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[Monsal Pekar on her current artwork](#)

## The female in contemporary Tibetan art: the artist Monsal Pekar (b. 1964)

by Nicola Schneider

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### Abstract

Like in many other professions, women only form a tiny minority among contemporary artists in Tibet. Monsal Pekar is one of a handful of them. She has not only reached fame in her own society, but also in Mainland China and international circles thanks to her travels and contacts. This article will deal with her life and training as presented by herself. It will then proceed by analyzing part of her artwork and especially those works, which, in her own words, can be considered as “feminist” or representing “feminist ideas”—“Fighting for women’s rights”.

I will trace the development and inspiration underlying these pieces by drawing on a small critical book she wrote on women in Tibet and her more recent thoughts expressed in conversations. I will thus examine social commentary, critique and reflections in the artist’s work with a particular regard to women’s issues. It will be also shown that the latter are closely connected to ideas stemming from Buddhism, which the artist knows well as a diligent follower and practitioner. Last but not least, I will explore how the female artist feels responsibility in her society when criticizing the gender-gap.

### Introduction

Contemporary art is a recent phenomenon in Tibetan society, which has literally exploded since it has started to go global at the beginning of the 21st century[1]. The Gedun Choephel Artists’ Guild in Lhasa, the capital of the Tibetan Autonomous Region, founded in 2003 by local artists, Tibetans and Hans alike, is the best known center of its kind and has been studied by several researchers for instance[2]. It is striking that, like in many other professions, women only form a tiny minority of these new Tibetan artists[3]. Monsal Pekar is one among a handful of them[4]. Being a painter as well as a sculptor, she has been trained in traditional as well as in modern arts, being thus unique among her peers.

Unlike other contemporary Tibetan artists, Pekar does not work for any public institution or private enterprise to earn her life. She can be considered as a independent artist, who has to sell her artwork to customers or otherwise accepts orders from them. Also, she is not affiliated with any association or center. Nonetheless, she has reached fame in her own society as well as in Mainland China and international circles thanks to her travels and contacts. Being a friend of mine with whom I have discussed over the last decade many issues related to my own anthropological researches on Tibetan women, it seems important to me to listen to her reflections as presented clearly in some of her art pieces and written works—most of them not being published but only circulating on WeChat social network groups. I will restrain myself here to what I call “female” or “feminist” art, leaving for later the rest of her work, which is, of course, from an art connoisseur point of view equally important.

The following article will start with a short biographical sketch as presented in her book *Fading Dreams*[5] and supplemented by conversations, before presenting and analyzing some of the pieces, which seem to me the most telling as concerns female or feminist art.

### A short biographical sketch:



Fig. 1

Pekar or Monsal Pekar Desal by her full name was born in 1964 in Kham Gawa (sGa pa), close to the town of Jyekundo (sKye dgu mdo). Her father, Losang Thugyal (1937-2013), was a well-known traditional sculptor and *thangka* painter who had learnt his craft from a young age in a Kagyu monastery. However during the Cultural Revolution, he had to stop exercising due to inherent risks. He was only able to resume his profession in the early 1980s when politics were slowly becoming more relaxed. At this time, it turned out that he was the only surviving artist of his group. Thus during her childhood, Pekar was ignorant about her father’s skills and more generally about Tibetan traditional art and handicrafts.

Although times were not appropriate, Pekar was lucky to accomplish her high school in a Chinese medium curriculum in Jyekundo. When finishing her school, in the early 1980s, the political atmosphere in her home area was getting more relaxed and her father started to work again as traditional *thangka*-painter and Buddhist statue sculptor. Meanwhile a group of some famous Chinese artists came to visit Jyekundo and taught art to some local students: Pekar was the only woman among them. She was convinced by one of the art teachers, M. Lu, to go to an art school and with his assistance, she joined the Fine Arts Department of the North West Minorities Institute in Lanzhou. There she studied not only oil painting, but also art history, Western and Eastern philosophy, sculpture, design, poetry, music, dance and gymnastics. She became particularly interested in Western classical painting, which she applied later to her own art, like we will see. After graduating in 1990, she found a job at the Department of People’s Art in Jyekundo where she designed book covers and translated folk literature.

