

Nepalese Art is usually associated with thangkas and religious bronze and silver sculptures. Nepal is also famous for her architecture and temple squares and an unrivaled tradition in metal work and woodcarvings. The Siddhartha Art Gallery, has been active in the promotion of contemporary expressions in Art for the last twenty four years. In order to understand how contemporary Art evolved in Nepal, one has to look into Nepali history.

Many experts have concluded that the move towards contemporary art began with the Rana Prime Minister, Jung Bahadur's visit to England in the early nineteenth century. From that point on, Jung Bahadur launched a parallel movement in the Nepalese arts. A small group of traditional Chitrakar Artists (temple artists) of Nepal were selected and specifically commissioned to paint Royal Family portraits, scenes of Royal hunts and landscape in the "European Court Style" for their anglophile Rana Patrons. Bhajuman Chitrakar was the first Chitrakar to paint in the European style. However, the geo-political constraints of the country were not ideal for the growth and development of the arts. The Ranas were xenophobic and geographic borders were zealously sealed. During the Rana regime Only a few artists (Chandra Man Maskey, Tej Bahadur Chitrakar and later Kesab Duwadi) went to India for formal artistic training as the British Raj had established several world class Art Academies right through out India. Several self-taught Artists like Manohar Man Poon, Bal Krishna Sama and Amar Chitrakar painted in the western style for their patrons. In the early 1950's Lain Singh Bangdel become first Nepali to ever receive formal artistic training at the Ecole National des Beaux Artist in Paris. The first Contemporary Art Gallery in Kathmandu was only established in the late 1960's. Contemporary art in Nepal has matured to take on its own unique and distinguishing characteristics. However it is important to note that the concept of contemporary art appreciation is barely 50 years old. In the last five decades, the contemporary art scene has truly flourished. Galleries have replaced the old patrons, and the market for the arts has evolved to reach a broader clientele. Commenting on a the development of Contemporary Art in Europe and America, New York Times art critic John Cannday once observed, "Painting became merchandise and the Salon became a gigantic salesroom. A Painter who could not manage to get into it had little chance of selling his pictures for a decent price. The Salon took the nature of a life and death arena for the Painter because he became dependent upon a new kind of buyer". Before the 19th century the artist worked for a small and cultivated groups or Patrons..." F.N.Souza (1959), a famous contemporary Indian Artist once remarked "Better had I died. Would have saved me alot of trouble. I would not have had to bear an artist's tormented soul, create art in a country that despises her artists and is ignorant of her heritage". The Indian art market has come a long way since then with international auction houses promoting and selling Indian art. Many Nepalese artists share F.N.Souza's sentiments-their artistic plight is no different. The Siddhartha Art Gallery seeks to establish itself as a catalyst for artistic change, committed to the upliftment and promotion of the Contemporary Arts in Nepal.