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Mural Motives Behind Funded and Independent Street Art in Kathmandu Valley

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Letter of Approval

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Abstract

This research paper explores the themes depicted in Kathmandu's street art through a visual analysis comparing funded and independent works. It delves into the embodiment of iconography, composition, artistic rhetoric, and symbolism employed in funded and independent mural creators. Additionally, this study examines how Kathmandu's street artists use the streets to comment on societal, political, and personal issues. Furthermore, the study investigates the potential presence of influences or underlying messages that may even be unknown to the artists themselves. Through comparative analysis of funded and independently created visual texts, the researcher argues that these murals embody distinct iconography, composition and artistic choices to convey social and political messages. To gather data, this paper utilizes qualitative reading through semi-structured interviews alongside observational techniques informed by the theory of spectacle. For the interview, a list of topics that dealt with intent, inspiration, collaboration, and funding process were amassed. Furthermore, the study places itself within a comprehensive framework of street art, engaging with the ideas of Erwin Panofsky, John Berger, Michael Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, Edward Said and Laura Muvley. The research findings reveal that Kathmandu street murals serve different purposes based on funding. Funded murals, often supported by foreign embassies, highlight cultural diversity and inclusivity to strengthen diplomatic ties, but also reflect power dynamics. In contrast, independent murals allow artists to freely critique government hypocrisy, resist agendas, and highlight gender violence.

Key Words: Street Art, funded art, independent art, power dynamics, cultural hegemony, scopophilia, iconography, intrinsic meaning, consent, and orientalism.

Kathmandu's streets were somewhat full of writing, they typically consisted of promotional wheat pastes from consulting firms, political pronouncements, or announcements for recently released Bollywood or Nepali films. These pamphlets and writings had very little to do with artistic expression. Nevertheless, over the last decade, the streets of Kathmandu have undergone a great deal of visual transformation. In the present, they consist of a rich galore of visually tempting murals to phallic graffiti and tags, offering an exciting realm for academic exploration to look for how they function as a platform for embedding cultural hegemony and political dominance to critiquing social ills and political shortcomings. Kathmandu embodies two types of murals—funded and independent. Funded murals are more detailed and focus on positive social themes through balanced and collectively associated iconography. In contrast, independent murals are more straightforward, critical, and subversive of society and politics. Thus, this research paper explores the thematic distinction between funded and independent murals in Kathmandu through the comparative study of iconography, artistic style, and messages encoded.

The researcher intends to utilize a qualitative approach fused with semi-structured interviews to learn more about their motivations, intention and collaboration processes. This research also considers the ideas of essential thinkers on street art like Erwin Panofsky, John Berger, and Michael Foucault. Their ideas will inform the study of art, power, and society. By comparing these two murals, the researcher intends to show that they serve different purposes. Funded murals promote positive social messages through balanced iconography and are used as repositories to inject foreign cultural hegemony and power dominance. In contrast, independent murals are the platforms for social and political commentary.

The early days of writing on walls, according to Lisa Gotilleb can be traced in the USA. She notes it started as Graffitiin the seventies as one of the four columns of Hip-hop. The rest of the remaining were “break-dancing, rapping and disc jockeying” (6). The

members of the ghetto started graffiti as an “illegally practiced art form” in which they would do tagging, bombing, scratching and wheat pasting. These activities were mainly done to assert their identity and mark their territories. But over the course of time, this newly-developed phenomenon was not limited to mark merely territories or asserting groups or personal identities. It transcended and entered into a more conscious realm. Practitioners started taking it as a means to communicate and comment on more serious messages, social and political.

Whereas, in Nepal, street writing is an introduced phenomenon with a history of a decade at maximum. According toGinanne Brownell, street art in Nepal “started booming when French artist Space Invader put up some installations in Kathmandu in 2008, which inspired local artists to engage” (5). Back then, Invader, an anonymous French street artist installed 28 artworks altogether in various locations of Kathmandu. These installations comprised pixelated icons (characters) from different “Space Invaders” video gameson a tile background. However, Brownell's assertion that street art boomed after the Invader installation doesn’t hold true. Because Invader is a French graffiti writer, other facets of his identity are still a mystery. So, he just installed them and returned. Local artists and the public had “no clue” what they were, as David Ways puts it (Ways). There could be two plausible factors: why locals could not make anything from Invader’s work. First, their lack of art education. Second, they were Western symbols. Hence, they were alien to them.

Shraddha Shrestha, known as Machha.73, has been doing street art in Kathmandu for almost 13 years. She has a different take from what Brownell and Ways have to contend. She notes that the actual street art scene in Kathmandu started in 2011 with the arrival of New York-based French artist Bruno Levy. She recalls:

> During his five-month stayLevy carried out ‘The BigFoot Project’ at major locations like the walls of Tri Chandra Campus, the overhead bridge at Ratnapark, and Kesher

> Mahal Library. Levy's project showed Nepalese artists that streets could be used for creative purposes, and his workshops taught us new techniques. (Shrestha)

Hence, it can be safely drawn that in Nepal, street writing did not enter its essential form, which is subversion, resistance and sarcasm, but rather in the form of mural writing painting, which is a capitalistic art form done with permission.

Although a late phenomenon, this practice has gained wider attention and received a handful of international funding and collaboration. Below is the introduction to the researcher's primary texts.

"EkatakoBhitta: The Wall of Unity" was a street art project in 2022 (October 2022-March 2023) organized by Artudio in collaboration with the U.S. Embassy in Kathmandu, Nepal. The project includes the portions of seven artists from Nepal to the USA to be viewed as a unified whole. Primarily, Artudio intends to "acknowledge, celebrate, promote, inspire and incite the voices of the minority and socially excluded communities" in Nepal (108). Thus, the seven portions include images that represent different minor communities. These pieces, however, have one thing in common—music. The first portion is by Sudeep Balla from Bhaktapu, which consists of a Gandarva boy playing a three-string instrument, Sarangi, accompanied by the first two lines of Nepal's National Anthem. The second and third portions are by Tshering Phonjo Gurung and Khem B. Palpali from Mustang and Sindhuli, respectively. The portions consist of tungna, a string instrument played by the people of the northern region, such as Tamang and Sherpa, and a woman. Man One, a USA-based artist, writes the fourth portion, which reads Ekata in Devnagari in stylized letter. The Fifth portion is a work by Kiran Maharjan from Lalitpur, which showcases the *PancheBaaja* (five instruments), played by the Damai people during celebrations like marriage.

