

Kalu Kumale and the Aesthetics of Wrath: Sculptural Practice, Affective Labor, and Cultural Resilience in Contemporary Nepal

Nabraj Lama*

Lumbini Buddhist University, Nepal

Abstract: This article offers a critical examination of the life, work, and legacy of Kalu Kumale, a pioneering figure in contemporary Nepali sculpture whose oeuvre spans over seven decades. Drawing upon a multidisciplinary qualitative methodology—comprising in-depth interviews, ethnographic observation, and archival analysis—this study investigates how Kumale’s sculptural practice engages with, reinterprets, and transcends traditional Newar iconography. Central to this inquiry are two seminal works, *The Corpse of Sati Devi* and *Two Farmers Fighting*, which serve as case studies for exploring the intersection of personal affect, socio-political commentary, and religious symbolism in his art.

Framed within the theoretical perspectives of postcolonial aesthetics and affect theory, the article contends that Kumale’s sculptures function as embodied texts that mediate grief, resilience, and communal memory. His integration of wrathful deity motifs and autobiographical narratives exemplifies a form of cultural hybridity that challenges static notions of tradition and modernity. Moreover, Kumale’s sustained engagement in artistic philanthropy and community activism positions him not merely as an artisan, but as a cultural agent who mobilizes art for ethical and social transformation.

By situating Kumale within both local traditions and transnational visual discourses, this article contributes to broader debates on indigenous visual sovereignty, cultural resilience, and the evolving role of the artist in postcolonial South Asia.

Keywords: Kalu Kumale, Nepali sculpture, affect theory, postcolonial aesthetics, Newar iconography, cultural resilience, indigenous art, visual sovereignty.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary landscape of South Asian visual culture is marked by a growing interest in indigenous artistic traditions that both preserve and reinterpret cultural heritage within changing socio-political contexts. Within this milieu, Kalu Kumale emerges as a seminal figure in the evolution of modern Nepali sculpture. A self-taught first-generation sculptor from Lalitpur, Nepal, Kumale’s work defies simple categorization: it straddles devotional craftsmanship, political commentary, and deeply personal narrative. Over a career spanning more than seven decades, he has produced over 600 sculptures, many of which are housed in temples, museums, and private collections across the world (Subedi, 2022; Yatra & Tamang, 2023).

Kumale’s significance lies not only in the technical sophistication and symbolic depth of his work, but also in his ability to reconfigure classical Newar iconography to articulate lived experiences of grief, resistance, and devotion. His sculptures, such as *The Corpse of Sati Devi* and *Two Farmers Fighting*, are emblematic of this approach—deploying wrathful deities and narrative realism as vehicles for affective and cultural expression (Lama, 2022; Gautam, 2022). As Rai (2006) notes, Kumale embodies a paradoxical creative identity: a

“calm creator of wrathful gods,” whose serenity belies the emotional and spiritual intensity embedded in his art.

Despite his pivotal contributions to Nepali art, academic scholarship on Kumale remains limited. Existing literature has largely been biographical (Lama, 2022), journalistic (Bajracharya, 2016; Rai, 2006), or institutional (Shakya *et al.*, 2019), with insufficient critical engagement from art historical or theoretical perspectives. The few in-depth studies, such as those by Shakya *et al.* (2019) and Gautam (2022), point toward his innovative role in the genre of *Krodhkala* (art of wrathful deities), yet there has been little exploration of how Kumale’s oeuvre contributes to broader discourses on cultural resilience, indigenous aesthetics, or the politics of representation.

This article addresses that gap by offering a critical analysis of Kumale’s sculptural practice through the lenses of postcolonial aesthetics and affect theory. It argues that Kumale’s work not only preserves endangered iconographic traditions but also mobilizes them as forms of cultural and emotional resistance. His art becomes a site where traditional forms are re-signified to engage with contemporary social tensions—such as caste inequality, land disputes, and national trauma—while simultaneously embodying personal experiences of loss and spiritual transformation (Bajracharya, 2016; Gautam, 2022).

