art' at Pekka Halonen Academy of Art, Tuusula, Finland  
2009 Presentation on Work Series *Time Wheel* at University of Art and Design, Helsinki, Finland  
2010 Presentation on 'Ragini Art' at FOMMA, Karachi, Pakistan  
2011 Presentation on 'Ragini Art' at National Council of Art (NCA), Islamabad, Pakistan  
2011 Workshop Presentation on Nepali Paper on Etching at Rawalpindi College of Art, Rawalpindi, Pakistan  
2012 Guest of Honour and Presentation on 'Ragini Art' at Gorakhpur International Art Conference, Gorakhpur, India  
2013 Presentation on Work Series *People's Power* on Nepal Day at R. Joest, Museum Köln, Germany  
2014-2018 Chancellor of Nepalese Fine Arts Academy

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1979 National Association of Fine Arts, Kathmandu, Nepal in the Presence of Late Poet Bal Krishna Sama  
1980 Royal Nepal Airlines, Kathmandu, Nepal  
1981 October Gallery, Vajra Hotel, Kathmandu, Nepal

- 1981 Fine Art Academy of Lucknow, India, Sponsored by Lalit Kala Academy of Lucknow and Inaugurated by Late Nepalese Prime Minister B.P. Koirala  
1982 Morya Hotel, Patna, India  
1983 Fine Art Academy of India, Ravindra Bhawan, New Delhi, Sponsored by the Nepalese Embassy in India  
1985 October Gallery in Vajra Hotel, Kathmandu, Nepal  
1986 National Association of Fine Arts, Kathmandu, Inaugurated by Her Majesty the Queen Aishwarya of Nepal  
1987 October Gallery at Vajra Hotel, Kathmandu, Nepal  
1988 British Council Hall, Kathmandu, Nepal, Sponsored by British Council, Nepal, Inaugurated by the Late Prime Minister Mr. Marich Man Singh  
1989 Deutsch-Nepalischen Hilfsgemeinschaft e.v., Stuttgart, Germany  
1990 Goethe Institute Hall, Sponsored by Goethe Institute, Frankfurt, Germany, Guests of Honours: the Consul of Nepal in Frankfurt and Late Mrs. Busak  
1990 Goethe Institute Hall, Sponsored by Goethe Institute, Schwäbisch Hall, Germany  
1990 Goethe Institute, Kathmandu, Nepal, Inaugurated by the Late Prime Minister Mr. Krishna Prasad Bhattarai  
1991 Shimba Gallery, Tokushima, Japan  
1991 Ujuka Gallery, Naruto, Japan  
1991 Hananj Restaurant and gallery, Kamojima, Japan  
1992 British Council Hall, Sponsored by British Council, Kathmandu, Nepal  
1992 Galerie Art du Temps, Verviers, Belgium  
1992 Galerie Eglau, Radier Werkstadt, Kampen, Germany  
1994 French Cultural Centre, Sponsored by French Cultural Centre, Kathmandu, Nepal - *Politics, Dust and Love*  
1994 Galerie Eglau, Radier Werkstadt, Kampen, Germany  
1994 Gallery Gamlastan, Helsingborg, Sweden  
1995 National Fine Art Association, Kathmandu, Nepal - *The Myth of Politics*  
1995 Gallery S, Eupen, Belgium  
1996 Gallery Joella, Türku, Finland - *Windows*  
1996 Majuma Art Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan  
1997 Goethe Institute, Kathmandu, Nepal - *Goddesses and Women, Mythology and Reality*



