



*Bull Depictions*, early 19<sup>th</sup>-century.  
National Art Museum of Bhaktapur.

# Animal Portraiture in the Shah and Rana Era

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## Abstract

*In the art history of Nepal, the portrayal of animals was never the primary subject until the late medieval period. But animals were depicted as mount of gods and goddesses in common practice. Independent animal portraitures are seen for the first time in the Shah period. In the National Art Museum of Bhaktapur, a collection of forty-eight distinct animal portraits has been available. There are two types of animal portraiture: mythical creatures and natural fauna. Mythical beings are śārdūla, simha, śarabha, and vyāla, whereas natural fauna are wild animals available in Nepal. Mythical creatures are mostly inspired by Persia, Central Asia as well as the Far East, whereas natural fauna are influenced by Pahari, Mughal, and Mewar artistic traditions. Animals are depicted engaging in fights, chases, and brawls, based on the animal kingdom. Among them, bull fight scenes commissioned by Rana Bahadur Shah, depicted by Nepalese artists. The background of the painting reveals a portrayal of mountains, trees, rocks, rivers, and other natural elements of Paubhāḥ painting. In the early nineteenth century, Nepalese artists used to make copies by Nepali artists using a camera lucida, drawing on paper with pencil, and filling with black ink or colors. Under Jang Bahadura Rana, Nepalese artists observed the photos, sketched them onto the canvas, and then applied colors.*

**Keywords:** Animal portrait, Chitrakar, Mythical creature, National Art Museum, Shah and Rana era.

## Introduction

Various animal portrait paintings are found in the archives of the National Art Museum of Bhaktapur. While some

animals are easily recognizable, others pose a challenge for identification. The animals are symbolically associated with strength, power, authoritative qualities, and mesmerizing beauty. Some animals

are composed of an animal body with an eagle face, accompanied by a pair of horns and fiery elements or wings emanating from their limbs. There are a few paintings, where the animals are fighting with each other in the forest. The backgrounds of the scenes are wild trees, colorful wildflowers, and fanciful vegetation. Certain animals depicted in these paintings are hybrid creatures, adorned with horns, wings, and fiery elements emanating from beneath their forelegs, spreading across their shoulders, and from their hind legs, spreading through their hips. In some paintings warriors are depicted on horseback amidst animals engaged in combat, while in other paintings animals are depicted attacking each other directly. Various mythical animals are depicted with serene expressions in the squares within a single painting. Some paintings depict scenes where flower motifs are repeated in the background. The facial expressions of the animals appear naturalistic in style. Some paintings predominantly feature a palette of three colors: white, red, and black. In this manner, the particular animal portraiture emerges distinctively, as animals were initially utilized solely as *vāhāna*-s for gods and goddesses in traditional paintings. The question of why this change initially occurred prompts an investigation into its underlying causes. The emergence of this type of painting in the history of Nepal raises questions regarding the foreign influences on the artists at that time, as well as the origins and motivations behind the shift. It remains unclear whether these paintings

were created independently by the artists or under the direction of a patron or a ruler. This paper aims to explore specific animal portraiture within the history of painting in Nepal. The specific objectives include identifying the sources of inspiration, examining the influences that shaped these artworks, investigating the reasons behind their creation, and determining the time periods in which these paintings were produced.

## Methodology

In the realm of Nepalese art history, the emergence of independent animal portraiture appears to coincide with the onset of the 19th-century. Curiously, there exists a notable absence of scholarly inquiry into the underlying reasons prompting the inception of animal portraiture during this era. Therefore, this paper adopts a qualitative research design to investigate the evolution of independently created animal paintings in Nepal within a historical context. Independently painted animal portraits discovered in the National Art Museum of Bhaktapur serve as focal points for this study. Employing a descriptive research design, the paper endeavors to illuminate the characteristics and themes prevalent in these artworks. Furthermore, a comparative analysis is conducted to depict various types of animal paintings found within the collection, while an analytical research design is employed to look into their stylistic nuances and symbolic significance. The study is generated from two sources: primary and secondary. The primary source for this

study comprises the original paintings housed at the National Art Museum of Bhaktapur. These artworks serve as the cornerstone for the research, offering direct insights into the subject matter. Secondary sources, including published books and articles related to the topic, supplement the analysis, providing additional context, interpretation, and scholarly perspectives to enrich the study's findings.

