



Inter-Art Dynamics of Kalapremi's Artworks: A Critique of Contemporary Nepali Arts

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Abstract

The 'inter-art' refers to an artwork that is composed of more than one art form of the visual arts, such as sculpture, painting, video art, photography, ceramics, installation, performance, etc., showing the relationship between them. This study reveals the idea of inter-art relationships in the works of Gopal Kalapremi Shrestha, widely known as 'Kalapremi'. The main objective of this paper is to explore the inter-art dynamics of Kalapremi's artworks. The paper also aims to identify the key art genres in the creations of Kalapremi and to discuss the underlying meaning of his style. The paper reveals the importance of having multiple skills and techniques for an artist in today's contemporary art contexts. The effect of the inter-art relationship shows the dynamism, progressiveness, limitlessness, and unconventionality of an individual art practice. It mainly focuses on the inter-art relationship as a major tool to analyze creativity.

Keywords: Art genre, artworks, visual arts, inter-art relationship

Introduction

Gopal Kalapremi Shrestha, nicknamed as 'Kalapremi,' is Nepal's foremost ceramic sculptor. According to him, he loves to be addressed as "Kalapremi"—"he who shares, transfers, and translates ideas into art forms (Kayastha and Schicklgruber 216). Thus, he has been mentioned as "Kalapremi" in this entire paper as his surname. He studied Fine Arts at Lalitkala Campus, Tribhuvan University, to obtain a formal degree of art education because of his strong interest in the arts. However, he quit Lalitkala Campus after a few years and became a self-taught artist. Kalapremi has produced a series of works and has participated in many important art exhibitions nationally and internationally. He had conducted ceramics workshops at Jeonju University, South Korea, the National College of Arts, and in several other countries such as Pakistan, France, Denmark, Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka. Currently, Kalapremi is a faculty member of ceramics at the Centre for Art and Design, Kathmandu University, Nepal.

Kalapremi was already a famous sculptor in his early twenties. His skill in making sculptures was noticed by the Department of Cottage and Small Industries, Nepal Government. As a result, he was nominated by the government to work on traditional

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ceramics in Bhaktapur. The main mission of his selection was to develop traditional ceramics through his sculptural creativity, which would be sustainable for the community. The main idea in his work was to incorporate his skills in sculpturing and re-creating conventional ceramic methods and products. He started learning the technique of ceramics in Bhaktapur and Thimi, exploring unique and unusual ceramic sculptures. He has been exhibiting many ceramic sculptural art exhibitions since 1988. Some of his most notable series of exhibitions are *The Muse*, *Millennium*, *Gold Fish*, *Bull Series*, *Blue Diamonds*, *Darker Days of My Country*, *Game of Chess played by Women*, *Masculism*, *Where the Wild Things Are*, and *Cows that Want to Be Bulls*.

The 'inter-art relationship' has been one of the strong tools of contemporary art practices. It refers to the convergence of different artistic genres into a single composition (see Fig. 1) and shows the relationship among them. They show different artistic skills such as painting, sculpture, performance, digital, photography, ceramics, print-making, installations, etc.

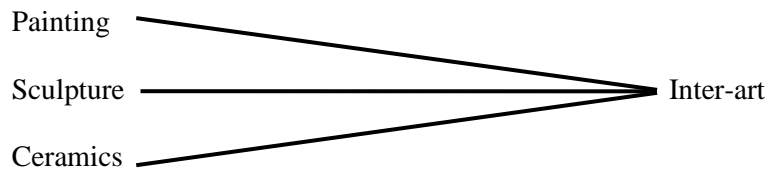


Fig. 1. *This diagram reflects the method of inter-art.*

Painting would be one genre, and sculpture would be another genre, which can be used to create a new work of art. Each artistic genre or discipline has a different medium, techniques, methods, and processes. According to Yam Prashad Sharma, "All the artistic genres have their own specific rules and elements" (3). All the artistic disciplines are given similar value by the artist to create an inter-art relationship. However, each inter-art can have a different visual taste for audiences, which can be unique and individualistic.

Kalapremi's highly refined conceptual ceramic sculptures reveal the relationship between ceramic and painting. He breaks the traditional boundaries of conventional art practices. He has created many of the finest art pieces by converging multiple artistic disciplines to express his feelings and emotions. His works are subtle, fascinating, and mind-engaging.