The year 1993 was a turning point in Pekar’s life: she decided to run away to India in order to get further education, especially in Buddhist teachings, and meet her spiritual master, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. During her first years in exile, she worked as an art teacher and book illustrator at the TCV-school of Upper Dharamsala and then in Byalakuppe, South India. She recalls that at that time she became very interested in Tibetan culture and traditions, something she was not so aware of before reaching India due to the political situation. She started to practice Buddhism very diligently, similar to an ascetic following strict diet and schedules. During one year and a half, she even became a nun. However, she also became aware of the fact that as a nun, one needs a teacher, otherwise it would be difficult to deepen religious practice. Realizing that all masters, even those teaching in nunneries, were men, she started to look for female role models and found one in the figure of the 11th-12th century female saint Machig Labdrön, the only Tibetan having invented a religious tradition, *Chö* or “Severance”[6]. After having read Machig’s secret biography[7]—which contains a scene where Machig in despair about not being able to follow dharma cuts both of her thumbs with a knife in order to be unable to work as a herder for her family in law—, she



decides to follow the same path. She chose however a different technique, tightening a metal wire around her index finger in order to cut all the blood circulation, a way of “offering”—the word she uses—parts of the body she had observed previously while on pilgrimage in Bodhgaya. This act was a shock to most of the Tibetans around her and she was forcefully sent to a mental hospital. Even today, she does not really understand why. Her finger having been left tightened up for several days, she says that she never lost consciousness. Instead, she says, she felt that something happened, something forced her, like in a dream-like state. During this time she neither slept nor ate food.

In 1997, Pekar came back again to Dharamsala. After having faced hard times, she was received as an artist in residence at Amnye Machen Institute, a research center specialized on Tibetan history and culture. There she produced various sculptures and paintings, as well as an exhibition organized by the same institute. She also got commissions from the Tibet Museum, the modern art section of the Norbulingka Institute and from the Songtsen Library in Dehra Dun[8]. For Sakya Gongma Rinpoche, she realized several masks. Moreover, she got the chance to travel to the West: first for an exhibition at the Smithsonian Folklife festival in Washington (2000) and then to France, where she was invited to the trade fair of Nior and the international fair of Nancy (2004). During these years, she started to study American female artists, female art critics, and more generally became interested in feminist issues. Besides, she discovered Indian Gandhāra art style and the Kāmasūtra-like book written by the great Tibetan intellectual Gedün Chöphel[9]. All together, they inspired her to write a small book *Don't Laugh at Women's Hardships*[10] in which she fiercely criticizes gender inequality and gender roles in Tibetan society. Thus her main question and quest became: Where is happiness for women?

In the summer of 2006, Pekar together with her husband from Kenya went back to Tibet, Jyekundo. One of the reasons was that her father had asked her for help to run the atelier and school he had founded after political relaxation, and which had turned by then to a well running place for art production, education and cultural preservation. Among his three children, Pekar was the only talented artist able to continue his heritage. Already at a very young age, she had shown her capacities while shaping little figures out of *tsampa*, Tibetan staple food, or helping her grand-mother to manufacture traditional boots. However, after her father's death, her brother-in-law appropriated the business and Pekar and her family decided to settle in the suburbs of Chengdu, where she was given a job as a trainer in a Tibetan factory specialized in statue-making. Not feeling at her right place, she nevertheless quit the work shortly after and decided to settle on her own, i.e. accepting commissions from various customers like Chinese businessmen and Tibetan monasteries for whom she realized sculptors as well as paintings. In 2013, she was chosen among several artists in a competition organized by the Department of Culture in her hometown, Jyekundo. After the earthquake in April 2010, the whole city and its environment had to be reconstructed; only a handful of buildings having resisted, among them one of Tibet's tallest and finest Gesar statues manufactured by no other than Pekar's father. In order to save it, the Department had elevated it on a pedestal, with the aim to ask an artist to decorate it with further artwork. Pekar's proposition to encircle the statue with Gesar's army, or 'heroes' (*dpa' bo*), riding proudly and fiercely on their horses as if showing their awakening after the earthquake chaos was accepted as being the most attractive and suitable - For more information on this artwork, [see video](#). As for now, approximately half of the work has been done, but in order to finalize it Pekar is still awaiting some of the promised funding.