## Discussion and Analysis

In the history of Nepali painting, animal representations appeared solely as *vāhāna*-s or mount for the deities. The *vāhāna*-s associated with specific gods and goddesses are intertwined with religious narratives. Hence, *vāhāna*-s depicted with images of gods and goddesses are commonly used. Even if there was no knowledge of the iconography of the deity, the deity's mount was also discussed in the story, so the gods and goddesses were easily recognized on the basis of their *vāhāna*. In traditional paintings, the portrayal of animals has never been the primary subject.

In the National Art Museum of Bhaktapur, a collection of forty-eight distinct animal portraits have been identified (Yamuna Maharjan. Personal Communication. 2023). Among these depictions are various mythical creatures such as the *śārdūla*, *simha*, and *śarabha*, alongside real animals including bulls, tigers, buffaloes, horses, lions, and leopards. These portrayals exhibit diverse compositions, ranging

from encounters between different species to aggressive interactions, and confrontations. Furthermore, the depicted animals exhibit a spectrum of realism, some rendered realistically while others embodying mythical characteristics.

Two distinct types of independent animal portraiture can be discerned within the National Art Museum of Bhaktapur collection: mythical creatures and natural fauna. Mythical beings such as *śārdūla*, *simha*, and *śarabha* serve as guardian beasts positioned at the entrances of temples, symbolizing potent protectors of the temple precincts. Typically depicted in pairs—a male and a female—in stone and metal, adorning Nepali architecture, these creatures later appeared independently in paintings, often situated within landscape compositions or alongside other guardian beasts. *Śārdūla* is a composite creature featuring the body of a lion and the face of an eagle, with lion's teeth. It is characterized by a set of horns and fiery elements, or wings, emerging from its forelimbs or hind limbs. Typically adorned with intricate curly hair motifs along its mane, jawline, and limbs, the lion tail of *śārdūla* often exhibits fiery motifs as well. The male *śārdūla* is depicted with a grayish-black base color, accentuated by vibrant red hair, a red beak, and red wings. Elaborate jewelry, adorned in gold, red, and white hues, embellishes its neck. It features sharp white claws and a pair of layered white horns. Notably, its tongue and the tip of its penis are depicted in red. Fiery motif elements embellish its eyebrows and the tip of its tail. The prominent

use of red, white, and black colors in its depiction often evokes connections to the aesthetics of tantrism. The male *simha* is depicted with a white body, accompanied by red hair adorning its tail and limbs. Fiery elements emanate from beneath its forelimbs and hind limbs, rendered in a blend of red and grayish-black hues. Its visage resembles that of a human, featuring a pointed nose and a thin, elongated mustache curling around its cheek. Prominently black eyebrows, eyelashes, and mustaches further characterize its facial expression. Elaborate jewelry, embellished in gold, red, and grayish-black tones, adorns its neck. Long, pointed ears add to the distinctive character of the portrayal. *Śarabha* embodies a fusion of a lion with a subtly elongated neck, resembling that of a horse, adorned with the majestic horns of a mature ram. Its main features long locks painted and lined in red, while red motifs extend outward from beneath its forelegs, spreading across its shoulders, and emanating from beneath its hind legs toward its hips.

The hybrid dragon *Simha* depicted in this collection bears resemblance to the Manticore, mythical creatures originating from Persia and Central Asia known for their fierce and savage attributes. Additionally, these hybrids share certain features, such as dragon wings, forked tongues, and tails, with the Gamelyon, an emblem of medieval European heraldry. Their scale-like rendering lends them a reptilian appearance. Much like the *simha* portrayed by the artist, they boast prominently displayed mustaches thinly

curling around their cheeks (Basukala & Maharjan, 2023).

Furthermore, the hybrid dragon *simha* exhibits characteristics akin to the supernatural beast Qilin or Chi Lin, horned dragon lions often depicted with uni-horns or in pairs. Qilin symbolizes wisdom, prosperity, good luck, and longevity, suggesting that the hybrid dragon *simha* shares these auspicious qualities (Taylor, 2024).