The main aim of this paper is to convey the importance of inter-art relationships in Kalapremi's artworks. It also conveys the importance of having multiple skills and techniques in a work of art, educating people to think beyond limitations in terms of creativity. In this paper, the following research questions have been attempted to answer: How has Kalapremi combined and represented different types of artistic disciplines in a single composition? What are the major types of artistic roots that he used to create his own artworks?

Methodology

This study follows a mixed-method that is presented through the inter-art relationship, which is a major tool to interpret the works. The primary sources include interviews with the artists and photos of the artworks to evaluate, analyze, interpret, and investigate the inter-art relationship in the major artworks of Kalapremi. His artworks have been interpreted using both positivist and constructivist methods as part of the ontological study. The secondary sources like critical books, book chapters, and journal articles have been used to support the issues raised in the study.

Inter-Art and Theories of Art

The practice of inter-art is not limited to a single style or theory. For instance, a painting *Mona Lisa* created by Leonardo da Vinci contains the elements and principles of painting; it does not include other discipline such as video art, sculpture, performance or any others. Similarly, Michelangelo's *David* is created in the three-dimensional form. There is no other art discipline added to this artwork. Thus, both *Mona Lisa* and *David* can only be interpreted as works of art. The aesthetic quality of these great works can be described individually. To analyze or create *Mona Lisa*, one does not need to look at Michelangelo's *David*. A few good examples of inter-art could be Grayson Perry's ceramic sculptural series and Yayoi Kusama's *Pumpkin* series. Both artists have unconventional ways of creating works of art; they create by combining different art disciplines such as painting, sculpture, and ceramic. Grayson Perry's *I Want to Be an Artist* (see Fig. 2) is one of the most notable works, which is created by combining two artistic disciplines: ceramic and painting. Ironically, Perry's work represents the portraits of Jean-Michel Basquiat and Andy Warhol on historical objects. His ceramic pots are associated with the most historical objects from his country. The portraits he has transformed on the objects are modern icons in the field of visual arts. According to him, "My pots always carry with them the intellectual baggage of the history of ceramics, its archaeology, geography, and value system. But up close, the content of my work can confound all that" (qtd. in Klein 242).



Fig. 2. Grayson Perry, *I want to be an Artist*, glazed earthenware, 1996

Source: © Artnet, 2024



Fig. 3. Yayoi Kusama, *Pumpkin*, Resin, 1994

Source: © Gregory Lane, Fukuoka Art Museum

The Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama's *Yellow Pumpkin* (see Fig. 3) was created by combining two disciplines: sculpture and painting. She has applied circular rhythmic patterns of black circles to the three-dimensional object (pumpkin) to make it more distinctive. This work is more pragmatic in nature, in which the audiences can have

multiple views and perspectives to interpret the work. There can be many other ways of creating inter-art relationships that depend on the artistic representation and creativity. For instance, Nepali artist Sujan Chitrakar has his own ways of building inter-art relationships. As stated by Sharma, "The verbal texts appear in Sujan Chitraka's canvas. Similarly, three dimensional real objects are put in the two-dimensional surface of painting" (5). However, in Kalapremi's work, two-dimensional visual images are depicted on a three-dimensional surface.

Kalapremi's Model of Inter-Art: Results

Kalapremi's artworks are created and composed by combining more than single artistic skill and discipline, mainly ceramic sculpture and painting (see Fig. 4, 5).



Fig. 4. Pattern and idea of a ceramic painting from his "Masculinism Series" by Gopal Kalapremi Shrestha



Fig. 5. Sculpture work in progress by Gopal Kalapremi Shrestha

Source: © Gopal Kalapremi Shrestha, 2024

This method of creation comes after his government project for the promotion of ceramics and small-scale industries in 1993; before this project, Kalapremi was famous as a sculptor, engaging only with the sculpturing skill. About the ceramics project, Kalapremi states,




As an artist and teacher, my main responsibility was to train traditional potters from Bhaktapur and Thimi in sculpture and contemporary pottery. This marked

my transition from sculpture to ceramics. This training period allowed me not only to study, experiment, and research ceramics, but also gave me an opportunity to incorporate traditional Nepali crafts and local materials into contemporary sculpture and pottery. This led me to my first solo ceramics exhibition entitled "Peace from Love. (216)

