



# Rangzhin Netang ki Jutsel

An independent, student exhibition on Environmental Art

**Dates** *December 3, 2018 to December 8, 2018.*  
**Time** *10 AM to 4 PM.*  
**Venue** *Folk Heritage Museum grounds, Kawajangsa.*

The Folk Heritage Museum is proud to invite you to this independent, student exhibition on Environmental Art. Bhutan has a robust international reputation as an environmental haven. However, the cultural tokens of Bhutan seldom reflect the environmental crisis even this small, Himalayan country is facing. Social scientists around the world tell us that this may be because environmental issues are typically large scale, long term, dispersed, and effectively "invisible" until a time of crisis.

In this exhibition, we bring to you larger-than-life environmental phenomenon in a form that is digestible for a general audience. For the first time, nine participating students from the National Institute for Zorig Chusum have painted, and are presenting, their original designs. Using the traditional style of painting, they re-imagine how famous Bhutanese pieces would look if they were updated for the near future, and with environmental accuracy. They consider the colour of the sky, potential landscapes of climate change-d Bhutan, plastics, flooding, wildlife security, and more.

In the end, our intention is to visually demonstrate that climate change affects even the well preserved traditional lifestyles of Bhutan. This exhibition is a step in making the "invisible" more visible. We invite you to explore with us, enjoy our art, and support young artists!

Concept and Direction by Ms. Ruchika Goel

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Web: [tinyurl.com/rangzhin](http://tinyurl.com/rangzhin)

Proceeds from sales directly support participating artists.

P.S. Feel free to ask for a guided viewing at the venue!





## PAINTING CONCEPTS



<b>Title</b>	Four Friends
<b>Size</b>	54 cm x 68 cm
<b>Material</b>	Acrylic and vegetable colour on canvas
<b>Artist</b>	Sangay Khandu, 23



## PAINTING CONCEPTS

### Environmental Concept

The story of the four noble friends is an important Bhutanese folklore. As legend goes, there is no survival without cooperation, and you will be reminded of that everywhere you look in Bhutan; on tapestries, on furniture, in stories, and even painted on everyday architecture. What happens then, when one of our noble friends is declared extinct? Take another look at our Four Friends. We seem to have lost our hare.

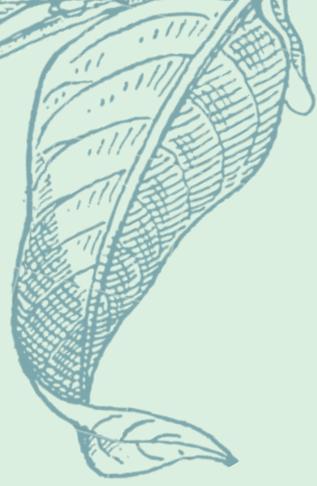
The Hispid hare is a globally endangered species. What survives of its numbers live in the lower Himalayan regions of Asia. Despite being an old species that we discovered and named in the 1840s, scant research has been conducted on the hares' habits. In fact, we know so little that we thought it was extinct- until we discovered it again in Assam, in 1971.

Animals that are larger and more noticeable, have economic or social connections with humans, and are more easily represented in logos and as symbols tend to receive the best of our conservation efforts. These animals are called "charismatic megafauna". On the other hand, it is common for there to be insufficient research in less attractive species when other, more charismatic animals exist alongside in the region. The hare is small, usually brown, and lives in the least glamorous of habitats: grasslands. The burning of these grasslands, overgrazing, and invasive species are threats to its existence. And as if to add insult to injury, excessive folder collection for the charismatic elephant also cuts into the hare's home, threatening its numbers.

In Bhutan, the hare is already a part of a massively popular cultural motif and it should not be difficult to get momentum on research. We already have the CSOs and Constitutional support. The only thing holding us back now might simply be inertia.

### Adaptation in Design

For this painting, the artist revisits the Bhutanese motif of Four Friends, but eliminates the rebong (the hare) from this print. The new depiction of our old friends asks a silent question: what happens when plants and animals we commonly depict in our artwork become endangered, or extinct? The hare is not as bad off as the dodo, but we live in a time where most of us will never see- in person, and even on TV- many of these animals again. Does that mean what we are painting now is history? With its phoenixes and dragons, Bhutan is no stranger to fantastic creatures. Who would have thought that an animal as common as the hare could join the ranks of those great beasts of old?