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Thus in order to make a living, Pekar mostly works for commissions giving her little time to realize her own ideas or creations. Among the latter, most fall into what can be considered to be female art. They all follow her main quest: Where is the happiness for women?

## 2. Pekar's female art

Since her graduation from university, some thirty years have passed during which Pekar has experimented with different techniques and materials in order to fine-tune her artwork. She has moreover shown a predilection for some subjects like the mother-figure, figures of past and present female heroines, the place of women in Buddhism and, more recently, the importance for women to acquire knowledge. All these subjects have been treated in different ways and styles over the years, the reason why the following chapter is divided into two periods.

### Early period of intensive painting: India, 1997-2006

During her first period in India, Pekar started to produce what can be considered female or feminist art. One of her first paintings depicts Buddha Śākyamuni's mother, Māyādevī. Painted in oil on canvas, the style is a mix between Indian traditional art and Western modern art. It portrays the celestial nymph Śālabhañjikā leaning against and holding the sacred *sal*-tree, a typical subject of Indian art. However, the arms and legs of Māyādevī are extremely simplified or figurative. Moreover, some of the typical features of Śālabhañjikā like the act of giving birth to Siddhartha Gautama while assistants are holding her, etc. are not represented.

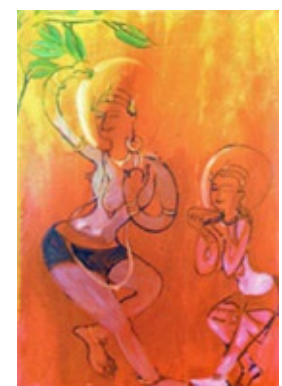


Fig. 4



Fig. 5

In the next picture (fig. 5), Pekar represents a young, innocent looking nun, a reminder of her own experiences as a *jomo*. In her book, she accuses very clearly the Tibetan custom according to which parents and their daughters assume that being a qualified nun needs no more than to wear the monastic dress and recite a few sutras, contrasting it with Taiwanese and Western traditions where, she says, nuns first find for themselves the true path of liberation through Buddhism and only then decide to take their monastic vows, thus becoming genuinely enlightened by religion as well as capable of serious practice and studies[11].

The painting of the *Young nun* in a realist style is nevertheless a moderate criticism compared to the next work: a sculpture representing two Tibetan women (fig. 6). Dressed in traditional clothes, the one in the foreground is sitting cross-legged, while the second is braiding her hair. Yet sitting in this way is a challenge to tradition if we take into account what Pekar writes in her book: “Sitting with her legs crossed is considered to be a woman's curse to her brothers” (2004: 34-35). This opprobrium is something she herself experienced many times when she was young and living in the Jyekundo area, like she says.



The next work is a sculpture of Machig Labdrön in *yab-yum* (father-mother) position (fig. 7). Throughout her life Machig Labdrön had several tantric partners, but the one depicted here is explicitly an unidentified one. Because none has special importance for Pekar, she preferred to leave him anonymous in this work. The sculpture dates from approximately 2003, a period when Pekar started herself to study the *Chö*-tradition with a small group of practitioners in Dharamsala under the guidance of the 9th Khalkha Rinpoche (Khal kha rje btsun dam pa).



Fig. 6

More generally, Pekar followed many teachings while in India, in particular those of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. It is from him, she says, that she learnt that the *Anuttarayoga tantra* or “unsurpassed yoga tantra”, the highest category in the fourfold division of tantric texts, is the only way of Buddhist practice where the female is emphasized equally to the male, where no gender discrimination exists anymore[12]. In recent years, she has transmitted this message to many other women through social media like WeChat with great success.