Some scholars argue that Kalapremi's interdisciplinary idea depicts the neo-cultural phenomenon of society. According to Adele Tilouine, "This [Kalapremi] interdisciplinary artist carries out a work of cultural interbreeding that highlights the contrasts of the modern and traditional society in which he evolves" (par. 5). Kalapremi's scientific ways of coloring the ceramics make his works more interesting and expressive. In most of his works, he does not use ready-made colors; rather, he creates his own colors and textures from various materials. He experiments with copper, gold, and silver to create appropriate color for his works; this is an unconventional way of creating a painting effect. Therefore, the inter-art relationship of his artworks highlights the following major artistic disciplines:

Ceramics

Kalapremi's major genre is ceramic pottery. Ceramic pottery is the process of making a three-dimensional object (it can be pottery or any desired form) by mixing clay or earthen elements. After providing a specific form to clay, the dried clay is fired at a high temperature. Sometimes the object is glazed to give it shininess and make it stronger (see Fig. 6). In Nepal, Bhaktapur is popular for its ceramic pottery, which includes various objects like khutruke (traditional piggybank), lamp, and vase. There are six major steps to create ceramic pottery, which is depicted below.

Ceramics Working Process		
Step 1		Clay mixing with water
Step 2		Soft clay that can easily be formed
Step 3		Form of a specific object that has hardened slightly




Step 4		Completely dried object, ready to be fired
Step 5		Object transformed to ceramics material
Step 6		Glaze applied on ceramics object and fired a second time

Fig. 6. Table showing the steps of ceramic pottery and sculpture
Image Source: © ArtBoxAdventures

Painting

Painting is another form of art in the artworks of Kalapremi. This artwork is one of the most important and historical mediums of art because it contains its own method, process, and technique (see Fig. 7). Paintings are mostly two-dimensional. Some paintings are created in a formal manner and some in an informal manner. In the formal aspect of painting, the method of art follows specific conventional rules. The informal aspect of painting does not follow academic rules and regulations, in which the artists have the freedom to express themselves in their own ways. However, the most essential factor of painting is that a visual aesthetic is composed of line, color, tones, texture, balance, pattern, rhythm, and repetition. How the various dots and colors are composed in one's design can be categorized as painting, which is mostly a two-dimensional work. Painting has its own tools, such as pens, pencils, paintbrushes, etc. Sometimes color can be directly applied with hands and feet to a space, or the texture can be created by different organic or inorganic materials.

Similarly, different art movements may have different artistic techniques. For example, the Renaissance artists used the Sfumato and Chiaroscuro techniques in their works, while some modern artists such as Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock maneuvered the "super flat," "drip," sometimes the "Alla Prima" technique in their two-dimensional masterpieces, as in the paintings of Pablo Picasso's blue period. However, in the sculptures of Kalapremi, his prior painting patterns are highly inspired by the *tattoo* (body art) of *Tharu* ethnic women from Dang, Nepal, which seem to be quite intriguing. In fact, both the techniques used by him (ceramic and painting patterns) were rooted in particular local traditions. The following diagram shows the important steps of two-dimensional work that have been used in Kalapremi's artworks before he glazed the three-dimensional object.

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Painting Working Process		
Step 1		First create an outline with similar shape with the help of pencil or pen
Step 2		Add stems on the top of the berries
Step 3		Connect broken lines
Step 4		Draw irregular rounds inside the shape, in similar distance
Step 5		Make sure that lines and shape look alike similar to strawberries
Step 6		Apply red color on the berries. After it dries, apply yellow on the tiny circular dots and green on the stems

Fig. 7. This table shows the steps of painting
Source: © HowToDraw.Pics

Kalapremi's Artworks: Discussion

Kalapremi's *Jenny* is one of the most interesting series (see Fig. 8). This is made of ceramics (Raku Ware technique). The painting patterns—the patterns in this oeuvre are inspired by the tattoos of women from the Tharu ethnic culture. Although these types of stylized tangible figures are not common in visual form in Nepali culture, the main idea is the representation of pop culture in modern society. To represent pop culture, he has illustrated the buxom female riding on a donkey, which shows a contradiction between modernity and tradition.



