

## Inter-art Relationship in Sujan Chitrakar's Artworks

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### Abstract

*Sujan Chitrakar's visual arts present inter-art relationship among various art genres like photography, painting, literature and sculpture. Within a single artwork, there are the elements of two or more art genres. Chitrakar uses photographs as references and integrates them in canvas in the renewed form. Some of his works present poem and painting in the same canvas. Both verbal and visual arts are integrated in the same artwork. Similarly, three dimensional objects are installed on the two dimensional surface of the canvas. Three dimensions are the special characteristics of sculpture whereas painting has only two dimensions. Chitrakar's creative impulse breaks the boundaries of conventional art genres. His artworks provide social and political commentary responding to the contemporary context.*

**Keywords:** art genres, breaking the boundary, inter-art relationship, inter-generic, rhythm

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### 1. Introduction

Sujan Chitrakar's artworks have inter-art relationship among various art genres like literature, sculpture, photography and painting. One art genre is interconnected to other art genres. These artworks break away from the techniques and rules of specific art genre. The artist does not follow the accepted tradition but experiments his own techniques and codes that are useful only to his own creations. In his artworks, visual images coexist with verbal texts, for he uses colors and inscribes words on his canvas. Even three dimensional real objects are found on his canvas. Some of his paintings share the techniques of comic stripes. He juxtaposes pictures and texts in the same canvas. His artworks present the connection among different art forms. He redraws the boundaries of his own creations through innovation and experimentation. The artist gives stress to his personal expression in response to socio-political condition of contemporary Nepal. Before tracing inter-art relationship in his artworks, it would be worth introducing the artist and his artworks.

#### 1.1 Background

Chitrakar is one of the renowned Nepali artists of contemporary time. He was born in the Newar family of "Chitrakar", painter, the creator of the pictures. In the exhibition catalogue of his artworks, Chitrakar (2010) himself states: "My father and grandfather both were painters, so I grew up on art." His artworks are both critical and creative. His creations provide aesthetic pleasure along with intellectual awareness. His artworks make the viewers see and feel the things in the world that they have missed.

Chitrakar is also an art activist. His art exhibition "Let's talk about art baby" foregrounds art and attempts to bring art to ordinary people. He states that art is everywhere, and everyone has the ability to create art. Chitrakar (2010) himself states in the exhibition catalogue of his arts:

What I am playing with, is the idea of art being present in our daily activities. One of the key ideas behind my exhibition is the idea of taking art out into public spaces and engaging with people. One question I want to raise is why can't random people sit around and get involved in creative activities which

we call art? In this series of activities [art activities], I have fantasized that people do talk about art. I believe people need to start talking about art.

Through such art activities, the artist attempts to convey the message that art is as important as anything else. He presents the art activity in a form of art itself.

### 1.2 Literature Review

Various writers and critics have expressed their views on Sujan Chitrakar and his artworks. According to Madan Chitrakar (2010), the artist takes bricks or bouquets as natural and goes with zeal to attain his goal. The artist accepts any sort of criticism in creative manner. He opines that constructive comments and criticism always enhance his creative potential and creative process. According to Salil Subedi (2004), "Sujan's will to transcend through veil of 'maya' towards the willingness riding, groaning, sweating, thundering, breaking and laughing over his mad impulses is beyond my reach, he has the art, I have babbles" (Exhibition catalogue). Sujan Chitrakar does not only have vision but also has passion and patience to translate his vision into tangible artwork.

Some of his works explore the themes of violence, war, death and decay. In the exhibition catalogue, Saroj Bajracharya (2004) comments on Chitrakar's artworks: "The expressions in the masticated faces show the remains of torturous and violent experiences. It deals with the trauma of psychological death, which are outcomes of tragic incidents that are occurring in country and across the world. Death is the actual theme here, which is being experimentally brought into the gallery." Innocent ordinary people have been killed during period of political conflict. The artist has attempted to present the tragic scenario of the contemporary Nepal.

Horror and fear are ruling the nation. The human expression is full of anguish. The pale face looks as if it is masticated. Sujan Chitrakar (2004, p.2) himself discloses his feelings: "Fresh smell of the crimson fluid chokes my breath. Death of army men, policemen, innocent countrymen and even those who rebel, has been a part of my life now. I die psychologically every moment as I see myself in the corpses that lay still." The artist has empathy over tragic characters.