*Address correspondence to this author at the Lumbini Buddhist University, Nepal; E-mail: nabraj@lbu.edu.np, mail@nabrajlama.com

Methodologically, this study draws on ethnographic observation, site visits, archival materials, and longitudinal interviews with the artist. It also contextualizes Kumale's practice within local Newar cultural frameworks and global discourses on indigenous art and visual sovereignty (Yatru & Tamang, 2023). By situating Kumale within both the localized aesthetics of the Kathmandu Valley and the transnational currents of postcolonial cultural production, this article seeks to affirm his position as a critical interlocutor in the evolving narrative of South Asian art.

In doing so, the article aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how indigenous sculptural practices can function not merely as preservations of heritage but as active engagements with affective memory, political agency, and cultural continuity. Through a close reading of selected works, the analysis reveals how Kumale's sculptures serve as visual texts that bear witness to the historical and emotional textures of contemporary Nepali life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on Kalu Kumale intersects a range of disciplinary fields including art history, cultural anthropology, and religious studies. However, scholarly attention to his work remains limited, often confined to biographical or journalistic accounts rather than critical, theoretical analyses. This gap persists despite his profound influence on contemporary Nepali sculpture and his role in redefining the visual vocabulary of wrathful deities (*krodhkala*) within Newar artistic traditions.

The foundational biographical study by Lama (2022), *Deuta Banaune Manche*, presents a detailed chronology of Kumale's life, offering insights into his formative years, spiritual philosophy, and creative process. It foregrounds the emotional and devotional dimensions of his sculpture, particularly in relation to the artist's personal experiences, such as the death of his wife, which inspired works like *The Corpse of Sati Devi*. While comprehensive in narrative scope, the work stops short of applying formal theoretical frameworks or engaging with Kumale's broader cultural significance.

Shakya *et al.* (2019), in their edited volume *Krodhkala Shiromani Kalu Kumale*, take a more art-historical approach, positioning Kumale as a master of wrathful deity depiction and a custodian of endangered

sculptural traditions. They explore how his work navigates the boundary between spiritual iconography and emotional catharsis. However, their analysis remains largely descriptive, and while the volume emphasizes his national importance, it lacks a sustained engagement with global discourses on indigenous visual sovereignty or postcolonial art.

Complementing these scholarly and institutional accounts are journalistic narratives such as Rai (2006), whose profile in *The Himalayan Times* casts Kumale as a paradoxical figure—a serene and modest artisan whose creative oeuvre centers on the fierce and emotionally charged imagery of wrathful deities. The article offers rare first-person commentary from Kumale, illuminating his spiritual convictions, aesthetic motivations, and commitment to visualizing divine rage as a conduit for moral reflection and ritual potency. Rai emphasizes Kumale's meditative demeanor and self-effacing character, contrasting them with the raw emotional power embodied in his sculptures. While the piece provides rich biographical detail and situates the artist within local devotional traditions, it remains largely descriptive and lacks engagement with broader theoretical or art historical frameworks.

More recent analyses, such as Gautam (2022), offer a nuanced reading of Kumale's work within Nepal's evolving socio-political and aesthetic landscape. Writing in *The Annapurna Express*, Gautam discusses *Two Farmers Fighting* as a pivotal example of how Kumale departs from religious motifs to confront the everyday realities of agrarian conflict, economic struggle, and male aggression. The article positions the sculpture as a raw and unsettling portrayal of rural tension, critiquing both social inequities and the performative fragility of masculinity. Gautam's interpretation foregrounds the artist's capacity to capture emotional volatility and structural disenfranchisement through bodily expression and compositional tension. However, while the analysis is rich in observational insight, it remains largely journalistic in tone and lacks engagement with formal theoretical frameworks—particularly those that could connect such affective representations to broader discourses on visual politics, postcolonial identity, or indigenous aesthetics.

The *Krodhkala Shiromani Foundation* booklet compiled by Yatru and Tamang (2023) offers a comprehensive overview of Kumale's artistic evolution, his community-driven philosophy, and institutional legacy. Beyond documenting his sculptural milestones,

the publication details the establishment of multiple philanthropic initiatives—including health, education, and arts journalism funds—under Kumale’s patronage. It also outlines his and his late wife Laxmi Maya’s contributions during national crises, such as the 2015 earthquake, and their enduring support for marginalized groups, particularly individuals with disabilities. The foundation’s role in formalizing Kumale’s legacy through awards, public works, and intergenerational skill transmission situates him not only as a master artist but also as a cultural steward and civic actor.

