

# República THE WEEK

WEEKEND EDITION

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### ARTBEAT

## Amblar's Words in Material Nepali

KANCHAN G BURATHOKI

Even before his residency began at the Kathmandu Contemporary Arts Center (KCAC) in Patan, Robert Cervera Amblar had been going in and around Kathmandu, observing things and making note of those that fascinated him. And what interests him are such ordinary sights to us Nepalis, that we hardly even consider them to be inspiring, influential or noteworthy for that matter.

"I noticed the terraced fields when I was walking around the outskirts of the city," says Robert, who arrived in Nepal in January 2012. He found similarities in the way terrace fields and roofs of pagoda temples stack upon each other. At KCAC, Robert shows this comparison with his sculpture titled "Gara."



**GARA:** Steel rod, plastic ribbon, enamel paint. 150 x 100 x 180 cm

Constructed out of steel rods and plastic ribbons, Gara consists of three organic shapes layered on top of each other to create a triangular form.

Placed outdoors, the vertical red strips of ribbon is dizzying when seen against the green foliage in the immediate background. And in the distance stands an actual pagoda temple, echoing the shape of Gara and vice versa. The ancient temple appears sturdier, but it isn't any less vulnerable than Gara, to harsh winds and rainfalls.

In Gara, Robert makes references to another item used locally, i.e., the red and blue plastic ribbons that are used to weave sitting stools on metal frames.

These plastic stools are perhaps the first image that comes into one's mind when looking at Gara, even before terraced fields or pagoda temples. To the artist, all of these – terraced fields, pagodas and plastic ribbons – are parts of the "vocabulary" of our "material language."

"Every place has its own material language. How things are made, how they are used, how people relate to them," Robert shares. His three and a half month residency at KCAC is about learning and exploring the material language of Nepal. It will wrap up with an exhibition that opens on Sunday, July 29.

Currently based in London, UK, Robert is originally from Barcelona, Spain. He moved to London eight years ago with a Bachelor's degree in Communication.

"I started out pretty late in art," laughs the 36-year-old who was initially employed in advertising. Robert completed his Postgraduate Diploma in Fine Art in 2010 and will begin his Master's in Sculpture at Royal College of Art in London in October of this year.

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**BANDH:** *Shovel handles (approx. 120 units). 224 x 620 x 130 cm.*

In the studio-gallery space at KCAC, Robert has laid out his works on the floor. When asked if they were going to be hung on the walls, he says, "No, I'm going to leave them on the floor."

His works not only conceptually spring from stacks and piles of materials but also literally and intentionally look like things displayed in a typical Nepali "kirana pasal" (convenience store).

"I've noticed that materials are placed here and there in shops until they turn into stacks," Robert puts in. His work "Napkin Grid" is simply placed on a column of briquettes, and next to it is a collection of circular stoves welded to create "Round fields."

The materials that Robert uses are varied from resin wax and wood to brass and concrete but many of his works go back to the idea of repetition and accumulation – conceptually and physically.

"Blue Saw" and "Red Saw" are saws covered in colored plaster. Underneath the thick layers of plaster we can still make out the shape of the saws.

"The idea comes from statues of deities that are covered with so much color that you can't really see them physically but you still know that it's a certain God," he explains and adds, "It's a spiritual experience."

In the middle of the gallery is yet another pile. Constructed out of some 120 shovel handles, Robert calls it "Bandh." "The work cuts your path in the middle of the space and makes you walk around," he states.

Photographs posted in his blog in June shows the initial construction of Bandh. The final output is a six meter long uneven sculpture that emulates contours of mountain ranges. There's tension and balance in "Bandh" which are also inherent in Robert's other works, "Drawing for Birds," "Upon Hiti" and "Blue Saw."



**ROUND FIELDS:** Brass or copper, acrylic ink, SH resin, plasticiser

"A Few Words in Material Nepali" draws references from local architecture and landscape to saw handles and Pinky Sweet Supari packets. While all of these elements are visual and tactile, Robert chooses to use the term "material language" for his works instead of "visual language."

"When I think of 'visual,' I feel that it's limiting and more to do with two-dimensional works," he opines and continues, "For instance, a photograph of a sculpture can't replace the actual work. You can't see all sides of the work and nor can you get a sense of how it feels."

Robert, therefore aptly calls his exhibition, with over 30 individual works, "a collection of material phrases assembled in the language of material Nepali."

*A Few Words in Material Nepali will open at KCAC in Patan Museum on Sunday, July 29. It will remain open till August 4.*

**Burathoki is the contributing Arts Editor for The Week.**

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