**Fig. 1:** *Gajayāli* early 19<sup>th</sup>-century. National Art Museum of Bhaktapur.

*Vyāla*, another prominent creature depicted independently in animal portraiture, bears similarities with makara, creatures that feature trunks with the head of a bird at the ends of their trunks. More specifically termed *gaja vyāla* or *gajayāli*, these creatures embody the strength of an elephant, the ferocity and swiftness of a lion, and instill fear akin to that associated with snakes (Kanakavalli, n.d.) Occasionally, *vyāla* also manifests as hybrids of horses, lions, humans, and dogs, consequently earning the designations *aśva vyāla*, *simha vyāla*, *nara vyāla*, and *śvāna vyāla* respectively.

*Vyāla*, also known as *yāzhi* or *yāli* in Tamil, serves as guardians and protectors, warding off evil forces. Widely depicted in southern Indian iconography as the *vāhāna* (mount) of the planet Mercury, Budha graha, they are popular motifs representing a composite leonine creature with the faces of an elephant and a bird. Additionally, they are regarded as personifications of powerful natural forces (Sayuri, 10 Jan. 2017). The pair of yellow, black, and white striped *gaja vyāla* or *gajayāli* (Fig. 1) depicted here appears to engage in a joyful encounter. The one on the right is identified as a female *gaja vyāla*, while the one on the left is a male *gaja vyāla*. Both creatures boast two pairs of black wings extending from beneath their forelimbs and hind limbs. The background is adorned with twelve distinct trees, likely symbolizing the autumn season. These creatures possess the strength of an elephant, the ferocity and swiftness of a lion, and instill fear akin to that associated with snakes.



**Fig. 2:** *Simha, Sārdūla and Śarabha*, early 19<sup>th</sup>-century. National Art Museum of Bhaktapur.

The encounter of *simha* and *sārdūla* with the *śarabha* beast composition (Fig. 2.), comprising the four fantastic beasts, is further adorned with repeating flower motifs. The stylistic influence for these motifs is drawn from Islamic manuscript paintings and the essence of northwestern art within the Indian subcontinent. Arranged in pairs facing each other, these beasts perhaps signify a readiness to engage in combat or compete, showcasing their strength and ferocity. Nonetheless, this composition undoubtedly reflects the profound interest and fascination of both the artist and the patron with these mythical creatures.

The portrayal of natural animals encompasses oxen, tigers, buffaloes, horses, elephants, lions, wild beasts, bulls, leopards, and more. These compositions depict scenes of animals engaging in fights, chases, and brawls, capturing the raw and dynamic interactions within the animal kingdom. The depictions include brawling lions, wild buffaloes chasing tigers, wild buffaloes attacking leopards and tigers, various animals engaged in fights, and bulls engaging in combat. These scenes capture the intense and often violent interactions between different species within the animal kingdom. These kinds of paintings depicting animal attacks were a favorite topic in the Nainsukh School of Guler. Nainsukh seems to use action studies from observation or his repertoire of sketches, constantly capturing little vignettes on paper and putting them together in his spirited works (Goswamy, 1997).



Fig. 3: *Brawling Lions*, early 19<sup>th</sup>-century. National Art Museum of Bhaktapur.

In the composition depicting brawling lions (Fig. 3), the stylization of the lion exhibits influences from foreign lands. They possess a slightly more natural appearance with a golden-yellow skin tone and white underbelly, along with a chest mane. The influence for the depiction of these lions can be traced back to the artistic styles of the Mughal era when the tradition of making portraits of strange or favorite animals was initiated by the fourth Mughal Emperor, Jahangir (reigned 1605 -27) and was continued by both later Mughals and Rajput patrons, further, to medieval Islamic animal paintings (Pal, 2001). The

artist has meticulously rendered the pair, both males, with outlines of light yellow delineating the boundaries between their white and golden-yellow skin. Thin red lines outline their claws and mouths, adding vitality to their appearance. Their eyes, resembling those of humans, are complemented by thinly rendered eyebrows. Both lions are depicted engaging in a playful brawl.

In the composition portraying tigers chasing wild buffaloes (Fig. 4), the background of the picture is depicted in dark green hues. The scenery includes grasslands dotted with four distinct



Fig. 4: *Tigers Chasing Wild Buffaloes*, early 19<sup>th</sup>-century. National Art Museum of Bhaktapur.

trees, alongside Tibetan-style rocks and mountains. In the foreground, a wild bull is depicted aggressively attacking a tiger with its horns, while the tiger fiercely defends itself, standing upright on two legs. In the distance, another tiger is shown retreating and fleeing from the scene, evoking a sense of urgency and danger.