The next three paintings, produced during her residence in Amnye Machen Institute in the late 1990s, can be considered as contemplation of female beauty (figs. 8, 9 and 10). They are all influenced by the return to a distinct Tibetan form of art which followed the period of Maoist Social Realism during the Cultural Revolution[13], but also by Western art and her own personal search for Tibetan culture and traditions. It is interesting to note that in the meantime, Pekar has become very critical towards women looking for beauty instead of searching for knowledge—we will come back later to this point.



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

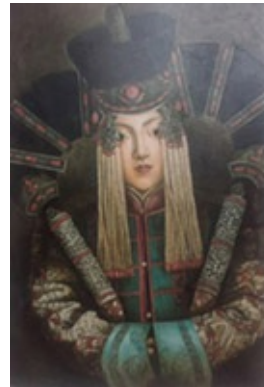


Fig. 9



Fig. 10

The next works all represent the subject of mother, starting with the original Tibetan mother: the *srinmo* or demones, a drawing we can find in her book (fig. 11). Pekar has explored the subject of the mother in different stages but also with distinct techniques like drawings, paintings, as well as in sculpture (figs. 12a, 12b and 12c). The mother represents to her “kindness”, “compassion” and “selfless love”, comparable to the characteristics of the bodhisattvas, also considered like “mothers” in Tibetan Buddhism. It is thus not surprising that she also represented the holiest of all the mothers, His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s mother known to Tibetans as Mayum Chenmo, in a sculpture (fig. 13).



Fig. 11



Fig. 12a



Fig. 12b



Fig. 12c



Fig. 13

#### Later period of creation: China 2006-today

The second phase of Pekar’s creations started with her return to Tibet, more precisely to China. Since settling near Chengdu, Pekar has been able to establish herself thanks to several regular clients, among them Chinese businessmen working in real estate business, and Tibetan monasteries. And, since 2013, she works on a contract basis with the Department of People’s Art of Jyekundo city (her home town), in order to realize a series of pedestal sculptors. It is in the context of a collection of paintings representing great historical Tibetan figures like the imperial kings Songtsen Gampo and Thisong Detsen, but also intellectuals like the translator and inventor of Tibetan script Thommi Sambhota and the doctor Yutog Yönten Gönpö ordered by a Tibetan monastery, that Pekar realized the painting of one of the holiest religious women in Tibet: the female incarnation of Samding Dorje Phagmo (fig.14). As we can see from the photo, it is heavily inspired by the sculpture of Mayum Chenmo, designed after existing photographs. Pekar says that she had no idea of how the previous Samding Dorje Phagmos looked like, not even the actual one. But she knows that His Holiness admires her very much when he talks about her, the reason why she chose to represent her this way.