The sixth portion, likewise, is a piece by Ma One, a U.S.A-based artist. The portion consists of a cartoon figure representing a hip-hop music listener accompanied by the word

“Unity” in stylized English font. Furthermore, the final piece includes four women from the Terai region depicting Mithila culture, a culture practiced in the Mithila region.

“The mural for the Nepal-Germany 62nd Bilateral Relationship” is a significant artwork installed on the wall of the German Embassy in Naxal, Kathmandu. Created by street artist Aayush Bajracharya, who works under the tag PAKV, this mural commemorates the longstanding diplomatic ties between Nepal and Germany.

The embassy held a competition for concept submissions to represent the Nepal-Germany relationship, and Bajracharya's design was selected. His mural beautifully integrates well-known and historical landmarks from both countries, including Nepal's Dharahara and Boudhanath Stupa, and Germany's TV Tower and Oberbaumbrücke. The backdrop features the national birds of each country alongside a yak, set against a serene sky of crystal blue and golden hills.

The artist's use of imagery and symbols highlights the harmony and strength of the diplomatic relations between Nepal and Germany. Additionally, Bajracharya includes three semicircles in his design, placed on the right, in the middle, and on the left. He explains that the middle semicircle symbolizes the transition and ongoing development of relations between the two nations under a shared sky.

In 2019, during the height of the COVID-19 crisis in Nepal, a mural titled “Dead Sarkar” appeared on the wall of Bir Hospital. The artist behind this piece was Laxman Shrestha, a 44-year-old street artist who goes by the name “Khoja,” which means “search.” Shrestha is known for his street murals and writings that challenge the status quo and comment on social issues. The mural shows a man burning a pyre, but instead of a body, there is only a rising fire, symbolizing the government represented by a skull. Shrestha’s mural, “Dead Sarkar,” is a protest against the Nepalese government’s inadequate response to the pandemic. In a conversation with Laxman Shrestha, he shares that the city authorities

whitewashed the mural title “Dead Sarkar” (which means “Dead Government”) the next day the mural was put up. “I returned that night,” Shrestha adds, “and re-wrote the title, but this time I wrote ‘Blind Sarkar’meaning ‘Blind Government’ (Shrestha). Shrestha mainly painted this mural to criticize the government’s failure to protect its citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic. Shrestha believes that street artists should do more than just beautify streets and promote cultural symbols; they should also address social issues. He thinks both the government and citizens are responsible for the problems in society, as people often don't speak out against crime and corruption. Shrestha has been arrested several times for his outspoken criticism of the government and social practices.

During 2012 Nepal was under a grave political strife experiencing series of strikes and closure. An artist named Machha.73 (Shraddha Shrestha) was annoyed by all the national strikes in Nepal. They felt the strikes weren't helping anything. So, they made a protest sign. They painted a picture on a bridge wall showing a guy with four arms. The guy was watching a TV with signs from the Nepal Communist Party on it, but he didn't seem to care. He even had his eyes zipped shut! The picture also had a clever message. By changing one letter, it turned a slogan that said "Let's make the Nepal strike successful" into one that said "Let's make the Nepal strike unsuccessful." The sign got painted over quickly, but it got its message across.

A giant mural called "Remember Something Ancient, Imagine Something New" was created to celebrate 200 years of friendship between Nepal and Britain. It was funded by the British Embassy and painted by a team of Nepali artists led by a British artist named Martin Travers.The mural is a mix of symbols from both countries that consists of Makara: a half-elephant, half-crocodile creature from Hindu mythology, Celtic knot pattern: a symbol of eternity from British culture, a woman with flowing hair: representing a forgotten Celtic braid design, Clouds and Stonehenge: representing the British sky and a famous monument and

Quote about Nepal's temples: by a representative of British empire, William Kirkpatrick, who visited Nepal in 1793 (1) as mentioned in the review titled “Kirkpatrick’s Accounts of Kingdom of Nepal” by Preyag Raj Sharma. A half-finished rhododendron flower: a tribute to a British botanist who studied Nepal's plants and a Lion in a special box: showing how old and new styles can be combined.

An artist named Sadhu X (Aaditya Aryal) made a stencil artwork called "Rape Me" to protest violence against women. It showed a young girl, like a holy figure some people worship, with butterfly wings and the words "Rape Me." This was during a big protest about a woman named Sita Rai (not her real name) who was raped.

The artwork was meant to be shocking. Sadhu X even went back and rewrote the words after someone tried to erase them. They wanted a reaction from the people in charge, and it worked! The whole thing got painted over. The picture is simple, but it has a strong message. It uses a symbol of purity and innocence and puts those words next to it to make people confront how women are sometimes seen as objects.

Furthermore, how do street visuals differ between funded and independent street art in Kathmandu? What stylistic choices do funded and non-commissioned artists make? Does funding influence the content and meaning of street mural works? What are the primary motives behind their work? Do the patrons have motives behind funding artists and their work? Is the street art of Kathmandu used as a medium to reinforce power and ideology? Can cultural hegemony's nuances be traced in Kathmandu's street artworks? These questions remain unanswered; the researcher, thus, makes an effort to assess them.

Given the need for more research regarding commissioned and independent murals and graffiti, this study will aim to identify and evaluate the themes and iconography used in the street art of Kathmandu Valley. The other thrust of this study is to explore and comprehend whether they embed patroness’ politics of meaning.

Although murals and graffiti can be witnessed almost everywhere in Kathmandu Valley at present, to avoid deviation, the researcher explored only a few street works that are commissioned and independent. In doing so, it did not consider client work, which included, for example, private spaces, such as restaurants, campus, and school premises. As a mural text, this study will constitute only the works of some prominent mural artists located in the significant streets and noted premises. Similarly, works out of the valley, political slogans, and tags were also not considered.

Kathmandu has a legacy of painting or writing on public facades. Installing street murals and other forms of writing isn't a new phenomenon in its entirety. It has existed adjacent to the culture practiced here bequeathed down for hundreds of years. However, the question is, what types of Murals were they? Moreover, where were they installed for the exhibition?