Institutional and audiovisual documentation further reinforces the positioning of Kalu Kumale as both a pioneering artist and a cultural intellectual. Two key ethnographic video productions—*Kalu Kumale Biography/Documentary* by Frontline TV (2019) and *Kalu Kumale Brief Bio* by the Institute for Socio-Cultural Research and Analysis (2022)—offer visual narratives that trace his early life, creative philosophy, studio techniques, and philanthropic ethos. These videos include interviews with the artist, footage of his sculptural process, and testimonials from peers and community members, thereby serving as rich primary sources for contextualizing his work. While these materials are invaluable in capturing oral histories and embodied practices, they remain largely celebratory in tone and lack critical or theoretical framing, which limits their direct analytical contribution to scholarly discourse.

Across this literature, a recurring theme is the fusion of personal narrative with religious and social iconography. However, what remains under-theorized is the role of Kumale’s work in mediating affective memory, indigenous identity, and postcolonial aesthetics. Despite the clear emotional and political content of his art, few scholars have engaged with his sculptures through interpretive frameworks such as affect theory or postcolonial critique. Moreover, little has been done to locate his practice within the larger field of South Asian or Himalayan visual culture, where similar themes of cultural resilience and aesthetic hybridity have become central.

This article addresses these lacunae by offering a critically grounded analysis of Kumale’s major works and public role. By linking his sculptural practice to broader discourses on emotional embodiment, indigenous visual sovereignty, and postcolonial representation, the study contributes to emerging conversations on how South Asian artists utilize

traditional forms as dynamic agents of cultural narration and resistance.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To critically engage with the sculptural practice of Kalu Kumale, this study adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that draws on affect theory—as developed by Silvan S. Tomkins and later expanded by scholars such as Sara Ahmed—and postcolonial aesthetics. These perspectives provide the analytical tools necessary to explore how Kumale’s work functions simultaneously as a medium of emotional expression and a site of cultural negotiation within a postcolonial South Asian context.

Affect theory, originally developed by psychologist Silvan S. Tomkins (1995) and later expanded by cultural theorists such as Sara Ahmed (2004), emphasizes the embodied, relational, and non-representational dimensions of feeling and emotional resonance. In this framework, affect is not merely a psychological state but a social and political force that circulates between bodies, objects, and histories. In the context of Kumale’s sculptures—most notably *The Corpse of Sati Devi*—affect theory enables an analysis of how grief, rage, and devotion are inscribed into material form, and how these emotions move through and reshape cultural memory. As Bajracharya (2016) highlights, Kumale’s sculptures do more than articulate anger—they externalize emotional states through ritualized craft, transforming personal and collective affect into tangible form. Building on this, and as Lama (2022) suggests, Kumale’s work emerges not just as a response to loss but as an aesthetic process through which emotion is shared and enacted. His sculptures serve as affective archives, transmitting and transforming collective memory, spiritual belief, and personal trauma through embodied ritual and material presence.

Complementing this is the lens of postcolonial aesthetics, which interrogates how artistic practices in formerly colonized regions both draw from and resist dominant aesthetic paradigms (Bhabha, 1994; Appadurai, 1996). While Nepal was never formally colonized, it has long been entangled in regional and global discourses of cultural marginality and exoticization. Within this framework, Kumale’s reinterpretation of Newar iconography—particularly his revitalization of wrathful deity motifs—can be seen as an act of cultural reclamation. As Shakya *et al.* (2019) assert, his approach reflects a hybrid visual strategy:

one that reaffirms ancestral iconographic systems while rendering them legible to contemporary audiences. Through this aesthetic hybridity, Kumale creates what Bhabha (1994) terms a “third space” of cultural production—where tradition is neither preserved in static form nor erased through modernization but instead reconfigured as a dynamic and dialogic process.