Fig. 14

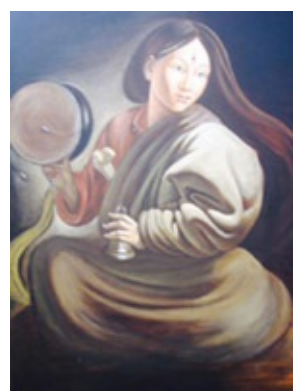


Fig. 15



Fig. 16

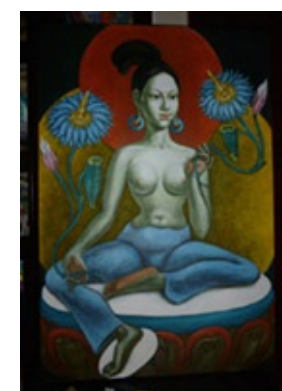


Fig. 17a

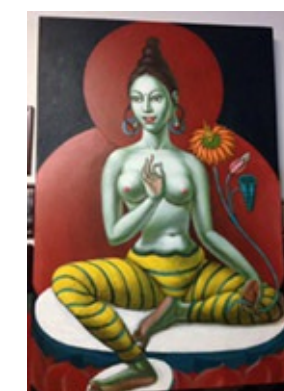


Fig. 17b

Since settling in the suburbs of Chengdu, Pekar has also returned to the representation of her favored Tibetan woman: Machig Labdrön (fig. 15). In this first painting, realized together with the collection of great historical Tibetan figures, she has chosen a style close to tradition, mixed with elements of realism. However, a few years later, she decided to paint Machig Labdrön in a much more modernized version where she is shown nude (fig. 16). It might be useful to underline that already in traditional Tibetan paintings, nudity is an acceptable feature, at least concerning Machig Labdrön (although not always well received by Tibetan audience).



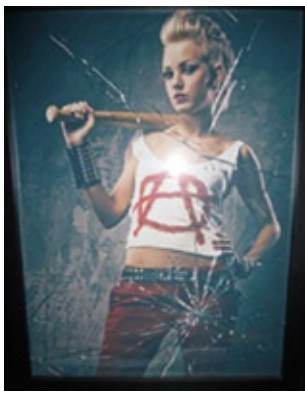


Fig. 18

At approximately the same period, around 2011, Pekar chose a similar style to paint Tara, the most important Tibetan female deity. (figs. 17a and 17b) It was her purpose here to paint Tara in a modern way that is distinct to the style used in *thangkas*, in order to underline the fact that she is like a human being, a *real* woman. Her inspiration comes partially from Western modern art: “a simple way of representing Tara”, like she says, “without any further decoration”.

A majority of her creations during the first years near Chengdu are again inspired by feminist readings and symbolic such as this photograph of a feminist: (fig. 18) a woman who is not afraid to fight for her rights, especially when it concerns equal gender treatment.

The next series of works can be resumed under the title *Female Space* (figs. 19a, 19b, 19c and 19d). It dates from the winter 2008/2009 and reveals her experiences and reflections after resettling again in a Han-Chinese cultural environment. It is also the period just after Pekar has given birth to her son and second child; the first child, a girl, was born in 1998.

Pekar has adopted here a new style, more personal and “modern”, according to her own words. It is influenced by Western modern art, like Picasso for example, as well as by the style of an Indian modern artist whose paintings she has seen and appreciated in a museum in Delhi while living there.



Fig. 19a



Fig. 19b

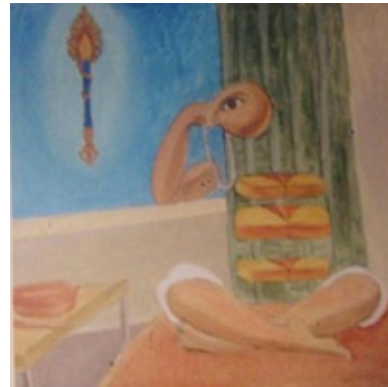


Fig. 19c



Fig. 19d

In the first painting (fig. 19a), a housewife is seen sitting on the floor of her kitchen. She is torn apart between her household work on the one side and the responsibility over her baby on the other. Pekar wants to show here how small a housewife’s place is; that there is no freedom at all for her being constantly busy with housework. This kind of woman has no independence and no freedom, a situation, which represents the life of many married women who are too much devoted to their family.

The second painting (fig. 19b) shows the contrary: a woman in the world, or a free woman. Compared to the first painting, the woman is outside and not confined inside; she fights for women’s rights and also for peace—symbolized by the white pigeon. With this painting, Pekar wants to transmit the message that in order to become knowledgeable, women have to study and go out to discover the world, not only for their own good, but also in order to better serve their society and more generally the world and all human beings.