Until two decades ago, mural paintings in Kathmandu Valley were mainly of religious themes installed in religious sites —temples and monasteries. The contents comprised the fusion of myths, legends and teachings that dealt with religious deities and symbols as the principal subjects. These works are didactic in themes with encoded messages like proper conduct and moral corrections evoking devotion and fear. Besides, after the establishment of Democracy and commercialization on the rise, Kathmandu also witnessed another type of street writing: political graffiti and wheat pastes. However, the writings are either propaganda or promote goods and services. They had nothing to do with artists' technique and voice.

Besides political slogans and promotional pasting, some of the earliest examples of recurring, cryptic motifs are Roop Chandra Bista's "Thaha" during seventies, the inverted spiral (often accompanied by the word "Prembad") and "Khoja" by Bhim Bahadur Thapa were seen in various locations across the city.

Rupchandra Bista started the *Thaha Movement* (know) around 1970. It was a philosophical movement. Bista and his colleagues wrote *Thaha* on rocks, walls, trees, blank papers and cigarette packs. "The objective of the *Thaha Movement*," as stated by Meena Lama"was to transform the under-informed people into conscious citizens and bring about political and social awakening" (51). Similarly, the *Khoja* Campaign, meaning search, is individually done by Bhim Bahadur Thapa, also known as *Khojababa.* Thapa claims to have written Khoja more than eight million over thirty years. When asked what ideas *Khoja* represent, "Anything that you have lost—territory, rights, self, food, shelter, security and peace?" Thapa answers (00:07:57-58).

However, this graffiti could not have had an influence on the young minds and in the emergence of an urban art form that has gained a foothold in Kathmandu in the past few years. The question to probe here is why they could not pave the way for the latter generation, mainly because of these two reasons. First, they failed to grab media attention and discussion in academic and intellectual spheres. Second, they lacked visual appeal and techniques as they were written in simple Devanagari font and style. Hence, the writings are solely an introduced Western subculture that flourished through several foreign initiatives, workshops and grants.

Despite the recent phenomenon, Kathmandu Valley has become a hub for local and foreign artists to hustle to showcase and exchange their ideas and messages. Various cohorts have since felt the potential of street art. Women's movements, corporate houses, NGOs, and embassies have taken up the medium. Two particularly influential mural projects that the artists and scholars often cite for establishing the street art scene in Kathmandu are Sattya Media Arts Collective's 2012 "Kolor Kathmandu" and Art Lab's 2015–16 "Project Prasad" (meaning "offering"). The project "Kolor Kathmandu" involved the creation of seventy-five murals in various locations of Kathmandu with the idea of representing each of Nepal's

seventy-five districts. The three-year-long “Project Prasad” was orchestrated to celebrate local heroes. Some of the local figures included in the project were Laxmi Prasad Devkota, Narayan Gopal, Sattya Mohan Joshi, Pasang Lhamu Sherpa and Yogmaya.

The Urban form of street writing in Kathmandu Valley is an introduced Western subculture with a history of no longer than a decade and a half. However, Kathmandu’s street art scene experienced tremendous thrift during this time. The scene thrives on a tantamount scale, giving impetus to several independent artists whose writings are pretty antithetical to the commissioned works. While saying so, however, except for a few icons like the seminude stencil of Kumari by Sadhu X, graffiti artists acknowledge that Kathmandu’s graffiti scene is way too premature. Kathmandu’s graffiti writers are only exploring the most basic form of graffiti: tags, consisting of the writer’s name in stylized letters or a logo or monogram representing the writer’s identity. In the USA, graffiti also transcended its initial form and entered the public consciousness through witty statements, sarcastic iconography and subversive commentary, making social and political issues the dominant substance. Hence, vandalizing but for a bigger and communal purpose. In other words, they use streets as the unfailing platform to speak up for those whose voices cannot be heard. In the context of Nepal, it appears that street artists and writers don’t seem to fully realize the potential of this form.

The street art scene in Nepal is young but thriving. At present, artists based in Kathmandu are pursuing street art professionally; it has grown and garnered exposure to a height that artists are also financially sustaining themselves. It appears the scene holds a promise tomorrow. Nevertheless, it has received minimal attention from academic lenses. Few studies in this area have only traced “the development of street art in Nepal” (2014) and investigated graffiti’s language and linguistics aspects. However, while investigating the language and linguistic aspects of the graffiti, the latter study ignored the fact that since its

growing days, the scene has had several big and small collaborative and commissioned projects. However, what do art critics and scholars have to say about these sub-cultural activities that are taking place in Kathmandu? What do they have to say about Nepal's unique socio-cultural contextualization? What is their reading about the development of the street art scene in Kathmandu? What types of content are Nepalese street artists mostly incorporating in their artworks? How are artists and other national and international institutions using street art as an activism tool? Furthermore, how is gender vulnerability getting represented in the streets of Kathmandu? The researcher attempts to review and reflect upon these questions that have been asked in the previous literature.

The paper "Banksy and Street Art in Nepali Context" by Hema Keyal explores the impact and significance of street art, mainly focusing on Banksy's influence within Nepal. Keyal delves into how Banksy has influenced Nepalese street artists to create dialogues and challenge societal constraints. She underscores the importance of practicing this medium to initiate change in Nepalese society. However, there is a gap in Keyal's work "Banksy and Street Art in Nepali Context." She only emphasizes Banksy and ignores the unique style and techniques the artists have brought to their work. Keyal's work is also the result of direct observation; she does not assess what the artists themselves have to say, which would have been overlapped with an interview with a few artists.

In the article "Street Art in Kathmandu as a Tool for Activism and Social Change," Madison Minchin explores how street art in Kathmandu is used to promote activism and social change. Minchin notes that Artists in Kathmandu create murals and graffiti to raise awareness about important issues like gender equality, environmental protection, and political corruption. Street art in Kathmandu serves as a tool for educating and mobilizing the community towards positive change. However, a primary setback with Minchin's exploration is that he does not explore how social issues get represented in independent and funded street

art. What Minchin fails to realize is that Social issues and activism are raised on two levels; for example, how is the issue of women's violence represented in the street art that is done in a tie with some NGO and INGO bodies and independently? Likewise, in "Public Art Archetypes in Kathmandu Valley," Supriya Manandhar demarcates graffiti as a form of public art that can be either sanctioned or unsanctioned. Manandhar notes that unsanctioned graffiti often challenges authority. However, Manandhar has an ambivalent opinion about graffiti in Nepal. For Manandhar, graffiti in Nepal is ironic as subculture imports like hip-hop lose their quintessence and become disconnected when embraced by middle and upper-class demographics. She is concerned whether the graffiti practitioners of Kathmandu are merely the work of middle-class kids without any deeper political consciousness who are merely doing it for their interests. Manandhar puts forward the following views regarding graffiti in Kathmandu:

> While street art is generally sanctioned, graffiti is not. Unsanctioned street art and graffiti are about challenging power [. . .] When middle and upper-class youth who can afford art materials go and paint walls in lower-income areas without local consent on themes that have no relevance to the locals, it becomes questionable whether they are challenging power or perpetuating their own hierarchies. It then becomes important to consider what exactly graffiti means in Nepal. (7)

Manandhar hints that street art is a privilege of politically unaware middle and upper class youth who may not essentially carry the essence of Graffiti, which is subversion and resistance. What further can be inferred from Manandhar's comment is that Graffiti, which emerged as an alternative tool to articulate the voice of the voiceless in Nepal, has become the very determiner of perpetuating social hierarchies.