Arun Gupto (2004) states that visual pictures and poems are put together in his artworks. The artist applies some western techniques of art to present native contents. According to Yam Prasad Sharma (2009), Chitrakar has shared floating, soft-edged and dimmed yellow and orange colors from the abstract expressionist artist Mark Rothko. However, the color rectangles are not as distinct as Rothko's. Besides, unlike Rothko, Chitrakar sticks a solid object on the canvas. He has integrated the figure of lotus and the structure of *mandala* paintings. However, the artist has reread and reformulated them using modern techniques.

### 1.3 Research gap

Literature review depicts that Chitrakar's artworks have been interpreted from various ways but they have not been studied in terms of inter-art relationship. The studies also have not answered the question why the artist uses various genres in his creations. This article attempts to fill this gap.

### 1.4 Research objectives

This research has the following objectives:

- To study the artworks of Sujan Chitrakar
- To clarify the concept of inter-art relationship
- To show inter-art relationship his artworks and throw light on their significance

## 2. Materials and methods used

'Sujan Chitrakar's artworks' is the area of research which will be explored from the perspective of inter-art relationship as a tool. Chitrakar's artworks are the primary sources

which have been interpreted to support the statement. Existing literatures on the artist have been reviewed using secondary sources. The concept of inter-art relationship has been also clarified using secondary resources. Chitrakar's studio has been visited to view his artworks, to take interview and to understand his creative process. This research is qualitative since the artworks have been interpreted to support the statement, and there is the possibility of more than one interpretation.

### 2.1 Genres of art

Chitrakar's artworks break the traditional boundaries among different art genres like music, literature, painting, sculpture and photography. Before analyzing his individual artworks, it would be worth throwing light on some essential elements of these various art genres. There are certain rules of a particular art genre. Painting, for instance, uses canvas and colors. Colors are applied on canvas and images are created to represent the world or to convey the artist's inner feelings and emotions. Painting is two dimensional art form. The third dimension in painting is only the illusion created through the use of color, light, shade, proportion and perspective.

Sculpture is three dimensional art form. The medium and materials of sculpture are wood, metal, clay and stone. A sculpture has weight and tactile sensation. Painting and sculpture unfold in space but dance, literature and music unfold in time. Sculpture, photography and painting are visual arts whereas literature is verbal art. Words are used to create poems and stories. All these art genres have their own specific elements and rules. Sujan Chitrakar has blurred the boundaries of these art genres. He cross-pollinates various genres of art in lively manner. The application of multimedia and the techniques of various art genres creates inter-art relationship. The artist has discarded the conventional codes of creation.

### 2.2 Inter-art relationship

One art form may share the elements of other art forms. Stories, poems and sometimes other texts may create visual images in our mind. A written text may be the "verbal reproduction of pictorial rhetoric" (Melville and Readings 1995, p.8). Montaigne shows close relationship between painting and writing. He uses word "paint" for the word "write": "I do not paint being. I paint its transition: not a transition from one age to another . . . but from day to day, from minute to minute" (qtd. in Marian 1995 p.213). Similarly, *A Portrait of Artist as a Young Man* is the title of James Joyce's novel. A novel is the portrait or the picture.