## PAINTING CONCEPTS



<b>Title</b>	To Go With The Waves
<b>Size</b>	73 cm x 102 cm
<b>Material</b>	Acrylic on canvas
<b>Artist</b>	Amit Bdr Rai, 21; Sonam Tobgay, 22; Tshering Letho, 20



## PAINTING CONCEPTS

### Environmental Concept

Right now, the world is witnessing a movement in environmental art. This includes graffiti, sand murals on beaches, plastics and waste art, rock gardens, more traditional mediums of paintings and sculpture, photography, and more. Frequently, an enduring question on environmental art comes up across these mediums: is it the responsibility of the artist to evoke any particular reaction through her art? And if so, is that reaction caution and alarm? Most environmental messages come to us wrapped in negative framing. Routinely, we are told what we have 'lost', 'killed' and 'spoiled'-- and while it is certainly necessary to report the costs of manmade climate change, sometimes we need a new perspective. What about reminders of the beauty of the planet? What if environmental art took upon itself the task to 're-draw' the glory of the earth?

### Adaptation in Design

In this painting, the artists take the familiar landscape of four friends standing by a tree, and introduce a swooping wave into the frame. The painting is large and is meant to command the room. The friends look directly at the viewer, in silent conversation. We are not sure where the wave comes from; but we know climate change puts Bhutan at risk of flooding. Do we feel uneasy, as we watch the animals that watch us back? Or do we ignore their near future, and satisfy ourselves with the visual magnitude of the painting? What we do may well depend on how prepared we feel to adapt to our changing world. So, while you are here, what do you see when you see the water roll in?





## PAINTING CONCEPTS



<b>Title</b>	New Planet In Silk
<b>Size</b>	76 cm x 57 cm
<b>Material</b>	Silk thread on gazchen fabric
<b>Artist</b>	Amrita Rai, 24



## PAINTING CONCEPTS

### Environmental Concept

One of the largest environmental issues today is climate change denial. Recent research has found that scientific studies and factual reporting is not as effective at convincing people that climate change is happening, as we might think. Instead, until people personally experience climate change, or empathise with visual depictions of environmental challenges, they do not believe that the challenges are real. It turns out that imagination and imagery are key in making climate change "real".

In fact, even people that do already subscribe to the concept, often feel helpless to imagine that the world could be any different. What other way could we live, if not in petroholoc, consumer economies, where human needs trump all others? We tend to forget that this kind of modern society is a blip in the history of human civilisation. We tend to forget... because none of our visual reminders depict a different world anymore. This is important because unless we can imagine alternatives, we will never be confident to back them to work towards changing the present conditions. Even as big a solution as renewable energy only became accessible to us when someone looked at the sun, the wind, and the water, and recognised the potential in there.

### Adaptation in Design

This work of embroidery is an imaginative piece in possible futures. Imagination is not only critical in finding solutions to climate change, but it also helps us adapt to the new world we must learn to live in. In this piece, there are many symbols of a Bhutanese mountain-side. Chortens, prayer-flags, and a variety of trees take the forefront of the canvas in a new Bhutan that is overflown with melted snowcaps. However, this is only imaginative, as it is unlikely for water levels to rise so high that they submerge mountains. The artist has deliberately chosen red gazchen for the base of this work. This is because the changing composition of our atmosphere has caused people to wonder what the colour of the sky will be in the coming years. In cities with high carbon emissions and pollution, the sky is already a permanent grey-yellow. The artist's red is a severe imaginative stroke on that phenomenon. Again, while the sky is unlikely to be so in Bhutan, the artwork is bold in its depiction of a new planet.





## PAINTING CONCEPTS



<b>Title</b>	River Bowl of the World
<b>Size</b>	32 cm x 44 cm
<b>Material</b>	Acrylic and vegetable colour on canvas
<b>Artist</b>	Jamphel Wangchuk, 23