Finally, Grossman-Thompson and Salmi, in their joint paper, "Kathmandu's Street Art: Public Representations of Gendered Vulnerability," explore the complex interplay

between gender vulnerability and empowerment in Kathmandu's street art. Examining three distinct street art initiatives in Kathmandu concludes that while they effectively raise awareness about women's issues, they face significant challenges in adequately representing vulnerability. The authors argue that vulnerability is "both a strategic element and a representational pitfall in humanitarian work" (609).

Previous research has looked at why artists make street art in Kathmandu and what kind of impact it has. This research is different. It looks closely at the actual murals themselves. Instead of asking the artists why they made them, this research examines the pictures to see what they show and what messages they might send. One new idea this research explores is the difference between paid murals and murals that artists make on their own. By comparing these two types, the research can see if the financial backing changes what the murals look like and what they are trying to say.

By looking closely at street art, this research can find new meanings and messages in Kathmandu's street art. It can also see how outside influences, like finance, might affect the art. The researcher strongly believes that this contributes to understanding Kathmandu's street art scene in a much richer way.

The present study thoroughly examines both textual and visual data to discern the primary motives behind funded and independent mural works. It investigates how funding influences the artwork's meaning and delineates the differences between independent and funded works. A qualitative approach combines semi-structured interviews with street artists and close observational techniques infused with theoretical insights. To gather primary data, the researcher conducted dialogues with ten street artists, including six who primarily created commissioned/funded works and four independent artists. Two sets of questions were prepared for these interviews. Artists were queried about their profession, pen name, titles of their works, context, year of installation, and whether their work was commissioned or non-

commissioned. Additionally, the researcher engaged in deeper conversations to explore the artists' intellectual perspectives. Questions posed to the artists included: Does funding influence the content of street art? How do they perceive their work compared to that of commissioned artists? What are the primary motives behind their work? Has their work been covered by the media, and if so, was the coverage positive or negative? Has their work been whitewashed? Have they faced legal issues, such as charges of noise pollution or vandalism? What is their perspective on Nepal's street art scene in terms of originality and social commentary?

Informed consent was obtained from all participating artists prior to conducting the interviews. The researcher also inquired about the artists' motivations, inspirations, decisions, and collaborative processes. The study includes the background and context of the artworks' creation and documents their impact. Furthermore, it seeks to identify recurring themes or social commentaries in independent street art that are absent in funded works.

The theoretical framework for this study is drawn from John Berger's concept of "power and gaze," Erwin Panofsky's idea of "iconography" and "intrinsic meaning or content," Antonio Gramsci's and Michel Foucault's notions of "cultural hegemony" and "power and resistance," respectively.

In his book Ways of Seeing, John Berger argues that art can reflect power structures. He underscores that subject matter is positioned in relation to the viewer's "gaze" (56). The viewer's position and the subject matter's placement are intertwined.

Edward W. Said's book, Orientalism, argues that the West has constructed a distorted view of the East (often referred to as the Orient) for centuries. This view is not simply one of geographical location but a complex power dynamic. He underscores that Western portrayals of the East often rely on stereotypes and generalizations. The East is seen as exotic, mysterious, and unchanging, while the West is seen as rational, civilized, and progressive.

This simplifies the complex realities of Eastern societies. He furthers that the portrayal of the East by the West is not objective but serves to reinforce Western power. By defining the East in a certain way, the West justifies its position as superior.

Likewise, Erwin Panofsky proposes three-tiered approaches to understanding the meaning of art. He offers ‘symbolism,’ ‘patron influence,’ and ‘intrinsic meaning,’ which is also read as a ‘subversive message.’ For Panofsky, the primary level of understanding the meaning is by focusing on what artwork depicts, which is to say, what figures, objects, colours and compositions are deployed by the artist overall. He then stresses on the ‘secondary level’ (Patron Influence). Here, he suggests delving into the historical context and the role of the Patron—the expectations and agendas they want the artist to convey.

Furthermore, Antonio Gramsci’s theory of ‘cultural hegemony’ posits that ‘dominant social classes’ exercise and maintain power not only through ‘coercion’ and ‘force’ but also by embedding ‘norms’ and ‘values’ through narratives such as ‘knowledge and art’ he defines this phenomenon as cultural dominance in which the subordination classes’ consent’ to their subordination. Lastly, Michael Foucault argues that power is not a singular entity. Instead, it exists in ‘chain networks’ in a society. Foucault interpolates that individuals and groups can challenge and subvert these power narratives through various alternative mediums being, artistic expression as one.

By examining the content, style and location of commissioned murals in Kathmandu adhering to the theoretical insights of Panofsky’s ‘Patron influence’, Gramsci’s ‘cultural hegemony’ the researcher explores the how these works reflect the vested agendas of the commissioning bodies. While analyzing the independent works through the theoretical lens of Ranciere’s ‘distribution of the sensible’ and Foucault’s concept of power allowed the researcher how these artists have challenged the consolidating narratives and sometimes advocating for the ‘unseen’ and ‘voiceless’.

EkatakoBhitta: The Wall of Unity (2022)

Fig. 1 EkatakoBhitta: The Wall of Unity by Artudio in collaboration with Sudeep Balla, Tshering Phonjo Gurung, Khem B. Palpali, Kiran Manandhar, Man One, Manisha Shah and Bishal Manandhar on the wall of YatayatBhibhag (Transportation Department), Minbhawan in front of Civil Hospital. Photos by Artudio.