The next two paintings are less of a feminist statement in her own words. However, they are also related to the first ones and the general theme of *female space*. The third painting (fig. 19c) represents a woman sitting and watching outside. At the first look, she is torn between material world inside her apartment (the jewelry in her hand, nice food and a comfortable living space) and the spiritual world situated outside. The big window represents here wisdom and knowledge. However, for instance the woman only contemplates the idea of searching for wisdom and has not taken any decision to follow this way. This painting can be connected to a statement, Pekar has given in her book: “Woman is not only the incarnation of beauty, but also that of wisdom and compassion. She needs to go beyond her ego and march towards the larger world. Don’t let the world shape you; you should go ahead and shape the world. This is all what it is to be a woman!”<sup>[14]</sup>

In the next and last painting (fig. 19d), we can see a rich lady sitting comfortably on her sofa. She has no eyes to see, only a mouth for speech. Pekar says that this is how she perceived Chinese people, and especially women, when she settled first in the suburbs of Chengdu: a world of narrow thinking where beauty, small talk, big houses and big cars have more importance for women (as well as for men) than deep knowledge and reflection. This painting can also be related to a critical poem Pekar has written and circulated on WeChat:<sup>[15]</sup>

女人无学便是德	Women who lack talent are virtuous
女人无欲便是贞	Women who lack lust are chaste
女人节食便是美	Women who follow diet are beautiful
女人无能便是娇	Incapable women are tender and spoilt
女人不思便是纯	Women who lack thinking are pure
女人胆小便是显可爱	Shy women appear to be cute
女人不劳便是贵	Women who do not work are noble
女人痴情便是爱.	Women who are infatuated by men represent love.

就这样女人没有了眼睛，没有了脚，没有了手，没有了脑子，半死不活的只有让男人给脖子套上绳索拖着走完一生。

In this way women lose eyes, feet, hands, and brain, so they are barely surviving and finish their lives like neck-rope slaves who are dragged by men.

In a recent series of small paintings in watercolor, finished in November 2018, Pekar has gone back to a couple of her preferred themes. However, in contrast to her previous works where women were depicted with beautiful outside appearance, she now has chosen to underline instead their interior beauty. Thus we discover proud Tibetan women being pregnant, Tibetan nuns studying subjects previously reserved for men and (future) mothers who are busy with self-cultivation. In parallel to these painted art works, Pekar has composed a manifesto in prose inviting all women to live up to their potential. Here is the excerpt and its English translation<sup>[16]</sup>:

起来吧！女人们

Wake up! Women!



Fig. 20

起来吧！妻子们

Wake up! Wives!

当丈夫们把青春和激情消耗在别的女人之上时

你要学会趁机把控自己的情绪和精力，让自己陶醉在更高的修养和事业中！

When husbands spend their youth and passion on other women,

You must learn to take the opportunity to control your emotions and energy, and let yourself be immersed in higher cultivation and career!



Fig. 21

起来吧！妈妈们

Wake up! Mothers!

当父亲们把家庭和孩子们超负荷的重量压在你一人身上喘不过气来，父亲们却逍遥自在在单身男女的行列里，尽情享受要有尽有的幸福时，请把“为人之母”当成一件最荣幸的事！用爱心培育、浇灌子女的成长过程，这种义务是人类赋予我们女人的神圣使命，也是女人命运中不可或缺的重要环节，以此培养博大无私的母爱和修炼人格中如大地般安祥忍耐的好机会！

When your husband and father of your children is enjoying the happiness of being a single man, and leaving you alone overwhelmed by the weight of taking care of family and children, you, please take “being a mother” as the most honorable thing! Cultivate and accompany the growth of your children with love, because this is a sacred mission that our women are endowed with, and this is also an indispensable part of women's destiny. Seize this good opportunity to develop unselfish motherly love and improve your personalities, which will be like the peaceful and patient earth.



Fig. 22

起来吧！姐妹们

Wake up! Sisters!

当男人们把理想和愿望高谈阔论重奏在酒桌上、啤酒的泡沫里时，我们不能忘记去学习看书、积累经验，为了实现自己的人生目标和理想去奋斗

When men want to fulfill their ideals and wishes while sitting in the bar or while drinking beer, we must not forget to learn to read books, to accumulate experiences, and strive to achieve our goals and ideals.



Fig. 23

起来吧！弱女子们

Wake up! Weak women!