## PAINTING CONCEPTS

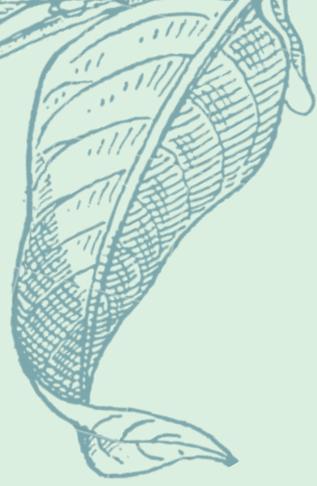
### Environmental Concept

More of Bhutan is covered in glaciers than in arable land. Consequently, the largest environmental threat to Bhutan is the bursting of these glaciers and glacial lakes, causing overflowing of the rivers that run through the country. The higher elevations are already seeing less snow in the winter, and more rainfall and erosion. Moreover, when glaciers melt, they create large and unstable lakes—which may temporarily cover farming land and disappear later on. Meanwhile, hydropower reservoirs will only evaporate faster and cause monsoon changes. While Bhutan is committed to nationwide environmental protection, regions within the country are set to face localized impacts of climate change. This is why many rivers, such as the Paro Chhu, have stone embankments built alongside them to contain a potentially raised river.

Meanwhile, yak herders from the North have already reported glacial retreat, and more unpredictable flash flooding. Longer summers are not good news for yaks. In fact, climatic change causes physiological stress to yaks. With longer warmth, their grazing space is encroached by lower-altitude plants which affects milk production and puts them at risk of attack from animals typically reserved to different climatic zones. This has an overall effect on the yak herders' economy as well, which is why in 2004, yak herders received government rights to harvest cordyceps.

### Adaptation in Design

Bhutan's environmental risks are mostly water-related, such as flooding in low lying valleys like Paro. The government has river embankments in place, that should hold the water if the river capacity increases drastically, but we do not know how much it could actually rise. We could be seeing a new world; one with nearly-submerged valleys, as if the mountains are massive bowls that carry the rivers. In this speculative piece, the artist imagines what this new topography might look like, from the perspective of a yak herder atop the mountains.





## PAINTING CONCEPTS



<b>Title</b>	About Trees
<b>Size</b>	50 cm x 38 cm
<b>Material</b>	Acrylic and vegetable colour on canvas
<b>Artist</b>	Singye Dorji, 22



## PAINTING CONCEPTS

### Environmental Concept

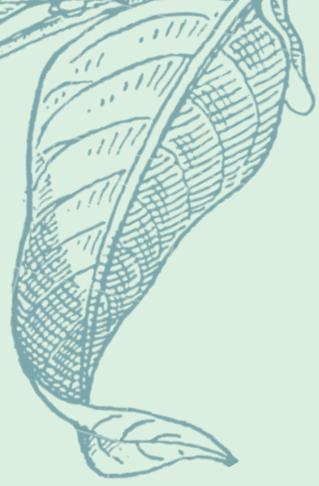
Trees are some of the most enduring beings on our planet. Routinely, we hear stories about adaptive trees, that grow around a fence, or take over the walls of tunnels, or spring forth in the middle of a concrete pavement. But our world is increasingly becoming a world of plastic waste. Could trees adapt to grow around our discarded plastic?

Plastic pollution in cities can easily become so entrenched in natural systems that it changes the composition of our soil and water. Some cities are experimenting with urban projects that make use of discarded plastics, such as mixing it in roads and using it to lay roofs. A famous example is the Chandigarh rock garden, made entirely out of waste. Perhaps one of the most hopeful images of earth's capacity to renew is the state of Fukushima today. The 20 kilometer zone around Japan's deserted nuclear plant is now entirely taken over by plants. The earthquake-tsunami that caused the nuclear disaster in 2011, could not be "solved" or contained, and the region had to be abandoned. The zone is still radioactive and dangerous, but trees have taken over houses, motorbikes, roads, and more, as if the earth is swallowing the history of the human town within itself. Maybe this will help us remember that climate change does not threaten earth... it threatens humans.

Given the long and slow rejuvenating processes of the earth, can it ever come to be that earth accepts a certain amount of plastic that already exists in our soil and water?

### Adaptation in Design

Look closely at the trunks of the plants. In this painting, the artist imagines a fictional future where plants have sprung out of discarded plastic bottles. The delicate silhouette of the trunks only hints at the shape of these bottles, in order to naturalise them as much as possible. In Thimphu, it is already as if discarded plastic is a part of rivers, mountain sides, and soil. The artist's playful spin of including plastic in our natural scenery, is one potential future of this city and our planet, that makes for interesting art.