"EkatakoBhitta: The Wall of Unity," the street mural project 2022 organized by Artudio in collaboration with the US Embassy, features the works of seven artists from Nepal to the USA. The project consists of seven portions to be viewed as a unified whole. The 50-meter-long vibrant piece is installed on the wall of YatayatBhibhag (Transportation Department) in Minbhawan, a heart location in Kathmandu, embodying the theme of unity through collectively identified diverse traditional symbols and texts. Primarily, the extensive piece appears to contend the sentiments of national and cultural inclusivity through music culture practiced by various ethnic groups across Nepal. The piece is broken down into seven portions and explained individually.

Fig. 1.1 the first portion “EkatakoBhitta: The Unity of Wall.” Photo courtesy. Parbat Lawati.

Figure 1.1 is the first portion of the mural by Sudeep Balla, Bhaktapur. It depicts a Gandarva boy with the Sarangi, a three-string instrument played by the Gandarvas. The image is accompanied by the first two stanzas from Nepal’s National Anthem in a stylized script that appears like the Nepal Bhasa script (Newari script).

Fig. 1.2 the second portion of “EkatakoBhitta: The Unity of Wall.” Photo Courtsey. Parbat Lawati.

Figure 1.2 is the continued portion by Tsering Phonjo Sherpa from Mustang.The mural showcases a hand playing the tungna, a traditional string instrument of Tamang and Sherpa people from Nepal’s hilly and mountain region, on the aquamarine dreamy cloud backdrop, a traditional Buddhist art style.

Fig. 1.3 the third portion of “EkatakoBhitta: The Unity of Wall.” Photo courtesy. Parbat Lawati.

Figure 1.3 features a woman’s face in a vibrant palette. The woman’s expression is serene and contemplative. This portion is painted by Khem. B Palpali from Sindhuli.

Fig. 1.4 the fourth portion of “EkatakoBhitta: The Unity of Wall.” Photo Courtsey. Parbat Lawati.

Figure 1.4 is the fourth portion, which depicts “Ekata” written in stylized Devnagari script in a vibrant colour palette by Man One, a USA-based artist. The English translation of “Ekata” would be Unity, also the project’s theme.

Fig. 1.5 The fifth portion of “EkatakoBhitta: The Unity of Wall.” Photo Courtesy. Parbat Lawati.

Figure 1.5, the fifth portion, depicts a set of traditional instruments, namely *PancheBaaja*, played during celebrations like marriage ceremonies by the Damai people, the so-called untouchable people from Nepal. Kiran Maharjan who is from Lalitpur does this portion.

Fig. 1.6. The Sixth portion of “EkatakoBhitta: The Unity of Wall.” Photo Courtesy. Parbat Lawati.

Figure 1.6 is the sixth portion of “EkatakoBhitta: The Unity of Wall.” It is painted by Man One, a USA-based artist. The piece is composed of three non-Nepali elements: a character face (clown), stylized English text (Unity), and modern musical symbolism (microphone). Upon arriving at this portion, viewers are also likely to feel the disruption in the flow that was earlier maintained by elements representing Nepali Indigenous culture.

Fig. 1.7 The seventh portion of “EkatakoBhitta: The Unity of Wall.” Photo Courtesy. Parbat Lawati.

Figure 1.7 represents the final part of the mural "EkatakoBhitta: the Unity of Wall" by Manish Shah from Sunsari. The mural portrays four women in vibrant traditional Mithila attire.

One element is recurrent in all seven portions—music. Except for portion six, the other portions’ musical instruments represent the music practiced by various indigenous communities across Nepal. But as hinted above, the flow is disrupted as it arrives in the sixth portion, which Man-One does. Adhering to the curator of the project and one of the founding members of Artudio, Kailash K. Shrestha’s explanation about the project, which is “unity in diversity and celebrates the traditional art and music culture from various ethnic groups of Nepal” (149) the very motive/theme is contradicted per se with Man one’s intervention. This led the researcher to anticipate some critical questions. Suppose the primary motive of this project was to celebrate Nepal’s unity in diversity through ethnic faces and musical symbols. How did Man One, a USA-based artist’s writing, manage to pop up all of a sudden? The

answer is quite visible; it is a USA-funded project. However, the question is, did the organizers propose that the embassy include their artist out of courtesy, or did the embassy propose that they should feature one of their artists in return? In conversation with the researcher about the project, curator Kailash K. Shrestha affirms, “The condition was the latter one” (Shrestha). Shrestha’s response led the researcher to an even more critical question—why is the US Embassy interested in granting the project? Does it have any vested agenda behind funding the project? Antonio Gramsci, a twentieth-century Marxist thinker, notes that the “dominance” of the ruling elite does not take place through only “coercion” and “enforcement” but also through nuanced and mundane activities of the lower class, like values and knowledge. He defines this phenomenon as “cultural hegemony,” which involves a political leadership based on the “consent” of the leader (421). In this light, the Man One portion dilutes the original theme of the project, echoing the USA’s subtle hegemonic power play to showcase their cultural expansion through funding.

Figure 2 “Mural for Nepal-Germany Bilateral Relationship” by Aayush Bajracharya (PAKV) in collaboration with the German Embassy on the front wall of the German Embassy, Naxal. Photo Courtsey. Parbat Lawati

Figure 2 is a meticulously planned and executed mural installed on the wall of the German Embassy, Naxal, to commemorate the Nepal-Germany 62nd bilateral relationship. Aayush Bajracharya, a street artist behind this piece, delves into the scene with the tag PAKV. The embassy had called for concept submissions to depict the Nepal-Germany relationship, and his concept was chosen. The mural incorporates popular and historical landmarks from both Nepal and Germany, such as Dharahara, Boudanath (Nepal), and the TV tower and Oberbaumbrucke (Germany). The national birds of the two countries and a Yak grace the backdrop of a tranquil sky in crystal blue and golden hills. The symbols and imageries incorporated by the artist appear in perfect harmony, evincing the harmonious diplomatic relation between the two nations. To further fortify this message, the artist also incorporates three semicircles. First, on the right, second in the middle, and third on the left. According to the artist, the middle semicircle symbolizes the transition of the relations of the

two countries under the same sky. However, upon discerning closely, there are two images that arouse the spectators' curiosities—the fiercely arriving Golden Eagle and the TV tower touching the sky. PAKV reveals that he was directed by the ambassador to portray the two symbols in the depicted style. Here, we get reminded of the Erwin Panofsky's notion of "patron influence" and "intrinsic meaning" where the commissioning bodies can influence the content of the art and its "symbolic meaning." Panofsky contends that certain images are used as by nations to inject their national sentiments. In this, they can direct the artist to embed their willed meaning in the work. Panofsky entails "intrinsic meaning" as