- 1997 Grand Hotel, Taipei, Taiwan, as part of the YWCA World Meeting on 'Violence Against Women'
- 1998 Gallery Oljemark, Helsinki, Sponsored by the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Nepal Finland Society - *Goddesses and Women, Mythology and Reality*
- 1998 Gallery Harmaja, Oulu, Finland, Sponsored by the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- 1999 Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu, Nepal - *Sensitive Women*
- 1999 Gallery Bellange, Atelje, Stockholm, Sweden - *Sensitive Women*
- 2001 Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu, Nepal - *Ragini's Odyssey 2001*, Inaugurated by her Majesty the Queen Aishwarya of Nepal
- 2001 Studio am Schloss, Berlin, Germany
- 2001 Atelier I.S., Eupen, Belgium, Inaugurated by H.E. Kedar Bhakta Shrestha, Ambassador of Nepal to the EU
- 2002 Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu, Nepal - *The Sun Never Dies, Buddha Lights and Truth Shines*
- 2002 Bilderwand Manufaktur (Culture House), Schorndorf, Germany
- 2002 Centrum Kultury 1 Języka Nlemieckiego, Zielona Gora, Poland
- 2003 Culture Hall, Organized by Rotary Club, Halle, Belgium- *The Sun Never Dies, Buddha Lights and Truth Shines*
- 2005 Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu, Nepal - *Time Wheel*
- 2006 Academy of Fine Art and Literature, New Delhi, India Sponsored by Indian Council for Cultural Relations - *Time Wheel*
- 2006 ICCR Hall, Hyderabad, Sponsored by Indian Council for Cultural Relations - *Time Wheel*
- 2006 National Association of Fine Arts Gallery, Kathmandu, Nepal Inaugurated by Former Deputy Prime Minister KP Oli - *People's Power*
- 2007 Majmua Art Gallery, Karachi Pakistan - *Sound of Love*
- 2007 Art Shop, Kathmandu, Nepal - *Sound of Love*
- 2007 Culture House (Manufaktur) Schorndorf, Germany - *People's Power*
- 2008 Venetian Multiversal Academy, Vienna, Austria
- 2009 Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu, Nepal - *Love in the Air*
- 2009 Gallery Riddaren, Stockholm, Sweden - *Love in the Air*
- 2010 Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu, Nepal - *Gajatra Nepal*
- 2010 Gallery 919, Karachi, Pakistan - *Love in the Air*
- 2011 Museum Art Gallery, Organized by The Gaekwad Art Foundation, Mumbai, India - *Nature Speaks*
- 2012 Solace International Designs, Kathmandu, Nepal - *Nature Speaks*

- 2013 Studio am Schloss, Berlin, Germany - *Nature Speaks*
- 2013 Saemmer, Teppicharchitektur, Munich, Germany
- 2014 Culture Council, Chaudfontaine, Belgium - *Preserve Nature for Our Future*
- 2014 Atelier I.S., Walhom, Belgium
- 2016 Wang Xiaohui Art Museum, Suzhou, China 2017 Xiao Hui Wang Art Space, Shanghai, China
- 2018 Atelier I.S., Walhom, Belgium
- 2019 Kathmandu Gallery, Nepal
- 2020 Skype Gallery, Boston, U.S.
- 2020 South Asia Culture Center, Shanghai, China
- 2020 Online Exhibition at Gallery 6 Islamabad, Pakistan
- 2022 Maxwell library, bridge Water State University, USA
- 2023 Ragini Upadhyay Retrospective Exhibition, Organized by Siddhartha Art Gallery

## GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1985 Nepal Association of Fine Arts (NAFA), Naxal, Kathmandu, Nepal
- 1986 Nepal Association of Fine Arts (NAFA), Naxal, Kathmandu, Nepal
- 1988 Nepal Association of Fine Arts (NAFA), Naxal, Kathmandu, Nepal
- 1999 Patan Museum, Lalitpur, Nepal, International Women Artists Exhibition - *Women A Commitment*
- 2002 Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu, Nepal - *Made in Janakpur- A Mithila Yatra*
- 2003 Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu, Nepal - *Himalayan Expression 2003*
- 2007 Art Shop, Kathmandu, Nepal, Organized by Women Artists Group of Nepal - *Shakti*
- 2007 Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu, Nepal, Sponsored by BP Koirala India-Nepal Foundation - *Ek Raat*
- 2008 Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu, Nepal
- 2008 Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu, Nepal, *Double Vision Group Exhibition*
- 2008 Imago Dei Cage Gallery, Gairidhara - WAGON Workshop
- 2010 Artist Proof, Lalitpur, Nepal - *Contemporary Nepalese Printmakers*
- 2010 Siddhartha Art Gallery, Kathmandu, Nepal - *Celebrating Line*
- 2013 Artist Proof, Lalitpur, Nepal, Sponsored by BP Koirala India Nepal Foundation- *Search for Ethics*