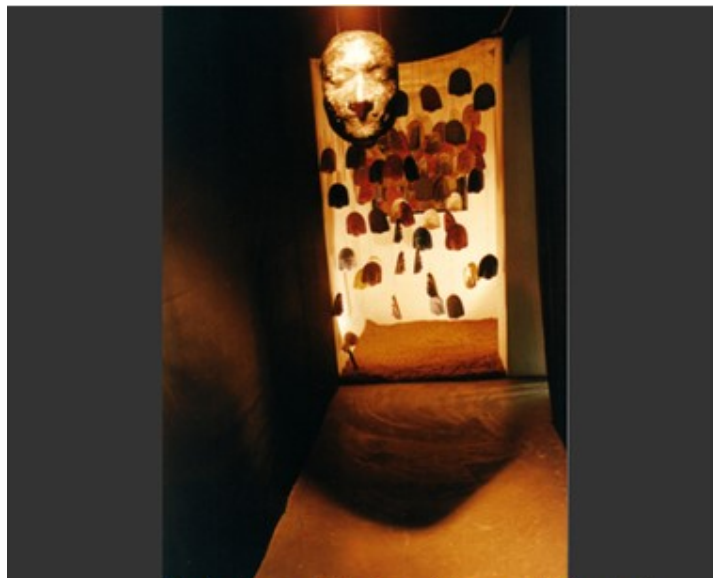


Fig.1 Sujan Chitrakar. 'Room to Disguise'

Rhythm is the common element in many art genres like music, poetry and painting. In painting, rhythm is created through lines, curves, colors and sweeping brush strokes. Giving stress to inter-art relationship, poet painter Rabindranath Tagore states about the importance of rhythm in every form of art: "My pictures are my versification in lines. Only training which I had in my young days was the training in rhythm, the rhythm in thought, the rhythm in sound, one thing which is common to all arts is the principle of rhythm which transforms inert materials into living creations (qtd. in Archer 1989 p.50). F. David Martin and Lee A. Jacobus (1991) describe the rhythm of abstract painting as "frozen music" (81).

Visual arts, of course, create rhythm and music. In addition to this, they also arouse our tactile sensation, the sense of touching. E. H. Gombrich (1992) writes about the interrelationships among auditory, tactile and visual sensations perceived from the colors and images: "We speak of loud colors or of bright sounds, and everyone knows what we mean. . . There is touch in such terms as *velvety voice and a cold light*, taste with sweet harmonies of colors or sounds, and so on" (p.1085). Paul De Man (1988) states that we should recognize the necessity of a "linguistic moment in painting and in music, and learn to read pictures" (p.362). The elements of one art form are shared by another art form. This is called inter-art relationship.

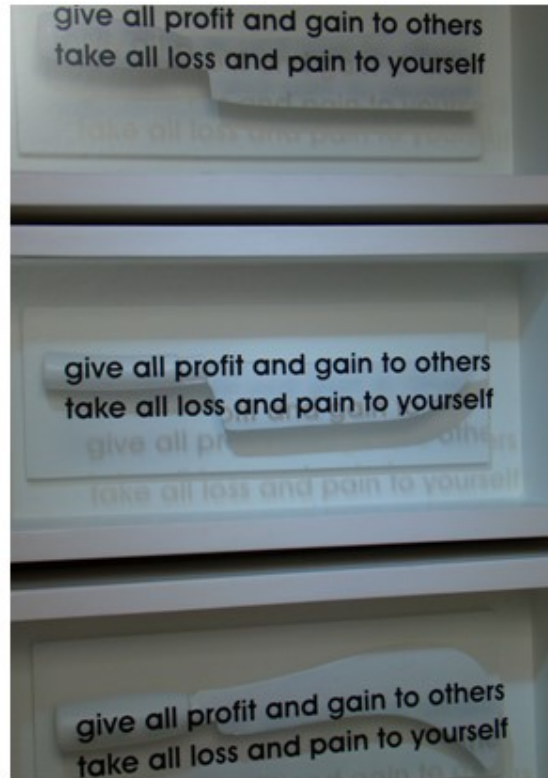


Fig.2 Sujun Chitrakar. 'When Nobody Tells you What'

Pop artists put the collage of papers and three dimensional things on the canvas. Because of this, the painting appears to be three dimensional like a sculpture. Such arts do not fit into a category of either a sculpture or painting.

Contemporary artworks blur genres, transgresses them, or unfix boundaries (Cohen 2000). Such works are "multigeneric" having inter-art relationship (Rowe 1992 p.186). The artists attempt to formulate their own rules in the artwork. Jean-Francois Lyotard (1986) states: "The work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for"

(p.81). Contemporary artists invent new techniques and idiom for their expression. Such art form "defers any final answer, implying that all answers are relative and provisional" (Wain, 1999 p.4). Such features are found in inter-generic artworks. Chitrakar's works also use the techniques of various art genres to express his feelings and emotions in response to contemporary society.