> [. . .] is apprehended by ascertaining those underlying principles which reveal the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion qualified by one personality and condensed into one work. Needless to say, these principles are manifested by, and therefore throw light on, both "compositional methods" and "Iconographical significance." (31)

Panofsky also introduces the concept of "symbolical values" and the field of "iconology." He differentiates these concepts from simply identifying the imagery "iconography." He contends:

> In thus conceiving of pure forms, motifs, images, stories and allegories as manifestations of underlying principles, we interpret all these elements as what Ernst Cas-sirer has called "symbolical" values. when we try to understand it as a document of Leonardo's personality, or of the civilization of the Italian High Renaissance, or of a peculiar religious attitude, we deal with the work of art as a symptom of something else which expresses itself in a countless variety of other symptoms, and we interpret its compositional and iconographical features as more particularized evidence of this 'something else." The discovery and interpretation of these "symbolical" values (which are often unknown to the artist himself and may even emphatically differ from

> what he consciously intended to express) is the object of what we may call "iconology" as opposed to "Iconography". (31)

When asked about the size of the tower and the eagle, the artist's response was intriguing. He explained, “Although Berlin TV tower and Dharahara do not vary much in terms of height, I was told everything in Germany is bigger than Nepal and I was particularly asked to portray the ‘Berlin TV Tower’ taller and the ‘Eagle’ bigger, flying and approaching.” (PAKV, 21). The researcher did compare the height of Nepal’s historical landmark, Dharahara and Germany’s tallest structure Berlin TV Tower and found out that Dharahara is only 78meters tall whereas the latter structure is 368 meters. But the crucial question here is if that is the case, why did the ambassador not want the other landmarks to be portrayed bigger than Nepal’s landmarks? Why particularly only the tower and the Eagle? Is it because the Germans associate the tower and the Eagle symbolically, and he represents Germany in Nepal? The ambassador's emphasis to portray the tower taller than any other landscapes and the arrival of eagle majestically do lend the connotative meaning of Germany as a nation. The TV Tower kissing the zenith conveys the height of progress Germany as a nation has made and culminated. Additionally, the golden eagle—the national bird of Germany—is one of the dominating birds in the birds’ kingdom. It soars higher than any bird yet has a very clear vision, allowing it to have a clear supervision of the land below. And it rarely misses its prey. But the state of the eagle in the Mural is composed and calm, it only appears to super visioning the space and land below which evince that attitude of Germany towards Nepal is that of sympathetic protector.

Figure 3 “Dead Sarkar” by Laxman Shrestha on the Wall of Bir Hospital, Jamal.Photo by the artist himself.

In 2019, when Nepal was at the peak of a crisis brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, a provoking mural under the title *“Dead Sarkar (Dead Government)”* appeared on the wall of Bir Hospital under the tag “Khoja.” The mural piece was installed by Laxman Shrestha, who goes with the tag “Khoja,” meaning search. Shrestha is a forty-four years old independent street artist and a painter who gained notoriety for his status quo challenging social commentary through street murals and writings. Shrestha shares that the metropolitan authority whitewashed the title (Dead Sarkar—Dead government) the next day. As a response to the whitewash, Shrestha went later that night and re-wrote, but this time, he changed the title from “Dead Sarkar” to “Blind Sarkar,” meaning blind government. Shrestha thinks differently from his contemporary artists. He believes the duty of street artists is not just to beautify the street and promote cultural symbols but rather much more serious than that, which is to comment on social issues. “It is not only the power that perpetuates crime, but the

citizens are also responsible for not speaking against the crime and corruption rooted in our society (June 19). He has been taken into legal custody several times for directly resisting, commenting and satirizing the government and social practices.

For Shrestha, the primary motive for painting this mural was to comment on the government's indifference during the COVID-19 pandemic, which failed to protect its citizens. The mural depicts a man burning the pyre. However, we do not see anyone on the pyre; there is just a conflagration rising. According to the artist, the man is burning the government, represented by the skull. Shrestha's mural, "Dead Sarkar," can be viewed as an act of resistance to the Nepalese government that failed to take practical actions for the welfare of its citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic. Foucault argues that power functions in society not as a singular entity but instead operates and permeates the society in chained relationships which minorities and individuals can challenge through other means of artistic expression as one. He states: "Power is not an institution and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society." (69). By creating this powerful painting, Shrestha attempts to unmask the hypocrisy and shortcomings of the government. The follow-up to rewrite the title (Blind Sarkar) after the whitewash further emphasizes his determination to resist the government's shortcomings.

Figure 4 “Nepal Bandha Asafal Paraoun9” by Macha.73 on the wall of Pulchowk overhead bridge, Lalitpur. Photo by the artist herself.

The work “*Nepal Bandha Asafal Paraoun (Let’s make Nepal Closure Unsuccessful* ”was painted on the wall of Pulchowk Overhead Bridge, as a counter to a Nepal Bandha—a political strike—by Machha. 73 (Shraddha Shrestha) on Falgun 8, 2069. The work was whitewashed the very next day it was installed. Machha.73 shares the story behind the scene that they had had enough with the recurring political strikes that did not bring any significant and progressive changes. That day too was a strike on a national level. The strike was called by the *Nepal Communist Party—Mawobadi(Maoist)* . Machha.73 along with the artists of artlab_life decided to protest the strike-trend in a creative way and went to the street and installed the piece. This act of protest, executed independently and with courage, embodies a bearded four-armed man and an image of TV. The man is holding a TV remote, which suggests that he is watching a TV. But the contrasting detail about the man is that his eyes are zipped. His second hand is holding a book with a title “Says” while his third hand is holding food and the fourth resting on his thigh. Another notable detail about the man is his sitting

position—he seems to be comfortably lying on the couch. There is also another contrasting impression between the man and the content he is watching. The TV frame incorporates the pamphlets initially pasted by the*Nepal Communist Party—Mawobadi(Maoist*). But the man gives an indifferent impression to the content he is watching on the media, apparently evinced by his sitting position and the zipped eyes. Upon close observation of the mural, we get to see that the artist has altered the initial letter of the word *Safal* (Success) to "A." With this single alteration, the artist has successively altered the text and its message from *"Nepal Banda Safal Paroun*(Let's make the Closure of Nepal a Success)" to "*Nepal Banda AsafalParoun*(Let's make Nepal Closure Unsuccessful)," whose translation in English would be "Let us make a closure of Nepal Unsuccessful." Erwin Panofsky posits that when identifying "images", "stories" and "allegories" to perform "iconology" the "synthetic iconographic features" becomes representation of "something else" (31).