In the depictions of wild buffaloes attacking leopards and tigers (Fig. 5), the background of the figure is rendered in dark green tones. Various types of trees, Tibetan-style rocks, and mountains are featured in the scenery. In the upper portion, a wild bull is depicted in pursuit

of a leopard, while in the lower portion, another wild bull is advancing to attack a tiger. The tiger is portrayed with a panicked expression, indicating the intensity of the encounter.

The painting composition, featuring a multitude of animals locked in combat, vividly illustrates a tumultuous clash between creatures of diverse sizes and strengths (Fig. 6). Amidst the tumult, the energized oxen and the striped tigers are locked in a fierce and bloody battle. Both oxen are tearing the tigers' guts with their fierce, large horns. The tiger in the foreground, however, bites the ox's back, and both of them are bleeding.



**Fig. 5: *Buffalo Attacking Leopards and Tigers*,** early 19<sup>th</sup>-century. National Art Museum of Bhaktapur.

At the top left, a blue śarabha with white and orange horns pounces onto the fighting scene. Further, the scene is crowded with a white śvāna (dog) with black patches, a black bhalluka (bear), and a mriga (deer). The composite of these ten animals makes it an engaging battle (Chitrakar, 2017).

In the nineteenth century, the depiction of horses, elephants, and various wild fauna in paintings exhibited a notable influence derived from the Pahari, Mughal, and Mewar artistic traditions originating from the north-western regions of the Indian subcontinent. This influence is discernible in both the stylistic approach and anatomical representation of the depicted animals, showcasing a pronounced similarity to the aforementioned north-western styles (Singh & Poovaian, n.d.). The diplomatic and commercial interactions of Nepal with these northern territories facilitated a gradual amalgamation of visual motifs over time. Nonetheless, the portrayal of both bulls and horses



**Fig. 6: *Tigers Chasing Wild Buffaloes*,** early 19<sup>th</sup>-century. National Art Museum of Bhaktapur.

alongside elephants within a singular composition represents a distinctive artistic endeavor. Remarkably, the absence of direct religious, political, or patronage symbolism in the depiction of the animals and vegetation by the artist underscores a sense of artistic autonomy and liberation within this painting.

The rich, deep dark-green backdrop of this painting serves as a canvas for an abundance of colorful wildflowers and whimsically depicted trees, adorned with white birds, likely various species of pigeons, distinguished by their colorful markings and spots, perched gracefully on the branches. The thematic focus of the painting revolves solely around the playful interactions of these animals, with particular prominence granted to the white bulls. One white bull is depicted in pursuit of a beautifully adorned horse and elephant, while another engages in a spirited bullfight with a bejeweled red bull. Notably, the white bulls, unadorned except for their natural horns and hooves, exude a wilder aura compared to the other depicted animals.



Fig. 7: *Bull Depictions*, early 19<sup>th</sup>-century. National Art Museum of Bhaktapur.

The presence of bull depictions (Fig. 7) within the National Art Museum of Bhaktapur suggests that the documentation was likely produced during the reign of King Rana Bahadur Shah. Rana Bahadur Shah demonstrated a particular affinity for animal husbandry, notably showcasing a keen interest in bullfighting. This passion led him to cultivate a significant number of high-quality bulls under his care. He diligently conducted extensive searches both within the country and abroad to identify the origins of unique bulls. After receiving information from Dakṣiṇī Bhatta regarding the possession of a

pair of exceptionally large bulls by the king of Vijayanagar, Ran Bahadur Shah expressed a strong desire to acquire them. The letter, written by Rana Bahadur Shah to Dinā Nātha Upādhyāya, his ambassador stationed in Calcutta in 1796, unmistakably underscores this intention. In the correspondence, Rana Bahadur Shah was unequivocally instructed to utilize all available resources and efforts to secure the acquisition of the bull. “आफुले जान्याको जुक्ति बुद्धिलाई सक्यभर गरि त्यो ठुलो साँडया भिकाहि षर्च लाग्न्या भया षर्चलाई पनि कृतसक्य गरि भिकाउनु” If this task remains unaddressed, Rana