### 3. Result and Discussion

Sujan Chitrakar's works have inter-art relationship among various art genres like literature, drama, photography, painting and sculpture. The conventional boundaries among various art forms have been broken. The artist's emphasis is on his expression rather than following the traditional rules of specific art genre. The verbal texts appear in his canvas. Similarly, three dimensional real objects are put in the two dimensional surface of painting. His artwork 'Room to Disguise' (Fig.1) shows the *mélange* of sculpture and painting. The artist has painted the real masks using colors. We can also see the real things as pillow and bed in the work.

On the top of the bed, the artist has installed sculpture and painting. The boundary between reality and art has been broken. The artist uses the room to hide himself. In the bedroom, we reveal ourselves. The distance between appearance and reality is vanished in the bed. We are something but we become something else through disguise to protect ourselves. There are various purposes of disguise as to show oneself great, to be hypocrite, to be invisible. Through disguise, the insignificant can be shining and famous. The important person can be invisible in disguise. We are living the life of disguise. Our identity is ever shifting rarely revealed. The artist also uses the mask, the other instrument for disguise. We wear mask to hide our face, to become something else what we are not. To disguise himself, the artist uses mask, painting and his private room.



Fig.3 Sujan Chitrakar. 'Let's Talk about Art Baby'

In the artwork, 'When nobody Tells You What' (Fig.2), Chitrakar uses literature and painting, verbal art and visual art, to express his feelings. The artist presents the message of



selflessness and renunciation in the world where there is, corruption, violence and selfishness. The artist has inscribed these lines on the canvas:

Give all profit and gain to others  
Take all loss and pain to yourself

These poetic lines are in contrast to the nature of most of the people in our context. Chitrakar has written this message on the images of knife, sickle and chopper in the background. These tools are connected to the violence. Power and violence win the election and rule the country. We have seen the people who take all profit and gain to themselves and give all loss and pain to others. The artist realizes that such attitude and actions create unrest and conflict in the society. By taking all the profit, a person can be rich in material things but may be spiritually empty. Leaving the greed, the artist asks us to give comfortable things to others, and to take painful things to ourselves. He appeals the viewers that if we are confused in certain situation and context: 'what to do and what not to do', we should provide all profit and gain to other people, and take all loss and pain to ourselves. This is the best policy of a humble man. This sounds to be the statement of a sage. This is the spiritual message in both Hinduism and Buddhism.



Fig.4 Sujan Chitrakar. 'And I Heard him Say'

Sujan Chitrakar's artwork 'Let's Talk about Art Baby' (Fig.3) puts text, photography and painting together. A couple is sitting together in a park. The girl requests the boy, "Let's Talk about Art Baby." The text or the dialogue floats within the bubble. A street vendor is going away from there saying, "Brush came! Color came!" The way the person is saying and walking seems as if the vendor is selling snacks in the garden or the street. The artwork suggests that art should be like other things used in daily life. Art should be in the access of common people. There should be the talk on arts at home, in the classroom, street and the society as other things of daily life.

The figures of the girl and the boy are the photographs of real people. The artist paints picture on the canvas manipulating the photographs along with putting the text on the same space. The artist blurs the boundary among various art genres. In an interview, Chitrakar (2017) himself states: "I think art cannot be categorized into these strict boundaries. Both the

western and the Nepali art traditions are equally my own.” Chitrakar crosses the boundaries among various art categories.

Chitrakar’s artwork 'And I Heard Him Say' (Fig.4) also includes both verbal and visual arts. Texts and images are put together. Photography, painting and literature are used to communicate his concept. The artist takes reference from the photograph of marketplace and paints the picture on the canvas. The text ‘need to buy some paints’ inside the bubble is visible. The dialogue is spoken to a boy who wants to buy some paints to make paintings. As an art activist, the artist tries to bring art in the mainstream of the society. People buy rice, biscuits, meat, vegetable, fruit and bread. Then, why not to buy brushes, canvas and paint? The artist attempts to present art as necessary commodity.