The identifiable or "primary or natural subject matter" in this text are—pamphlets, television set and the man. Considering the "iconography" of this mural, the "conventional subject matter" is a man watching the television in a laid-back position. Thus, considering the "synthesis'' of the mural, the work can be apprehended serving two-fold commentary hinted towards two types of demographs—the self-serving Politicians and the diffident Youths. Then the "symbolic value" of television becomes luxury, which regardless of the content on display the youths are unbothered because the artist has apparently altered the initial message and called to initiate for something positive. The artist's alteration of the initial message is a call for positive change, a hopeful and optimistic message amidst the indifference of the youths.

Additionally, borrowing John Berger's concept of the subject "looking" out of the picture—"the spectator" (56) the TV in the mural appears to be facing the pedestrians passing through that bridge rather than the man holding the remote in the mural. By directly making

the image of the Television face the spectator, the artist also seems to be directly trying to interact with the spectator and asking them to challenge the status quo.

Figure 5 “Remember Something ancient, Imagine Something New” on the wall of the British Embassy. Photo from the gallery of Martintravers.com.

The eleven feet tall and over seventy feet long mural, titled “Remember Something Ancient, Imagine Something New” was a British Embassy funded project. It was installed in 2015 on the British Embassy, Kathmandu wall to mark the two century-long bilateral relationship between Nepal and Britain. The piece, thus, is the amalgamation of cultural symbols representing the two nations. The piece was a collaboration with Nepalese street artists Shraddha Shrestha, Kiran Maharjan, Michelle Lama, Laxman Shrestha, Preeti Serchan, Aditya Aryal under the leadership of British mural artist, Martin Travers. According to Aditya Aryal (Sadhu X), the project consisted of a two-phased preliminary workshop to the local artists by Martin Travers. The first phase consisted of a workshop on methodology. The objective behind assessing the local artists with methodology courses was to make them able to explain everything that goes into making the mural. The second part of the workshop

included the “selection of the symbols later to be incorporated in the piece” (shrestha). Like the EkatakoBhitta, the piece comprises fusion of elements from seven artists. The piece begins from the left hand side, with Makara a sea monster with the body of a crocodile and head of an elephant, a *Vahana* (vehicle) of Hindu deity, Ganga, from whose mouth a Celtic eternity knot pattern is coming out. Continuing this pattern, we get to see a quote or title of the mural “Remember Something ancient, and Imagine Something New” conceived by Martin Travers and written by Shraddha Shrestha. The third element is of a woman whose tentacle-like hair appears swirling towards the center, executed by Aditya Aryal. According to Aryal, this woman represents a “poetic echo of the Celtic braid pattern often omitted in history.”

Additionally, the piece consists of six sections that serve as a backdrop to Makara and other images in continuation. Each section is rich in historical significance, enlightening the audience about the cultural heritage of both nations. The first section in deep blue consists of cloud elements. The second element in light blue showcases the megalithic structure, Stonehenge, a famous British monument situated in Wiltshire, England. The third section in light gold consists of a famous quote about Nepal by William Patrick, one of the first Englishmen to visit Nepal that goes “as many temples as houses and as many idols as men.” Depicted as if written in a diary. The middle section, enclosed with stylized letters forming as a parenthesis lion painted blending traditional and cubic style which signifies the merging of the old and the new technique. On the other side of the parentheses is a semi-finished drawing of a rhododendron. According to Kiran Majarhan the “rhododendron,” is tendentiously left “semi-finished,” as a tribute to Francis Buchanan Hamilton, a British Botanist who came to Nepal in 1802 to record Nepali flora, leaving behind him a legacy of exquisite botanical drawings that reside currently in the Linnean Society in London (Maharjan).

Attempting Panofsky's "iconological interpretation" to the piece, the mural is a synthesis of symbols representing British and Nepalese historical sentiment. Through the juxtaposition of ancient English and Nepalese historical symbols, the piece is a jubilant celebration of Nepal and Britain's century-old bilateral relationship. The artists' intention to incorporate the phrase by William Patrick and commemorate Francis Buchanan Hamilton through a semi-finished rhododendron is a testament to this celebration. However, the absence of Nepalese figures and their contribution raises the question of one-way inclusion in this representation.

Edward Said in *Orientalism: Western Concept of East* critiques the representation of the East (Orient) by the West (Orientalist) a position deeply governed by the attitude—west "knows" east—more than they know about themselves, their geography, and sociopolitical formation. He defines Orientalism is

> [. . .] is rather a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts; it is an elaboration not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of "interests" which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it is, rather than expresses, a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world; it is, above all, a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political (as with a colonial or imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with reigning sciences like comparative linguistics or anatomy, or any of the

> modern policy sciences), power cultural (as with orthodoxies and canons of taste, texts, values), power moral (as with ideas about what "we" do and what "they" cannot do or understand as "we" do). (12)

The mural work “Remember Something Ancient, Imagine Something New” then contends ancient images showcasing the two nations' historical greatness. However, unlike England, Nepal’s greatness lies only in the past. By referring to Kirkpatrick who visited Nepal and Hamilton who visited Nepal in 1805 AD and 1793 respectively as the representatives of British colonial governance and Science respectively, firsts of the English men to visit Nepal, Martin Travers intends to do two things. First, Travers seems to take pride in his predecessor’s colonial past. In doing so, he is also reminding Nepal about his predecessors’ contribution to Nepal. Second, Travers is assuming the superior position and reinforcing the English attitude–we ‘know’ about Nepal, their understanding about themselves comes from us, their repository of science lies on our bedrock. The unfinished rhododendron then becomes a symbol that Nepal’s knowledge about themselves is incomplete without England. Additionally, Travers's conducting of the workshop course to the artist further underscores an attempt to ‘rehabilitate’ the east as they are ‘irrational’ and therefore, requires to be taught to speak for themselves.