This framework also foregrounds the political implications of Kumale’s work. As Gautam (2022) argues in his reading of *Two Farmers Fighting*, Kumale’s sculptures go beyond religious or folkloric symbolism to actively intervene in contemporary discussions around land rights, class struggle, and social inequality. Rather than being mere depictions, these works function as visceral commentaries, channeling affect into political critique. Through the emotional intensity of gesture and form—whether it provokes discomfort, empathy, or reverence—Kumale’s sculptures wield affect theory and postcolonial aesthetics as allies. The emotional charge is inseparable from political power: it becomes a means of confronting and negotiating the lived realities of marginalization and resistance

Together, these theoretical perspectives offer a comprehensive lens through which to examine Kumale’s oeuvre. They illuminate the emotional, cultural, and political work performed by his sculptures and allow us to situate him not just as an individual artist, but as a cultural agent actively reshaping the contours of Nepali visual heritage in a postcolonial, globalizing world.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research methodology aimed at providing a multidimensional analysis of Kalu Kumale’s sculptural practice and cultural impact. Given the deeply embedded nature of Kumale’s work within religious, emotional, and socio-political contexts, a qualitative approach allows for a nuanced exploration of meaning-making processes that extend beyond formalist analysis. The research design integrates five core methodological components: in-depth interviews, ethnographic observation, literature review, community engagement, and archival validation.

1. In-Depth Interviews

At the heart of this study is a longitudinal series of semi-structured interviews conducted with Kalu Kumale

between 2021 and 2023. These interviews were designed to elicit reflective narratives concerning his artistic evolution, spiritual worldview, emotional motivations, and philanthropic engagements. Conducted in Kumale’s workshop in Lalitpur and in his residence, the interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and thematically coded using grounded theory techniques. Open-ended questions enabled the emergence of unanticipated insights, particularly regarding how the artist interprets his own work—insights crucial for affective and postcolonial readings. In accordance with APA guidelines, direct personal communication from these interviews is cited in-text but not included in the reference list.

2. Ethnographic Observation and Site Visits

Complementing the interviews, a series of field visits were carried out at key locations where Kumale’s sculptures are installed, including temples, stupas, and private collections throughout the Kathmandu Valley. These observations focused on the placement, reception, and ritual use of his artworks within their spiritual and communal contexts. Informal conversations were held with devotees, caretakers, and art visitors to gather emic perspectives on how the sculptures function in lived religious practice. Detailed field notes and photographic documentation supported the contextual interpretation of the pieces, particularly those embedded in ceremonial or funerary architecture.

3. Review of Literature and Media Archives

An extensive review of published literature was conducted to situate Kumale’s practice within the wider history of Nepali sculpture and South Asian visual culture. Sources included biographical texts (Lama, 2022), institutional reports (Shakya et al., 2019), and journalistic features (Rai, 2006; Bajracharya, 2016; Gautam, 2022; Subedi, 2022). Additionally, video materials from Frontline TV (2019) and the Institute for Socio-Cultural Research and Analysis (2022) were used to supplement interview data with visual ethnography and public discourse around Kumale’s work. These resources provided insight into both the reception and public framing of his legacy.

4. Community Engagement and Oral Histories

To further enrich the contextual understanding of Kumale’s work and character, interviews and informal dialogues were conducted with members of his family, artistic peers, and community leaders in Lalitpur. These

conversations illuminated Kumale's mentorship role, social ethos, and the intergenerational transmission of Newar artistic traditions. The communal narratives collected were especially relevant in understanding how Kumale is perceived not just as an artist, but as a cultural steward and moral exemplar within his society.

5. Archival Cross-Referencing and Validation

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, all biographical and historical claims were cross-referenced with archival records and institutional documentation. This included publications by the Krodhkala Shiromani Foundation (Yatru & Tamang, 2023), press coverage from *Republica* (February 19, 2021) and *Samachar Dainik* (December 26, 2019), and publicly available digital archives. Timelines, major life events, and exhibition records were triangulated across sources to confirm accuracy and reduce reliance on anecdotal accounts.