- 2013 Park Gallery, Lalitpur, Nepal - *Emergence of Nepali Modern Art 1960-80 AD*
- 2014 Park Gallery, Lalitpur, Nepal, Sponsored by BP Koirala India-Nepal Foundation - *BP Ko Samjhanama*
- 2014 Imageark, Patan, Nepal - *Paribartan Sochma: Understanding Gender*
- 2015 National Art Exhibition, NAFA I, Nepal
- 2016 National Art Exhibition, Art Council, Nepal
- 2017 National Art Exhibition, Art Council, Nepal
- 2018 National Art Exhibition, Art Council, Nepal
- 2020 Awadhi Art Promotion, Art Council, organized by SLFN and supported by BPKF, Indian Embassy
- 2021 150 Years of Mahatma Gandhi, organized by SLFN and supported by BPKF, Indian Embassy

## INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITIONS

- 1979 College of Arts and Crafts, Lucknow, India
- 1980 Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Calcutta, India
- 1980 Madras, India
- 1980 Srinagar, India
- 1982 Lalit Kala Academy, Lucknow, India
- 1983 International Biennial, Ljubljana (Ex-Yugoslavia)
- 1983 International Print Graphic Exhibition, New Delhi, India
- 1983 International Asian Biennial, Dhaka, Bangladesh
- 1986 British International Print Biennial, Cardwright Hall, Bradford, England
- 1988 Hananji Gallery, Tokushima, Japan
- 1990 Arijano, Italy
- 1991 Osaka Triennial, Japan
- 1992 Luxembourg
- 1992 Liège, Belgium
- 1994 Atelier I.S. Gallery, Eupen, Belgium
- 1995 Lahti Museum, Lahti, Finland-Nepal Group Exhibition Aesthetics in Practice Conference
- 1996 Lahti University Hall, Lahti, Finland
- 2003 Habiart Gallery, New Delhi, India, Organized by Siddhartha Art Gallery - *Himalayan Expression 2003*
- 2007 Gallery Open Eye, Edinburgh, Scotland, UK - *Double Vision Group Exhibition*

- 2008 Jamshoro School of Art and Design Gallery, Pakistan
- 2008 Kunste Centrum, Haarlem, Holland - *Double Vision Group Exhibition*
- 2009 Siddhartha Art Gallery, International Art Exhibition - *Separating Myth from Reality Status of Women*
- 2010 London, UK, Organized by Siddhartha Art Gallery
- 2010 Artistproof Gallery, Antwerp, Belgium - *Double Vision Group Exhibition*
- 2011 Gallery 6, Islamabad, Pakistan
- 2012 Satrang Gallery, Islamabad, Pakistan - *Double Vision Group Exhibition*
- 2012 Neerja Modi Art Centre, Jaipur, India
- 2012 Gorakhpur Fine Art Faculty, Gorakhpur, India
- 2014 Artistproof Gallery, Antwerp, Belgium - *Exhibition 60/60 2017*
- 2017 Korea-Nepal International Art Exchange Exhibition, titled *Draw the Himalayas*, Korea
- 2018 18th Bangladesh Biennale, Invited as Guest Artist, Bangladesh Shilpakala
- 2021 I.S. Surean Atelier Gallery, Walhorn, Belgium to support Flood victims in Belgium

## ATTENDED WORKSHOPS

- 2002 Dolakha, Nepal, Sponsored by Nepal Academy Organized by Lalit Kala Academy
- 2006 Hyderabad, India, SAARC Countries Artists Workshop on the Occasion of Golden Jubilee of Lalit Kala Academy
- 2006 Mandala, Organized by Women Artists Group of Nepal
- 2007 Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, SAARC Countries Artists Workshop Organized by Indian Council for Cultural Relations and SEHER Organization
- 2007 Fine Art Faculty Hall, Benaras, India, with Indian Artists - *Ek Raat* Organized by BPKF
- 2008 Nagpokhari, Kathmandu, Organized by Women Artists Group of Nepal - *Shakti*
- 2008 Darjeeling, India, Nepali Sahitya Sansthan- *BP Ko Samjhanama* Organized by BPKF
- 2009 Nepal Art Council, Organized by Women Artists' Group of Nepal to Support Flood Victims
- 2011 Maiti Nepal, Kathmandu