Figure 6 “Rape Me” on the Nepal Law Library wall, in Jamal, Kathmandu. Photo courtesy: Aditya Aryal (Sadhu X).

The stencilled piece titled “Rape Me,” featuring a seminude girl revered, particularly by the Newars, as a living goddess, appeared in the Nepal Law Library in 2012. The artist behind this stencil piece is Sadhu X (Aaditya Aryal). This provoking piece, was installed in solidarity with “Occupy Baluwatar.” “Occupy Baluwatar” according to Pranika Koyu and Astha Shrama Pokhrel, was “a hundred-and-seven-day-long” (349) protest against women violence that was sparked up by the sexual assault of Sita Rai (this is not her real name), who was mercilessly robbed and then raped by government officials. In the conversation with the researcher, X recalls, the text “Rape Me” was whitewashed the very next day it was installed; later that night, he went to the location and re-wrote the text, and the next day, the whole piece was defaced. “This response made me happy because I could see the authority getting involved, which was my primary motive behind installing the piece” (Aryal). The composition of the piece is quite simple. It features a topless kumari with butterfly wings in a black backdrop. ‘Kumari’ is not only unmarried and undefiled but also has not gone through her menstruation cycle. Sadhu X seems to use the features and juxtapose them with the text

"rape me," which is antithetical to the norms associated with her. The stencil positions the viewer as a voyeur, mirroring Laura Muvley's concept of "Male Gaze" (11). Muvley posits that visual media, particularly mainstream cinema, reinforces patriarchal order by presenting women as objects of the male gaze. She states:

> The cinema offers a number of possible pleasures. One of them is scopophilia. There are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure. The pleasure in looking has been split between active male and passive female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy in the female figure which is styled accordingly. [. . .] women are simultaneously looked at and displayed with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked –at-ness. Women displayed as sexual object is the leit-motif of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip tease [. . .] and signifies male desire. (809)

But the very effect Sadhu X intends to derive through this stencil piece is not the "scopophilia" pleasure experienced from looking at, which is the very objective of visual media, as suggested by Muvley. By using the body of a woman–Kumari–a revered figure in Nepalese society, to be specific, Sadhu X rather intends to subvert it by making the gaze uncomfortable. Unlike the female models and actresses in the films and other visual forms, the subject posing in the stencil is a religiously revered subject and gazing at the piece directly invokes guilt, forcing the viewers to confront the disturbing reality of violence against women. In this light, the stencil is a "jab at the hypocrisy of our society" (24), to put it in the words of the artist himself.

In this paper, the researcher analyzed the role of street murals in Kathmandu, exploring how they function as a platform for cultural exchange, ethnic inclusivity/discourse, social commentary, power interplay and challenging power dynamics. To do this, the researcher included six visual texts—three funded and three independent- and studied the

iconography, borrowing the theoretical spectacle from Panofsky's notion of "intrinsic meaning" to Muvley's "Male Gaze."

"EkatakoBhitta: The Wall of Unity," a US Embassy-funded street art project in 2022 by Artudio incorporating seven portions by different artists from Nepal to the USA. The project emphasizes the theme of traditional art and music culture from various ethnic groups of Nepal. However, the theme of cultural inclusion and dialogue through street art is intervened and diluted by the mural of US-based artist Man One. The inclusion of Man One in the project is a statement to showcase how their sub-culture, hip-hop, is taking over in Nepal rather than a musical transition evincing the "hegemonic" injection of Antonio Gramsci. On the Contrary, "Dead Sarkar" or "Blind Sarkar," an independent mural by Khoja (Laxman Shrestha), exemplifies Foucault's concept of artistic expression to challenge power. The mural embodies unconventional symbols—cremation, fire and human skull to comment on or strip off the Nepalese government's shortcomings in acting for its citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic. The mural piece is a vital act of criticism against the Nepal government's inaction, while the act of whitewashing the mural is an attempt to silence Shrestha's criticism.

In the case of "Mural for Nepal and Germany Sixty-two Years of Bilateral Relationship," the piece is an example of how street murals can be a platform to represent international relations, promoting harmony and mutual understanding between the countries. However, considering the images through Panofsky's lens of iconography, it becomes apparent how nations inject their nationalistic and political ideologies in certain symbols and biasedly direct the artists exercising patron's influence and thus assert power imbalance between the nations. In the case of "Nepal Banda AsafalParoun," the mural criticizes the recurring political strikes in Nepal, but the indifferently lounging man with zipped eyes evince that the artist is also frustrated with apathetic Nepali youths towards the political

situation, who neither engage with the issues nor actively resist them. By altering the slogan within the TV frame, the viewers are directly prompted to reconsider their stance on political issues and potentially act against ineffective strikes. Additionally, “Remember Something Ancient, Imagine Something New,” a collaborative project funded by the British Embassy, celebrates the two hundred years of Nepal and Britain’s bilateral relationship through the fusion of symbols from the two nations. However, including elements like William Kirkpatrick and the unfinished rhododendron raises questions about the portrayal of Nepal.

On the surface level, the mural is a celebration of the diplomatic relationship between the two nations, but the undercurrent message is the reinforcement of the “West knows East” mentality. Likewise, the workshop conducted by Martin Travers for the local artists also potentially limits the artistic voices and choices. Finally, “Rape Me,” an independent stencil piece by Sadhu X, is a provocative piece that deploys the shock technique by juxtaposing a revered figure (goddess) and text: rape me and comments on the prevalence of sexual violence against women and the need for change. It challenges the patriarchal hypocrisy and calls to action, urging the viewers to question societal norms and speak up for women’s safety.

In conclusion, this research paper has explored the rich tapestry of street murals in Kathmandu Valley, raising questions about the motivations behind foreign-funded and independently carried out projects. The foreign-funded street mural projects majorly depict issues like inclusion and celebration of historical and cultural roots through balanced iconography. On the other hand, they also underpin cultural domination and patron influence, suggesting the interplay of power where art becomes a medium to disseminate geopolitical narratives. In contrast to the funded projects, independent artists are more free to question the power dynamics and comment on sensitive social issues. Examining these murals through the lenses of theorists like Panofsky, Gramsci, Mulvey, and Foucault highlights street art’s

multifaceted role in Kathmandu. As Kathmandu's street art scene continues to evolve, further research could explore the impact of murals on specific communities, the role of media in amplifying or distorting their messages, and the ongoing tension between artistic expression and censorship.

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