当男人们用体魄威力殴打恐吓我们时，记住女人的肌肉是在骨头里，女人可以一次次地经历医学上的疼痛之最——十二级分娩之痛，由此可以培养和竖立不可摧毁的倔强意志及心力，慢慢转变发展到利益社会乃至全人类的力量！

When men intimidate us with their physical power, remember that women's muscles are attached to the bones, and so women can experience the highest level of pain again and again—the pain of giving birth to a baby. Through this pain, our unshakable faith and mental strength will be well developed, and can be slowly transformed into the power benefiting the interests of society even all mankind!



Fig. 24

起来吧！女儿们

Wake up! Daughters!

虽然，传统不曾用鲜花迎接你的降临，虽然，历史总是习惯于把头衔佩戴给男人，虽然，女人总是去充当默默无闻的坚强后盾——贤妻良母，可是我们自己一定要付出双倍的努力和代价去开阔自己的视野、丰富自己的知识，培养坚定的信念，肩负并圆满两大责任：对社会做为人类一员的责任，在家中做为母亲、妻子、女儿、媳妇的责任！培养对社会对家人的关爱和奉献精神！

Your birth is not welcomed by a custom of receiving flowers, the honor is usually attributed to men in the history, and a woman acts always as a nameless backing—as a virtuous wife and a good mother. Thus we must pay double efforts and costs to broaden our horizon, to enrich our knowledge, to develop a firm faith, through which we can take upon our shoulders and fulfill two responsibilities: one is to be a member of society as a human being, and the other is to be a mother, a wife, a daughter, and a daughter-in-law at home! Cultivate affection and dedication to the community and to the family!



Fig. 25

起来吧！女士们

Wakeup! Ladies!

用我们自己的博爱和智慧，去点燃女人人们的黑暗，克服从生理到心理，从感性到理性的种种弱点和缺陷，争取以下等之躯立下上等之功勋！

Our endless love and wisdom can light up the darkness, and overcome weakness, no matter whether if physical or psychological, sensible or rational. They help us to strive for the merits of the upper class through our lower class's bodies!





Fig. 26

起来吧！འགྲོ་བུ་ལྷན་དུ་མཇུག་པའི་རྒྱལ་མཉམས་ལྷན་ལྷན་།

Wake up! Ladies who carry the bodhicitta in their heart!

让我们试着放弃对红尘的贪念，和对身体及现实的邪见执念，溶化女人的艰难和不幸在因果缘起的虚幻游戏中，解脱女人的轮回在菩提心的慈悲中！以无际的胸怀容纳天下沧桑云云众生！

Let us try to give up the greed of living in the secular world, and the deviated view and grasping mind of the body and the reality, to dissolve the hardships and misfortunes of women in the illusory game of karma, to free women from samsara and let them enter into the mercy of bodhicitta! Let us have boundless mind to embrace the world's human being!

芒萨·贝尕  
2018.11.17

Written by Monsal Pekar on 17th of November 2018

I will end this section by underlining that Pekar has plans to continue in this more critical and reflective direction. Her wish is to present meaningful artwork, representing deep wisdom as well as human intelligence. In order to do so, she draws on notions of Buddhist philosophy and meditation like emptiness or the innate mind. Thus in a first attempt, she has chosen to represent Machig Labdrön, one of her favorite, not as a young innocent (and somehow "cheap") woman, but as middle-aged mature woman exposing openly her vagina in the foreground of the painting (maybe an allusion to the American feminist painting of the "Last Dinner Party"[17] or the famous feminist play "Vagina Monologues", which has gained momentum in China during the last decade?[18]).



Fig. 27

Meanwhile, Pekar is struggling to find the necessary funds, which would allow her to finish the frescoes of Gesar's army. Confronted with lack of support, she has started to identify herself with the French sculptoress Camille Claudel (1864-1943), who after having been the muse of the famous artist Auguste Rodin, has been rejected not only by her own family but by the society as a whole, only to end up in a sanatorium where she died without having ever practiced her art anymore.

