

Ocula

Venice Biennale Highlights: Off-Site National Pavilions and Collateral Events

By Stephanie Bailey, May 2, 2022.



Tsherin Sherpa, *24 Views of Luxation* (2022). Acrylic on canvas. 24 panels. 50.8 x 50.8 cm each. Made in collaboration with KarmaLama, Pasang Lama, and Phurba Hyolmo. Exhibition view: Nepal Pavilion, 59th Venice Biennale, The Milk of Dreams (23 April–27 November 2022). Courtesy the artist and Rossi & Rossi. Photo: Chhiring Dorje Gurung.

Following the pavilion highlights in the Giardini and Arsenale and reviews of parallel projects, Ocula Magazine visits a few collateral events and off-site national pavilions at the 59th Venice Biennale.

Nepal Pavilion

Tsherin Sherpa, *Tales of Muted Spirits*
Sant'Anna Project Space One, Castello 994

The most striking thing about Tsherin Sherpa's painting *24 Views of Luxation* (2022), whose title points to the disembodiment of its central figure, is its luminous, super-flat style that brings this stunning update of traditional Buddhist painting to life.

Consisting of 24 square panels arranged into rows of six by four, the work—produced in collaboration with Karma Lama, Pasang Lama, and Phurba Hyolmo—is a deconstructed vision of Garuda, who appears across Hindu and Buddhist myths; most often as the part-human, part-eagle vehicle of the god Vishnu, universal protector, and a guardian against ill fortune.

In Tibet, the figure of Garuda is enmeshed with the myth of the Himalayan bird of fire Khyung, known as a strong adversary against demons, becoming a god for both the Indigenous Bon tradition and the dominant Buddhist order.

In this composition, Garuda holds a snake, which refers to the semi-divine half-human half-serpent Naga, whom Garuda is said to have defeated in battle. (The saliva of eagles, incidentally, was apparently known as an antidote to snake bites.)

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According to the curatorial text—pavilion curators Sheelasha Rajbhandari and Hit Man Gurung just closed a triumphant Kathmandu Triennale with Romanian Pavilion co-curator Cosmin Costinas—the form of the Garuda has been used in ‘post-colonial Asian state configurations...to represent their own might as [national] protectors, but ironically this figure also underscores their role as persecutors’. The serpentine Naga, they pose, represents older animist beliefs in the region—Buddhism became an ideology of conquest, after all, just like the others.

With that, the delicate rendering of human forms that push to the very bottom edges of 24 Views of Luxation are telling presences made just-about-visible: the embodied cost of forceful, idealised images trained on power rather than people.



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