Fig. 8. Gopal Kalapremi Shrestha, *Jenny*, 2017
Source: © Gopal Kalapremi Shrestha, 2024

The artist has created these characters to represent the socio-political situation of the world. Sangeeta Thapa illustrates about this work:

These women are not only riders but the masters of their own destiny. Gopal's donkeys grin, gape, gaze upwards and nudge the buxom female rider. The rider and the donkey appear as caricatured reflection on the politics of gender and identity. The torso of the donkey is decorated with the reoccurring motif of mother board patterns and symbols of the 12 zodiac signs: the lion, the ram, the bull, fish, scales of justice, bow and arrows etc. The traditional godhana or tattoo patterns from Kathmandu Valley plus Janakpur, Dang, Deukhuri and Kapilvastu from the Terai, are also used to embellish both his cows, horses and donkeys. (par. 4)



Fig. 9. Gopal Kalapremi Shrestha, *Bulls Series*, 2015

Source: © Gopal Kalapremi Shrestha, 2024

Kalapremi's *Bulls Series* is one of the most interesting series in his opus (see Fig. 9). The structure of a bull in the traditional Hindu mythology represents a symbol of power, strength, and gratification. In this series, not only the structure of bulls but also two-dimensional elements are visible. All the faces of bulls are presented in various expressions, and their actions are depicted with the masculine features. The combination of three-dimensional bull ceramic sculptures and two-dimensional visual patterns provides a sense of inter-art relationship. All the humps and horns are the central characters of the creation, which symbolize masculinity and patriarchy.

The visual patterns on the bodies of bulls depict different irregular patterns. This can epitomize man-made masculinity rather than nature-made masculinity which is more like a deconstructive form from nature to man-made culture. Rubia explains about Kalapremi's bull series, which has dual characteristic features: "Gopal's clay bulls have been made using the Japanese pottery technique of *raku*, which gives them a cracked surface. As if trying to depict a personal story, their bodies are individually decorated with different patterns" (par. 6). In this context, the idea of different patterns resembles painting, while bull sculptures mimic the concept of three-dimensional formation of Japanese pottery technique of *raku*.



Fig. 10. Gopal Kalapremi Shrestha, *Vessels Have Stories*, 2021

Source: © Gopal Kalapremi Shrestha, 2024

Vessels Have Stories is also created by combining two major art genres, ceramics, and paintings, which can be easily noticed by the viewers (see Fig. 10). A two-dimensional painting is applied to a three-dimensional form (vessels). Composed of black, white, and gray color lines, the texture and pattern of all the vessels delineate an era of pain, trouble, and misery. A visual pattern can be called a part of painting. The vessels are constructed and developed through the ordinary pottery, inspired by Kalapremi's own distinct style of ceramics, which indicates the modern pottery. A pottery without a painting looks like a human without a cloth in the creation of Kalapremi. Sangeeta Thapa writes on this particular work: "A set of six large ceramic torso like vessels, titled *Vessels have Stories* also depicts this trauma and complements the black and white raku fired paintings" (par. 8). To sum up, Kalapremi's artworks are unique and combines multiple skills and techniques to show his mastery of creating artworks.

Conclusion

Kalapremi mostly uses ceramics, sculpture, and painting as major mediums. His mastery of creating three-dimensional ceramic sculptures in various forms, such as vases, pottery, animals, and anthropomorphic figures. Moreover, his proficiency in creating two-dimensional paintings both technically and conceptually make his work more meaningful. His works highlight the importance of multiple skills and knowledge in art making. The combination of his three-dimensional and two-dimensional works into a single work of art showcases his unique individuality. The result conveys that he has not only combined the techniques and visuals of different genres of art, but he has also connected multiple artistic roots (Bhaktapur's Newari traditional ceramic culture with Tharu's indigenous *Tattoo* culture) in his works, which gives a sense of multicultural identity and portrays a pure inter-art relationship.

This study is useful to identify the aesthetic of contemporary art practice, as the inter-art relationship has become one of the most fundamental pillars of art history around the globe. This type of art activity can bring uniqueness and individuality to the work of an artist. The result of this study proclaims that any artist around the world can borrow any artistic discipline that belongs to their own culture and tradition, connecting it with other artistic disciplines to make it more unique and interesting. To sum up, this study on Kalapremi's masterpieces convey that creativity has no limitations; an artist has the freedom to express his or her feelings, emotions, and imagination through discovering their own method of creativity.

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