## PAINTING CONCEPTS



**Title** In Memory Of  
**Size** 54 cm x 64 cm  
**Material** Acrylic on canvas  
**Artist** Tandin Tshering, 19



## PAINTING CONCEPTS

### Environmental Concept

This artwork deals with complicated concepts of planetary loss and inter-species grieving. In the environmental humanities, there is a growing body of work on how we might react to the endangerment and extinction of many nonhuman animal species that are feeling the effects of climate change. Even without threat of extinction, how might we empathise with crows and rabbits, that are struggling to adapt to the changing world. In many nature documentaries, you will notice that film crews follow a family of ducklings, or continuously make parallels to human activities in animal behaviour: nurturing mothers, playfulness, threat and protection, grief after loss. Many animals share lots of characteristics with humans, but we tend not to notice them, because we are taught from childhood that animals are fundamentally different from us. This makes it hard for us to lament the loss of animal species. This makes the notion of a funeral for a sparrow sound weird. But studies in environmental ethics say that until we let ourselves grieve the loss of our planetary wealth, of animals and plants, the same way as we grieve the loss of a relative, a public figure, or a character in a movie, we will not be able to care about their living condition.

### Adaptation in Design

If you still haven't seen the movie, we have to assume that you don't mind spoilers. But for anyone who does know how Avengers: Infinity War goes, the dust-making should be a familiar scene. The artist picks up that famous pop-culture reference and adapts it into a traditional painting of the four friends. It is as if these animals are headed for the same fate as many heroes in the movie: total annihilation. It is indeed as if someone has snapped their fingers and brought this onto the animals. Except, instead of one purple Thanos, this was done by millions of common humans. So when we watch the news about species extinction, maybe we should do it with the same drop-silence, close-up of the last animal dying? Maybe we should insist that the animals must come back, the same way we insist Doctor Strange will return? Surely, we value these living creatures just as much as we do our pop culture heroes...





## PAINTING CONCEPTS



<b>Title</b>	Rise
<b>Size</b>	32 cm x 44 cm
<b>Material</b>	Acrylic and vegetable colour on canvas
<b>Artist</b>	Jamphel Wangchuk, 23



## PAINTING CONCEPTS

### Environmental Concept

Firewood is a major source of fuel in Bhutan, for a variety of reasons. Topographically, many settlements are remotely located and cannot access the national electric grid, causing them to rely on the wood that families cut and collect from regional forests. Moreover, the traditional Bhutanese stove, the thab, runs on firewood. Traditions are always difficult to tweak, because they are supported by centuries of practice and comfort. These are the clauses to consider as we re-plan firewood use in Bhutan now. Not only is the population rising and putting more demand on forests, trees too have an increased role in mitigating the effects of climate change.

### Adaptation in Design

In this piece, the artist depicts a trail of smoke rising from a wooden campfire. As we follow it upwards, the smoke takes the shape of a dragon's head, and the length behind it imitates its long body and swirling tail. These symbolic tokens; the people, the fire, the yak, the terrain, and the dragon's head, all embed this painting in the Bhutanese social conscience. As the dragon rears its head to swallow the sun, where will light come from, in the Bhutan of tomorrow?





## PAINTING CONCEPTS



**Title** All That Shines  
**Size** 44 cm x 60 cm  
**Material** Acrylic and vegetable colour on canvas  
**Artist** Singye Dorji, 22



## PAINTING CONCEPTS

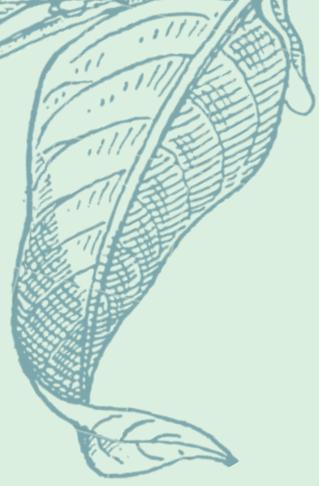
### Environmental Concept

It is common knowledge that the colour of the sky is the result of sunlight scattering when it comes in contact with molecules in the air. The way the light scatters is what gives us a blue sky and an orange sunset. Maybe orange and red-*ish* sunsets. But in a clean environment, under no circumstance should a normal sunset be distinctively red. That only happens when there's pollution in the atmosphere. In fact, Edvard Munch's famous painting, *The Scream*, features a brilliantly red sunset—which may have been inspired by a sky changed via volcanic activity.