Bahadur Shah has issued a warning about potentially removing Dinā Nātha from his position. “अघि पछि परेवा हाँस ल्याउँदा जस्तो गरि एस पाला ढाढ्यादेपि बनाइकन बुभौला – मैकन् ताकित गरि नभिकायादेपि उस् दिन म बुभौला ।” He has also appreciated Dinā Nātha's belief that threats alone will not work. दीनानाथ उपाध्यायलाई ज्या काज लायो सो पुरन् गर्न सक्छन् भनि सबै मानिस तारि फ गथ्या, यो काज पुन्याउन सक्या काज गर्थ्यै र ह्याछन् भनि हामि पनि बुभौला । (Vajracharya and Nepal, 2014 V. S.).

It is documented that Rana Bahadur Shah exerted significant effort in attempting to acquire the bull. Hence, given Rana Bahadur Shah's fondness for bullfighting, it appears that he has ordered works depicting bullfights from artists. The presence of graiveka-adorned necks on the bulls indicates their status as state-owned animals. The depiction of bulls engaged in a bullfight in the painting suggests that they were raised specifically under the patronage of Rana Bahadur Shah. Upon scrutinizing the stylistic characteristics of the painting, it becomes apparent that it predates the introduction of European artistic influences in Nepal. Observing the background of the painting reveals a portrayal of mountains, trees, rocks, rivers, and other natural elements rendered in a distinctive stylistic manner consistent with the overall artistic approach of the Paubhā painting. Examining the background of the painting suggests that the artist dedicated considerable time and effort to its creation. This indicates that Nepali artists independently depicted animals in

artworks for the first time in the history of Nepali painting.

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the British East India Company commissioned Indian artists to portray the lives, monuments, festivals, crafts, and occupations of diverse ethnic groups within India. Their artistic endeavors embodied a fusion of Indian and British stylistic elements, commonly referred to as company painting. During this period, the Sugauli Treaty was signed between Nepal and Britain, leading to the establishment of the British Resident Legation in Kathmandu. The burgeoning association with the British Empire exerted a notable influence on Nepali art, drawing elements from Western artistic traditions (Rubia, n. d.). Western artistic influences commenced permeating Nepal following the signing of the Sugauli Treaty in 1816. (Shakya, 2023).

In 1816, the colonial British Empire designated Edward Gardner as its ambassador, subsequently elevating him to the position of the inaugural resident at the Court of Nepal. In 1820, Brian Houghton Hodgson was appointed as an assistant at the Nepalese Residency. In 1829, the Honorable Edward resigned from his position, leading to Hodgson assuming the role of acting resident in Nepal. During this time, he spent significant amounts on the purchase and copying of Buddhist or Sanskrit manuscripts and the preparation of zoological specimens, which he presented to the Asiatic Society and Scientific Society. Hodgson was beginning to be recognized in Europe

as a man of unique research into the language, religion, and zoology of the Himalayan regions. He enjoyed a fine reputation as an ethnologist, religious, scholar, and naturalist (Waterhouse, 2005). Between 1833 and 1836, James Prinsep curated special editions of Asiatic Research, featuring numerous contributions by Brian Hodgson focused on Nepal and Himalayan studies. Those issues of Asiatic Research centered on topics such as geography, geology, zoology, ethnography, and anthropology, as explored by Asian researchers. Artist Raj Man Singh Chitrakar produced sketches of architectural monuments, as well as depictions of birds, mammals, and individuals, on behalf of Brian Hodgson. These illustrations were then disseminated within academic circles for scholarly reference and contemplation. (Joshi & Joshi, 2005). By mid-1837, he had amassed the necessary materials for a comprehensive illustrated publication focusing on the birds and mammals of Nepal. The collection predominantly comprises 1,076 bird illustrations and 600 sheets to mammals (Waterhouse, 2005). During this time, he was the first to employ Nepalese artists for the depiction of secular human figures, birds, animals, natural scenes, and monuments on paper. As early as 1831, he had commissioned Nepali artists to depict certain paintings portraying the mammals of Nepal. In the art history of Nepal, the portrayal of specific animals was depicted for the first time by Nepalese artists along with Raj Man Singh Chitrakar under Brian Houghton Hodgson (Waterhouse, 2007). He used