Through this layered methodology, the study constructs a holistic, triangulated portrait of Kalu Kumale's artistic and social legacy. By blending personal narrative, cultural observation, and theoretical interpretation, the research foregrounds the affective, political, and aesthetic dimensions of his work while remaining grounded in the lived realities of Nepali society.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Kalu Kumale's emergence as a first-generation sculptor must be understood within the broader historical and cultural framework of Nepali art, particularly the traditions of the Newar community in the Kathmandu Valley. Born in Lalitpur—a city renowned for its artisanal and ritual heritage—Kumale diverged from his familial lineage of part-time pottery and agriculture to pursue full-time sculptural practice. His trajectory defied entrenched caste-based systems of artisanal transmission and signaled a broader cultural shift in how Nepali artists began to navigate modernity, self-authorship, and spiritual vocation (Lama, 2022; Institute for Socio-Cultural Research and Analysis, 2022).

Newar visual culture is historically rooted in the sacred, regulated by ritual codes, and transmitted within tightly controlled guild or caste structures. Kumale, however, operated outside these inherited lineages. Without formal academic instruction or hereditary apprenticeship, he constructed a self-taught

practice based on observational learning, philosophical introspection, and lived experience. His work reflects deep engagement with Newar iconographic grammar, yet consistently departs from strict orthodoxy—reconfiguring symbolic forms to express contemporary affective, social, and political realities (Shakya *et al.*, 2019).

Kumale's artistic evolution unfolded alongside significant political upheaval in Nepal: from the collapse of the Rana regime and the rise of constitutional monarchy, to the Maoist civil conflict and the 2015 earthquake. These moments of rupture inform the visual and emotional language of his work. *Two Farmers Fighting*, for instance, captures the tension of rural land disputes, emblematic of enduring class inequities (Gautam, 2022). Similarly, *The Corpse of Sati Devi* draws on Hindu mythology but also serves as a personal lamentation following the death of Kumale's wife, Laxmi Maya (Lama, 2022).

His sculptures engage not only religious motifs but also lived experience—bridging the sacred and the secular, the mythic and the intimate. This approach positions Kumale within what Bajracharya (2016) calls a "folk-spiritual idiom," where traditional iconography is employed to convey personal grief, collective trauma, and ethical reflection. The affective realism of his work—expressed through facial tension, asymmetry, and emotive posture—challenges static notions of heritage and devotional art, marking his oeuvre as both preservationist and radically interpretive.

Taken together, Kumale's position in Nepali art is not simply that of a sculptor, but of a cultural agent whose career redefines who can create, what can be represented, and how tradition is lived. His practice emerges from a unique convergence of individual will, cultural rupture, and spiritual inquiry—making his legacy foundational to any serious discourse on contemporary South Asian visual culture.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This section offers a critical examination of two seminal works by Kalu Kumale—*The Corpse of Sati Devi* and *Two Farmers Fighting*—as sites where affective expression, political commentary, and cultural tradition converge. Through the lenses of affect theory and postcolonial aesthetics, these sculptures are interpreted not simply as visual representations, but as embodied texts that mediate grief, rage, and resilience within the broader cultural and socio-political landscape of Nepal.

THE CORPSE OF SATI DEVI: SCULPTING GRIEF AND SACRED LOSS

Among Kumale's most emotionally charged works, *The Corpse of Sati Devi* exemplifies how sculpture can operate as a medium of affective labor. Inspired by the death of his wife, Laxmi Maya, and the myth of Sati Devi—who self-immolates in protest of patriarchal dishonor—the sculpture allegorizes the emotional intensity of personal loss through divine narrative. It depicts Shiva carrying the lifeless body of his beloved, rendered with heightened emotional realism. The rawness in Shiva's facial expression, the curvature of his shoulders, and the heaviness of Sati's limbs together form an intense visual articulation of mourning (Lama, 2022).

Affect theory provides a critical lens through which to understand how such sculptural form transmits emotion across time and viewer. As Ahmed (2004) argues, affect “sticks” to objects and bodies, accumulating histories of feeling. In *The Corpse of Sati Devi*, affect is not abstract; it is materialized—coagulated in gesture, texture, and narrative posture. Bajracharya (2016) suggests that the sculpture's power lies not just in what it represents but in how it feels—how it invites viewers to inhabit grief as a sacred and shared space. The work thus functions as a site of empathic resonance, collapsing the boundary between the mythological and the autobiographical, the viewer and the viewed.