#### Conclusion

Unlike many modern Tibetan artists from the TAR and elsewhere, Pekar has been educated in modern Chinese art, being at the same time introduced to Western classical painting. She then later elaborated her own techniques and style in India, inspired by the work of modern Western and Indian painters including post-impressionists, expressionists and abstract artists as well as by traditional Indian style.

Living in an art world characterized by "the fluidity of the migratory model"[19], Pekar's art can be considered as experimental, many of her works synthesizing traditional motifs and contemporary art stemming from different cultures. She moreover has a strong message to transmit, which can be qualified as feminist—and even an outspoken feminism, which I would say is always rare in Tibetan society. Through her art, she tries to convene this message not only to other Tibetan women, but also to Tibetan men. In her view, women and men have to go hand in hand to reach gender equality. In her own words: "Sisters need to guide their brothers while holding each other's hands!" The same is true, she says, for wives and their husbands. In this sense she looks up to examples of men having spoken out to support gender equality like the famous Tibetan artist Gedün Chöphel.

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## Footnotes

1. On the development of contemporary Tibetan art, see Tsewang Tashi (2008). On Tibetan art going global, see for example Miller Sangster (2007), Ho (2010), Strasnick (2013). All my thanks go to the East Asian Civilisations Research Centre (CRCAO-UMR8155) for financing the fieldwork.
2. See for instance Heimsath (2005), Bremm (2009), Chen (2010). On the beginning of modern art in Lhasa, see Hessel (2002).
3. According to Höfer (2016: 201), there were only two female artists out of twenty-four in total at the Gedün Chöphel Artists' Guild (as of 2010), one out of seven at the Melong Contemporary Art Space (as of 2010) and two out of eleven artists at the Tibetan Art Collective in Delhi (as of 2012).
4. The most famous contemporary female artists are probably Dedrön, from Lhasa (for an interview, see URL: [audio-video.shanti.virginia.edu/video/gendun-choephel-artists-guild-interview-16-dedron](http://audio-video.shanti.virginia.edu/video/gendun-choephel-artists-guild-interview-16-dedron)), and Sonam Dolma Brauen from Switzerland (Höfer, 2011). In order to make female artists better known to the public, the famous artist Gade from the Gedun Choephel Artists' Guild plans to organize a series of exhibitions under the name "Her"; a first having taken place in 2017 (see <https://highpeakspurearth.com/2017/her-part-1-by-gade-tibetan-female-art-exhibition-series-in-lhasa/>).
5. Monsal & Tashi Tsering, 2002.
6. Edou, 1996.
7. For a partial translation of Machig Ladrön's secret biography, see Crook & Low, 2007 [1997], p. 297-315 (here p. 298).
8. As for the style of these earlier works, see Höfer, 2017.
9. See Gedün Chöphel, 1969 and for the translation Gedün Chöphel & Hopkins (translator), 1992.
10. Monsal, 2004.
11. Monsal, 2004: 14-15.
12. As for written statements, see for example: Dalai Lama, 2012: 44-45. For more on *Anuttarayoga tantra*, see Buswell & Lopez, 2014: 421-422.
13. As for the ideological impact on Tibetan art, see Kvaerne, 1994.
14. Monsal, 2004 : 112 (written on 30/11/2001).
15. I am thankful to Li Zihan for the translation from Chinese to English of this poem.
16. I would like to thank Fan Jingming and Li Zihan for their help of translating this manifesto.
17. The "Dinner Party" (1974-1979) by Judy Chicago is one of the most well-known pieces of Feminist art. A Tibetan artist whose name is unknown to me has realized a replica in a distinct Tibetan style.
18. Several groups of Chinese women have adapted the feminist play "The Vagina Monologues" written by Eve Ensler, cf. Qi Wang, 2018.
19. A term used by Harris (2012 : 152), which fits perfectly to Pekar's artwork.

[Monsal Pekar on her current artwork](#)

[HOME](#) | [TABLE OF CONTENTS](#) | [INTRODUCTION](#)

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