

Press Statement

“Health Transformed by Art” is a community art project initiated by Siddhartha Art Gallery which has a history of initiating community art projects. It aims to bring out the unseen therapeutic value of visual arts in a hospital setting. The project location was Kanti Children’s Hospital, Maharajgunj Kathmandu, which is the oldest and the only government children’s hospital in Nepal. The major activities in the project included painting murals in the hospital corridor to revitalize the waiting area and second, installing artworks made of hospital waste as a method of upcycling non-hazardous waste and further enlivening the hospital’s ambiance that is visited by thousands of people every day. This project was conceived in February 2017. SAG takes pride in working with the young leading team of Health Transformed by Art- Raju Giri(Project Leader), Anoj Subedi(Project Manager), and Shristi Shakya(Project Coordinator), who have a collective vision of taking art outside of galleries into public spaces and impacting the general public.

As Kanti is a government hospital, getting the project approved itself was a difficult task and the changing bureaucratic structure made matters worse. It took the team six months to get the approval. Initially, the project was only concerned with mural paintings but later the idea broadened to include installation of artworks made out of hospital waste. According to WHO, of the total amount of wastes generated by health care activities, about 85% are non- hazardous waste. The project started collecting these non-hazardous wastes, uncontaminated by patients, from six different hospitals of Kathmandu, namely Kanti Children’s Hospital, Norvic International Hospital, Manmohan Cardiothoracic Vascular and Transplant Center, Om Hospital, Grande Hospital and Shahid Gangalal National Heart Centre.

The major activities of the project were preceded by Art Based Therapy workshops sponsored by the Surya Bahadur Thapa Foundation and Siddhartha Art Gallery. The workshop included local emerging artists for the therapy sessions with child cancer patients. The Art Based Therapy session was conducted by Art therapist Ms. Lajja Dixit. Eleven young artists: Anamika Gautam, Anshu Pandey, Jenney Ghale, Jhankar Sapkota, Kamala Khadka, Keepa Maitri Tuladhar, Kritika Pradhan, Manantuna Rana Jyapoo, Samikshya Rai, Sudesha Shrestha and Sujan Bir Bajracharya took Part on this Session.

The workshop was divided into two parts. On 12th and 13th, March 2018 artists were introduced to the concept of using art to reflect, learn and heal so that they could then hone their skills and mold their works according to the need of the child patients in the hospital and lead art based therapy sessions with child cancer patients. On the 13th and 14th of March, the second part of the workshop was held where young artists could engage child cancer patients in the process of art therapy. These art based therapy sessions helped the children de-stress, reduce anxiety and be receptive to medication. “Children are missing their schools and normal lifestyles and only surrounded by doctors, medicines and the same monotonous space while in the hospital. An introduction of this colorful medium helps them connect with other aspects of their life and talk about something different.” said the Art Therapist Lajja Dixit.

The larger objective of the workshop was to influence and encourage the hospital to include art sessions in their treatment as well because children admitted in the hospital were found watching movies, cartoons or playing video games and were not engaged in activities that enrich their creativity.

After the Art Based Therapy workshop, we worked on Mural Art. From April 15th, 2018, mural paintings were initiated outside the observation ward of Kanti Children's Hospital, which is one of the most visited areas of the hospital. The murals were designed and painted by artists Kiran Maharjan and Shraddha Shrestha and paints have been sponsored by Berger Paints Nepal. The team of artists Gopal Shrestha, Nikhil Shakya and Niru Giri assisted Kiran Maharjan and Shraddha Shrestha on the mural art project. SAG, Surya Bahadur Thapa Foundation, and Panchakanya also came forward to support the murals. It took the artists a month to complete the murals because the area was crowded with patients waiting for treatment hence, the mural paintings began from 3 pm when checkup hours were over and there was less movement in the space. By the 18th of May 2018, seven different murals were completed. One of our major objectives was enhancing the space to make it more lively, colorful and refreshing. Artist Kiran Maharjan said, "The project helped visitors and patients to see the hospital in a completely different perspective, not just as a sterile place to physically heal but also as a source of positivity and mental healing."

The adjoining space also held installation artworks made of hospital waste. The installation artworks were designed and made by artist Mekh Limbu as well as young emerging artists from two local art institutions in Kathmandu- Kathmandu University School of Arts, Centre for Art and Design and Sirjana College of Fine Arts. The students of Kathmandu University installed their artwork on 8th June 2018 while the students of Sirjana installed their artwork on 12th June 2018. Manish Lal Shrestha, the Program Coordinator of Sirjana College of Fine Arts said, "Students were immersed in the opportunity to create a body of art with hospital waste. This beautifully demonstrates the community responsibility felt by the students to make a difference in our society." The installations were supported by Siproddian Sahayata Sanstha. Siddhartha Art Gallery was able to bring Himalayan Bank Ltd on board to redesign hospital signage, donate chairs, and execute specific repair work for our hospital clean-up campaign. We were happy to have Butta onboard as our T-shirts sponsor for HTA project. Special thanks to Fotohollywood for supporting our cause.

An opening ceremony at Kanti Children's Hospital on 18th July 2018, was followed by a Gala event at Siddhartha Art Gallery supported by Smart Cell from 22nd July to 17th August. The exhibition contains the documentation of HTA project activities and marks the successful completion of the project. Other artists like Mekh Limbu, Ang Tsering Sherpa, and artists from MCube also worked with the waste to create engaging artworks to support HTA's fundraising initiative Siddhartha Art Gallery. Similarly, a selection of Kiran Maharjan and Shraddha Shrestha's prints based on their hospital murals are on sale to help fundraise for the next hospital project.

In using art as a means of therapy, waste management, and inspiration, this project is the first of its kind in Nepal. Project Health Transformed by Art hopes to inspire individuals and organizations to replicate the concept in other hospitals of the country.