Furthermore, the work departs from classical Newar idealizations of divinity, favoring instead a posture of vulnerability and emotional excess. This aesthetic divergence signals a subtle yet profound act of postcolonial re-signification, wherein traditional myth is reframed through the lens of lived experience. The sculpture ceases to be merely ritualistic; it becomes testimonial, a deeply personal contribution to the canon of South Asian sacred art.

TWO FARMERS FIGHTING: AGRARIAN CONFLICT AND VISUAL PROTEST

Two Farmers Fighting marks a deliberate shift in Kumale's oeuvre—trading his typical religious iconography for a visceral portrayal of rural life's hardships. As Gautam (2022) observes, the sculpture “captures class divisions and land disputes in stark physicality,” depicting two male figures locked in combat, their muscles straining and faces contorting with desperation and rage. It's more than a hyper-local scene; it functions allegorically, exposing the structural

precarity at the heart of agrarian existence. Through this powerful invocation of affect—anger, fear, solidarity—the work becomes a socio-political archive, mobilizing viewers toward empathy and critique rather than passive sentiment.

Here, Kumale's work functions as a form of visual protest, echoing what Bhabha (1994) identifies as the “interstitial space” of postcolonial art: a space where new cultural meanings are negotiated within and against dominant paradigms. The piece challenges romanticized images of rural harmony often propagated in nationalist narratives, replacing them with a brutal realism that exposes the fragility of communal bonds under economic and legal strain. The fight is not heroic; it is tragic, cyclical, unresolved.

From an affective standpoint, the sculpture radiates what Tomkins (1995) describes as “negative activation”—an emotional intensity that provokes discomfort, empathy, or recognition. Unlike heroic statuary, which elevates its subjects to idealized roles, Kumale's figures remain grounded—dirty, mortal, and angry. Their bodies are thick with implication, conveying not just the physical act of struggle but the emotional weight of systemic disenfranchisement. Through the tactile language of stone and form, the artist translates agrarian tension into visual testimony.

Moreover, the work reclaims sculptural realism as a political idiom. Shakya et al. (2019) note that while Kumale is celebrated for his religious sculpture, pieces like *Two Farmers Fighting* reveal his deeper commitment to depicting unseen truths of Nepali society. In this sense, the sculpture parallels the postcolonial function of “telling otherwise”—recasting ignored or marginalized realities in ways that resist erasure. By sculpting the everyday violence of property disputes and resource scarcity, Kumale asserts the relevance of indigenous aesthetics as socio-political critique.

Together, these two works illustrate the range and depth of Kumale's sculptural practice. *The Corpse of Sati Devi* and *Two Farmers Fighting* occupy distinct iconographic territories—mythological and secular—but both demonstrate his ability to mobilize traditional form as a vessel for emotional intensity and political consciousness. Their affective potency and formal innovation underscore Kumale's role not only as a master craftsman but also as a cultural theorist in his own right—one who sculpts not merely deities or villagers, but the invisible structures of grief, power, and social rupture.

DISCUSSION

The preceding analysis of Kalu Kumale's sculptural practice reveals a complex interplay between affect, tradition, and cultural transformation. By engaging with themes of grief, social conflict, and spiritual intensity, Kumale's sculptures transcend the boundaries of devotional art and emerge as affectively charged interventions into Nepali cultural discourse. Through a theoretically grounded interpretation of works such as *The Corpse of Sati Devi* and *Two Farmers Fighting*, this article demonstrates how Kumale's practice constitutes a form of aesthetic resistance and cultural narration in postcolonial South Asia.

One of the key insights to emerge from this study is the centrality of affective labor in Kumale's work. In *The Corpse of Sati Devi*, grief is not depicted merely as an emotional theme; it is sculpted into the material fabric of the artwork, rendering affect visible, tactile, and communicable. As Ahmed (2004) argues, emotions are not private states but social and political forces that circulate across bodies and objects. Kumale's ability to externalize personal trauma through mythological form reveals the therapeutic and social power of art, particularly within societies where mourning and spiritual expression are intimately intertwined. His sculptures thus become affective archives, encoding both personal and collective experiences of loss, devotion, and endurance.