- 2012 Dhulikhel, Nepal, Search for Ethics Organized by Women Artists' Group of Nepal (WAGON) Sponsored by BPKF
- 2012 Neerja Modi Art Centre, Jaipur, India International Art Workshop
- 2014 International Workshop, Dhampus, Nepal, Organized by Nepal Academy of Fine Arts
- 2016 International Workshop, Lumbini, Nepal, Organized by Nepal Academy of Fine Arts 2016 International Workshop, Janakpur, Nepal, Organized by B.P. Koirala Foundation, Nepal
- 2016 Banaras, India, Organized by Art Beyond the Border
- 2020 Awadhi Art Promotion Workshop, Kapilbastu, Sponsored by BPKF, Nepal and Organized by Shivata Love Foundation, Nepal
- 2021 150 years of Mahatma Gandhi Art Workshop Sponsored by B.P. Koirala India-Nepal Foundation and Organized by Shivata Love Foundation
- 2022 Celebrating Krishna Mahotsava Workshop Exhibition, Sponsored by BPKF, Indian Embassy and Organized by Chaitanya Prem Pratishthan, Vrindawan, India
- 2023 Indo-Nepal International Art Workshop, State Art Gallery, Hyderabad, India

## PRIZES AND AWARDS

- 1979 National Exhibition Prize, Nepal
- 1985 National Exhibition Prize, Nepal
- 1988 National Exhibition Prize, Nepal
- 1986 Kate and Robert Wilson Prize, Bradford, UK
- 2002 Birendra-Aishwarya Memorial Medal, Kathmandu, Nepal
- 2005 50 Most Influential Women of Nepal, *The Boss*, Kathmandu, Nepal
- 2010 Sankalp Samman, Sankalp Nepal Welfare Society, Kathmandu, Nepal
- 2011 Best Student Award in 100 Years of Lucknow College of Arts and Crafts, Lucknow
- 2013 Toran Kumari Kala Sanskriti Award, Kathmandu, Nepal
- 2013 Senior Artist Honour Award, Nepal Commercial Artist Association of Nepal, Kathmandu, Nepal
- 2014 Bhadra Kumari Sewa Sadan Award, Nepal
- 2016 Sahamati Award for social work, Nepal
- 2018 Sabda Kosh Mahila Pratibha Award
- 2021 Araniko Lalitkala Samman 2078 by Shree Lunkarandas-Ganga Devi Chaudhary Academy for Arts and Literature

## SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Board Member, B.P. Koirala Foundation  
 Board Member, Barbara Peace Foundation Founder  
 President, Shivata Love Foundation

## PRESENT IN OFFICIAL COLLECTIONS

Bradford Museum (The U.K.), Fukuoka Asian Art Museum (Japan), SAARC Building (Kathmandu, Nepal), Tribhuvan University (Kathmandu, Nepal), Tribhuvan Airport (VVIP Room, Kathmandu, Nepal), Nepal Television Office (Kathmandu, Nepal), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Kathmandu, Nepal), Ministry of Culture (Kathmandu, Nepal), World Bank (Kathmandu, Nepal), Danish Embassy (Kathmandu, Nepal), PM House (Kathmandu, Nepal), and other Government Offices (Kathmandu, Nepal), Fine Art Academy (Lucknow, India), King Birendra Art Gallery Museum (Kathmandu, Nepal), World Bank Museum, Head Office, U.S.A., Culture Ministry, Beijing, China.

## PRESENT IN PRIVATE COLLECTIONS

Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, China, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Holland, India, Iran, Israel, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Nepal, Norway, Pakistan, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, UK, USA.

## VISITED COUNTRIES

Austria, Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Netherlands, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, UK, U.S.A., Vietnam.







Frida & Me | 2017 | Acrylic | 30x36 inches