However, another effect of added aerosols and polluting particles in the atmosphere is that the overall colour contrast in the sky is dampened. This means that the day is unremarkably blue, or mixed with shades of yellow, and ends in an orange, but less striking sunset. Distinct sunbeams would cut through such a sky as if artificially hung from the sky. In either case, we already know the sky behaves differently when we feed it emissions and pollutants. Whether we like the new palette is a matter of personal taste and environmental awareness.

### Adaptation in Design

In this work, the artist depicts the sitting Tara in a striking aerial surrounding. We don't know if this is a world that glows with clear skies, or one where sunlight occasionally cuts through the smog. All that shines, may not be a nice surprise.





## PAINTING CONCEPTS



**Title** In Spirit And In Deed  
**Size** 58 cm x 76 cm  
**Material** Acrylic on canvas  
**Artist** Thinley Gyeltshen, 21



## PAINTING CONCEPTS

### Environmental Concept

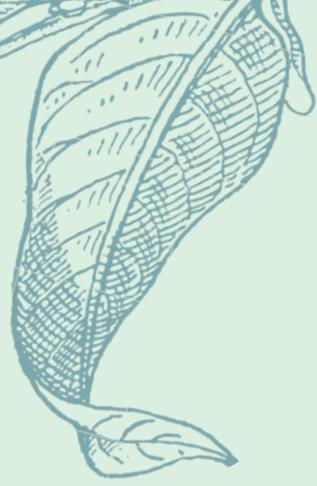
Like any good religion, environmentalism has its own traditions, laws, and beliefs. The basic rules of behaviour are to recycle, to consume less, and to harbour some form of love for the planet's many natural gifts. The traditions are an annual Earth Day, counting and tracking animal welfare, and encouraging others to be more environmentally-conscious. The beliefs are that we can come back from this state of crisis, and that we must. For reasons much deeper than this simple paragraph, people have proposed creating an environmental religion. And of course, others have protested.

But if environmentalism were to be thought of as a spirituality than a religion, we would already find evidence of it in many cultures of the world. Hindus, for instance, famously worship cows, and honour many animals and plants through divine symbology. To see spirits in mountains and rivers has frequently been the custom of tribes and aboriginal peoples. In New Zealand, the Whanganui River has the same legal status as people. In fact, it should be possible to trace roots to the planet for any socio-ethnic group in the world, since our traditions come from our relationships with and understanding of the world—and the world wasn't always industrial.

How would an environmental religion look, do you think? Would it pray to anything? Would it need to pray, to be a religion? What would its idea of a good world be, and what would it say about human nature? And finally, do you suppose it could ever harm someone?

### Adaptation in Design

Bhutan is a country that constitutionally mandates 60% forest cover, that assumes every citizen to be a trustee of the environment, and is the only country to be carbon negative in the world at this time. If there were ever a religion for the environment, this would be the country its tenets could be based on. In this painting, the artist celebrates the intermixing sentiments of environmentalism and spirituality that are preserved in the customs of Bhutan.





# Gratitude

Even at an independent exhibition, it takes a village of supporters and well-wishers to bring the event to life. Perhaps it is so *especially* at an independent exhibition, because we couldn't have opened without the help of so many of you. We owe our thanks to the following people:

Event proudly sponsored by Folk Heritage Museum, Tarayana Foundation  
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Concept and Research by Ruchika Goel

Thank you especially to the two women who lead the institutions most closely involved in making this independent, student exhibition happen. To the Secretary General of Tarayana Foundation, and the Principal of National Institute for Zorig Chusum, your support and enthusiasm for a young girl's ambitious idea is what brought it all together in the end. Thank you for trusting me with this project, for introducing me to the student artists, and for equipping me with the freedom and guidance to see the plan through. The ten of us painting and presenting this exhibition owe you so many thanks.

Kaadinchhey La!

# Press and Contact

For queries about this exhibition or any of its components, please write to [folkheritagemuseum@gmail.com](mailto:folkheritagemuseum@gmail.com), and we will connect you appropriately.

All opinions expressed in the exhibition and on this document belong to the exhibition participants, and are written for the most part by its curator, Ruchika Goel.

Some event coverage is available on our Facebook event: [tinyurl.com/rangzhinonfacebook](https://www.facebook.com/rangzhinonfacebook)