Similarly, *Two Farmers Fighting* illustrates how Kumale mobilizes sculpture as a medium of social critique. The piece reimagines agrarian struggle not as anecdotal realism, but as a structural symptom of Nepal's post-feudal socio-economic landscape. Through its affective intensity and compositional drama, the sculpture captures the emotional toll of rural inequities and collapsing communal solidarities. This positions Kumale within what Bhabha (1994) terms a "third space" of cultural production—one where indigenous aesthetics are not nostalgic recoveries of tradition but strategic reconfigurations of it, embedded within lived modernities. In this space, Kumale's work articulates a postcolonial aesthetic that is both vernacular and contemporary, devotional and political.

Crucially, Kumale's position as a first-generation sculptor who emerged outside the caste-bound transmission of artisanal knowledge disrupts essentialist narratives of tradition. His work resists being subsumed into a static notion of heritage, instead offering a model of indigenous modernism that evolves

through embodied experience, personal intuition, and community engagement. The hybrid iconography and unconventional compositions found across his oeuvre underscore the idea that cultural continuity in South Asia is not merely about preservation, but about active re-inscription of meaning under shifting historical conditions.

The public and institutional recognition of Kumale's work further enhances its cultural significance. As discussed, the accolades he has received from state authorities, academic institutions, and civic leaders legitimize his role not only as an artist, but as a cultural interlocutor whose practice has contributed to Nepal's national identity formation. In founding the *Krodhkala Shiromani Foundation* and instituting awards in his late wife's memory, Kumale has also ensured that his artistic legacy is embedded within broader frameworks of community development, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and civic responsibility.

Moreover, this study underscores the importance of theorizing indigenous artistic practices within global academic frameworks without erasing their specificity. Kumale's work demands a reading that is attuned both to local cosmologies—particularly those of the Newar community—and to critical discourses such as affect theory and postcolonial aesthetics. His sculptures challenge us to rethink binary categories such as "traditional" versus "contemporary," or "sacred" versus "secular," revealing instead a continuum of cultural production where forms are recontextualized, emotions are sculpted, and identities are negotiated.

In this light, Kumale's oeuvre contributes to broader scholarly debates on cultural resilience, visual sovereignty, and the politics of representation in South Asia. His practice exemplifies how non-Western artists can simultaneously assert indigenous aesthetics and engage with universal human concerns—grief, conflict, faith, and survival—through culturally embedded artistic forms. Rather than merely preserving a tradition, Kumale transforms it, inviting us to see sculpture not only as material artifact but as a living, breathing discourse on what it means to be human in a rapidly changing world.

CONCLUSION

Kalu Kumale's sculptural practice represents a profound convergence of artistic mastery, cultural stewardship, and emotional articulation. As this study has shown, his body of work—spanning over seven

decades—challenges reductive categorizations of “traditional” art by operating within a dynamic field of aesthetic hybridity, spiritual meaning, and political urgency. Through a focused analysis of *The Corpse of Sati Devi* and *Two Farmers Fighting*, this article has demonstrated how Kumale’s sculptures embody what affect theorists describe as emotional transmission and what postcolonial scholars identify as cultural re-signification.

Kumale’s contribution to Nepali art is not confined to form or iconography; it lies equally in his ability to animate inherited symbols with new emotional, philosophical, and sociopolitical life. His works function as affective texts—repositories of grief, anger, resilience, and devotion—that speak to both intimate personal experiences and broader collective conditions. In this sense, Kumale is not merely preserving cultural tradition; he is reshaping it, using the sculptural medium as a site for negotiating identity, memory, and modernity.

His institutional recognitions and philanthropic initiatives further reinforce his position as a public intellectual and cultural agent. By establishing foundations and mentoring younger artists, Kumale extends the impact of his work beyond the gallery or temple, embedding it within the ethical and civic fabric of Nepali society. His legacy offers a compelling model for how indigenous visual practices can serve as instruments of both cultural continuity and transformative engagement.

This article contributes to an emerging discourse on indigenous aesthetics, visual sovereignty, and affective labor in South Asian art. It invites future scholarship to engage more critically with non-Western artists who, like Kumale, are often situated on the periphery of global art historiography yet play a central role in shaping the cultural and emotional landscapes of their

communities. In doing so, it affirms that sculpture—as both medium and message—can bear the weight of memory, embody the complexity of social life, and carve new possibilities for cultural thought and practice.

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