

# The anatomy of a flower

**Neera Joshi's unique paintings of plants combine scientific accuracy with botanical art**

Shristi Karki [April 5, 2021](#)



“I can’t help myself when I see flowers,” says [botanical artist and illustrator Neera Joshi](#). “I have to paint them.” Outside her studio, the spring garden is blooming with bright pink azaleas, orange daisies, and lush calla lilies. They were splashes of colour against a city shrouded in smoke this week. Inside, Joshi sits cross-legged on the floor, surrounded by framed [botanical artwork](#). On Tuesday, 32 of her paintings will be on display at Siddhartha Art Gallery for a three-week-long exhibition supported by the Nepal Britain Society. “Many people do not know what botanical art is because they have never seen it,” explains Joshi. “It is a means visual communication that will enable Nepalis to recognise and appreciate our rich and varied biodiversity.” Indeed, the relatively unknown art form typically comprises botanical illustration and botanical art. While both styles need to be scientifically accurate, and require equipment different from other art forms, botanical drawings are more scientific, the figures

need to be precise and to scale, and they contribute to scientific studies and plant identification. [Botanical art](#), meanwhile, allows for more focus on the aesthetics and the creative process. Joshi plays to both of those styles in her artwork. Half of her collection for the exhibition includes flowers native to Nepal— from wildflowers of Champadevi done in greens and browns to the soft pink *Luculia gratissima* and Himalayan blue poppies. The other half are exotic plants, ranging from orchids in pinks and yellows to kalakaua, magnolias, and more.



Joshi experiments with multiple mediums in [her artwork](#) while balancing scientific accuracy and artistic expression in her paintings. One of her pieces of mahonia berries, called jamaane mandro in Nepal, is a mixture of watercolour and pen-and-ink, while some of her pieces are half watercolour and half pencil sketch, with a series of smaller, more detailed, and scale illustration of the plant, depicting every stage of its life.

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*Video: SHANTA BUDHA MAGAR*

“There is little room for free expression, freestyle or imagination with botanical art, and there are lots of rules and regulations,” says Joshi. She prefers being in nature and doing live paintings, and recently trekked up to 3,500m in Gorkha to study flora in previously unexplored forests. Although botanical artists also work with herbariums, a collection of preserved plant

specimens, she usually documents flowers live in her field sketchbook, later referring to them to translate her art to watercolour. If the plant is small and manageable, Joshi brings them back home to study. “My mother wanted me to become a doctor,” Joshi says, smiling. “But I studied botany.” Joshi got her Master’s degree in Botany from Tribhuvan University in 1995.

Although her father, Ramananda Joshi, was a noted artist, it was only in 1996 that she considered art as a career after her Master’s. “Becoming an artist had never crossed my mind, although I was raised surrounded by art,” she says.

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*Video: SHANTA BUDHA MAGAR*

For picking up the paintbrush relatively later in life, Joshi honed her skill swiftly over the next few years and had her work on exhibit for the first time in 1999. “Botanical art is a scientific discipline, and as such, one cannot just paint whatever they feel like,— the portraits of plants have to be meticulous,” says Sangeeta Thapa of Siddhartha Art Gallery. “Neera is among the very few botanical artists in Nepal, and she stands out from the crowd of contemporary artists because she’s doing something very unique and something she’s really passionate about.” Her work has been on display at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, and more recently at the [Wuhan International Botanical Art Exhibition](#), where three of her paintings were exhibited virtually, owing to the Covid pandemic.



“Most Nepalis don’t know indigenous flowers from exotic ones, which is especially concerning at a time when conservation of biodiversity is so important,” says the artist, who also trains students and budding Nepali artists at her Studio Petals. “I hope this exhibition will provide exposure to botanical art and generate interest among young Nepalis,” she says. “This will help in education, conservation and research. .”

*Neera Joshi’s collection of botanical art, The Beauty of Nepal’s Flora, will be exhibited at Siddhartha Gallery from 6-26 April.*