to make a copy by Nepali artists using a camera lucida, drawing on paper with pencil and filling with black ink or colors. The Nepali artists were Raj Man Singh Chitrakar, Raj Vira Chitrakar, Parasa Mani Chitrakar, Tulsi Muni Chitrakar, and Dhanananda Banda (Joshi & Joshi, 2005). However, Raj Man Singh Chitrakar was the chief artist among them. Following the directives of the British East India Company, artists from Banaras and Delhi produced paintings in the European two-dimensional style. Similarly, Nepali artists also created artwork under the guidance of Hodgson. He employed hunters outside the Kathmandu valley to hunt animals and birds. After their demise, he traced the outlines of these creatures onto paper using a camera lucida. Subsequently, colors were applied to the artwork. The artworks, accompanied by the deceased animals, were dispatched to the Royal Asiatic Society. Approximately 600 animal paintings, drawn by Nepali painters under the guidance of Brian Hodgson, are archived in various institutions: National History Museum and Geological Society of London Museum, the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, the Fort William College Library, and the Lawrence Collection (Waterhouse, 2005). This approach highlights the emergence of independent animal portraiture within Nepali Art History, as executed by Nepali artists in a European stylistic vein under the patronage of Hodgson.

For the first time in Nepal, Captain Comyn Taylor used a camera to

capture photographs between 1863 and 1865. Under official instructions from the British government, Captain Comyn Taylor captured photographs of individuals belonging to various tribes in Nepal (Onta, 1998). Several foreign photographers visited Nepal to document its cultural and social life, capturing images of prominent figures such as the Rana family and the architectural marvels of the Kathmandu valley. Notably, Dumbar Shamsher, among these foreign photographers, acquired his photographic skills under the tutelage of Bourne and Sephardt in the 1870s, marking him as the pioneering Nepali photographer. Endowed with financial support from his father, Dhir Shamsher, Dumbar Shamsher established Nepal's inaugural photo studio within the palace premises. It appears that in Dumbar Shamsher's photograph of the animal, the Chitrakar employed a method akin to sketching a grid and subsequently adding color. In one of the images featuring animals at the the National Art Museum of Bhaktapur, there exists an inscription dating back to 1873. This inscription mentions that observation one part among four parts of a tiger and tigress for depicting. Additionally, there is a mention of the proportions of the animals provided below this inscription. Narayan Bahadur Singh writes that there exists a collection of forty-four animal portraits within the National Art Museum of Bhaktapur, which is written on the back of one painting. But forty-two of these portraits are presented with frames, while twenty-four exist in an unframed state (Singh, 2033 BS). Singh

additionally writes that these works were depicted by foreign artists, while some attribute the creation of these portraits to Bhaju Man Chitrakar, others believe that they may have been replicated by Nepalese artists. He also writes that the independent animal paintings housed within the museum are attributed to a personal bestowal of the Prime-Minister Judda Shamsher to Chandra Man Singh Maskey. He housed these paintings within his office, *Naksā Aḍḍā*, within the Singha Durbar. After creating a critical cartoon aimed at the Rana regime, Chandra Man Singh Maskey was subjected to imprisonment by the Rana government, which also confiscated all of his possessions. The indication that Judda Shamsher sent those paintings to Vira Pustakālaya circa 1938 is evident from the writings on the framed pictures, which were affixed to the frames and read 'Sri 3 Mahārājā Judda Shamsher was boxed from Janga Bahadur Rana'. Following the advent of democracy in the country in 1950, Chandra Man Singh Maskey assumed the role of museum curator, facilitating the restoration of the paintings. Notably, the year "2010 year Bhādra " is inscribed in black ink on the back of two of these pictures. Chandra Man Singh Maskey commissioned chronologist Bakhata Man Singh Basnet, along with Chitrakara-s Santa Bahadur and Purna Bahadur, for the restoration of paintings afflicted by insect damage (Singh, 2033 BS).

Within the museum's collection, the inscription "Rajman Pentter" in English appears on the exterior of two paintings.

These artworks are indicated to Raj Man Singh Chitrakar. It appears that the artist Raj Man Singh created artworks under the supervision of Prime Minister Janga Bahadur Rana, during the reign of King Surendra Vikram Shah, following the departure of Brian Hodgson from Kathmandu to Darjeeling. Jung Bahadur Rana was interested in painting, and it appears that under his mentorship, the creation of depictions featuring animals and birds flourished. According to the writings by Padma Jung, on the 22nd day of May 1860, the Mahārājā (Jung Bahadur Rana) met two Chinese scientists who had arrived in Nepal to study its flora and fauna. Following this encounter, it is reported that the scientists presented leaves as a gift to Janga Bahadur (Singh, 2033 BS).