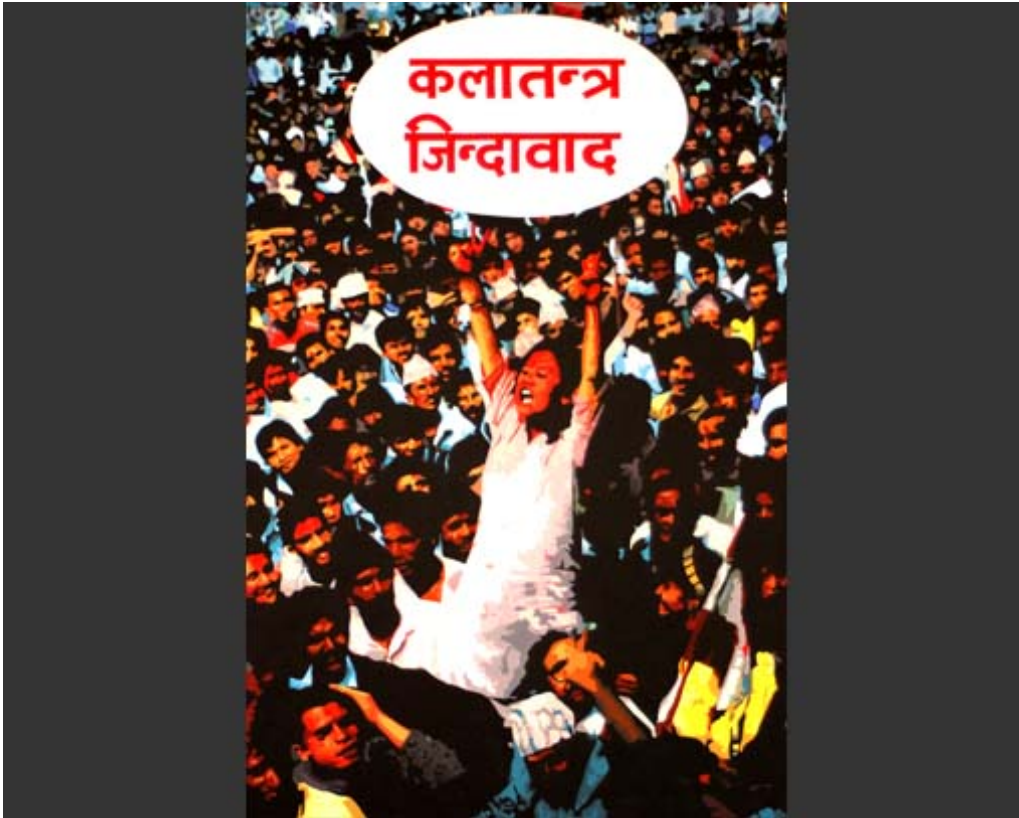


Fig.5 Sujan Chitrakar. 'Long Live Artocracy'

'Long Live Artocracy' (Fig.5), next artwork by Chitrakar, brings together the techniques of three art genre like photograph, literature and painting. The visual art and verbal arts are put together. The painting takes reference from the photograph taken at the time of political demonstration. The title of the photograph is 'Long live democracy'. But the artist has reformulated it into 'Long live artocracy'. The presentation resembles to photograph although the figures are painted with colors. From the middle of the crowd of people, an energetic girl is shouting the slogan. The artist attempts to convey the idea that there should be demonstration with slogans in the domain of art as there are such things in the field of politics. The artwork is about art itself.

Sujan Chitrakar’s works cross the boundary between various art genres. The artist presents the visual and verbal texts in the same space. Sculptures, photographs, verbal texts, paintings and other objects of daily life are integrated as a part of a work of art. Transgressing boundary between artist and audience, some works demand the viewer's participation to be complete.

#### 4. Conclusion

Sujan Chitrakar integrates different art genres in his works. Two dimensional art like painting and three dimensional arts like sculpture are put in the same space. Sculpture, painting and photographs coexist in the same work. The boundary between visual pictures and written texts are broken. The artist does not follow the traditional rules of art. He uses multiple genres of arts to present his themes. Sujan Chitrakar breaks the convention of creating art to give expression of his inner feelings and emotions in response to the contemporary context. Breaking away from the established traditions of art, he invents his own techniques for expression in each of his artworks.

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