On the back of the animal pictures in the National Art Museum of Bhaktapur, it is noted that they were created based on observations of other animals, whether deceased or alive. It is noted that there are pictures of bears in the Himalayan region, tigers hunted in Salyan, and cats (Singh, 2033 V. S.). It shows that at the Nakṣā Aḍḍā within the Simha Durbar, the Chitrakara-s have observed the photos, sketched them onto the canvas, and then applied colors. Hence, it appears that under the direction of Janga Bahadur Rana, the Chitrakara-s depicted various animals. Indeed, the Chitrakara-s skillfully depicted the aggressive expressions of animals in an aesthetically pleasing manner. It seems

that the Chitrakara-s portrayed in the background of the painting, utilized a traditional painting style.

## Findings

The National Art Museum of Bhaktapur has two distinguishable categories of independent animal portraiture: mythical creatures and natural animals. Mythical creatures, such as the Manticore, draw inspiration from Persian and Central Asian traditions. The stylistic influence of Islamic manuscript painting and the essence of Northwestern art within the Indian Subcontinent.

The natural animals depicted in the the National Art Museum of Bhaktapur encompass various compositions, including encounters between animals, aggressive interactions, and confrontations, such as fights. These compositions are depicted from the natural appearances observed in forest settings. The artistic styles of the Mughal, Pahari, Mewar, and Medieval Islamic animal representations have influenced these artworks.

Following the Sugauli Treaty, Nepalese Chitrakar-s have rendered animal figures under the tutelage of Brian Houghton Hodgson, employing the camera lucida technique.

After the advent of cameras in Nepal during the era of Janga Bahadur, Nepali painters adopted a novel approach to depicting animals. They crafted images by closely examining both photographs of animals and live specimens,

meticulously ensuring the accuracy of physical proportions in their renderings.

## Conclusion

During the Shah Rana period, the evolution of independent animal portraiture can be delineated into three distinct phases. The inaugural phase witnessed the portrayal of mythical creatures and natural animals amalgamated within the stylistic conventions of Islamic manuscript painting and the traditional Newari style. These mythical creatures were characterized by sharp white claws and a pair of layered white horns, with noteworthy attention given to detailing their tongues and the tips of their genitalia in red. Fiery motifs adorned their eyebrows and the tips of their tails, with the prevalent use of red, white, and black hues in their depictions often invoking associations with tantric aesthetics. Further enhancing their portrayal, fiery elements emanated from beneath their forelimbs and hind limbs, rendered in a nuanced blend of red and grayish-black tones. In the depiction of natural animals during the Shah Rana period, influences from the Pahari, Mughal, and Mewar artistic traditions are discernible. The lush, profound dark-green background of these paintings functions as a canvas upon which an array of vibrant wildflowers and whimsically portrayed trees are displayed. These trees are embellished with white birds, presumably various species of pigeons, characterized by their distinctive colorful markings and spots, depicted in graceful repose upon the

branches. In the first phase of paintings, the Shah kings found inspiration for these styles and commissioned Nepali artists to create similar depictions during that era. In Nepali art history, the portrayal of independent animal portraiture emerged during the Shah Period. Forty-eight independent animal portraits are preserved in the National Art Museum of Bhaktapur.

Following the Sugauli Treaty between the British East India Company and Nepal, the second phase of painting emerged. During this period, Nepali painters, under the guidance of the British East India Company ambassador in Nepal, produced animal paintings in a style reminiscent of European artistry. Employing the camera lucida technique, they skillfully crafted depictions of various animals. During the third stage of painting, under the patronage of Janga Bahadur, Nepali artists embarked on a new approach. They created images of diverse animal species by referencing both photographs and live animals, meticulously matching proportions to achieve a lifelike representation. This method marked a significant departure from earlier practices, indicating a shift towards a more observational and naturalistic approach to animal portraiture. The animal paintings from the second phase have been amassed in collections abroad, while those from the first and third phases are available at the National Art Museum of Bhaktapur.

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