# How I started making Photo Collage art

I knew that I was to have some sort of future with photographs when 'coincidentally', a number of events occurred around the same time.

In 2003, I was given an old, second hand, 1960's Pentax camera, one of the best of its era. Around the same time, I was leaving from Kathmandu, on a trip to Solukhumbu in North Eastern Nepal and went to meet my spiritual teacher, His Eminence Chogye Trichen Rinpoche before going.

As I was leaving the room, his attendant called me back in. "Rinpoche is telling you to **Take Photographs**", he informed me.

His Eminence Chogye Trichen Rinpoche

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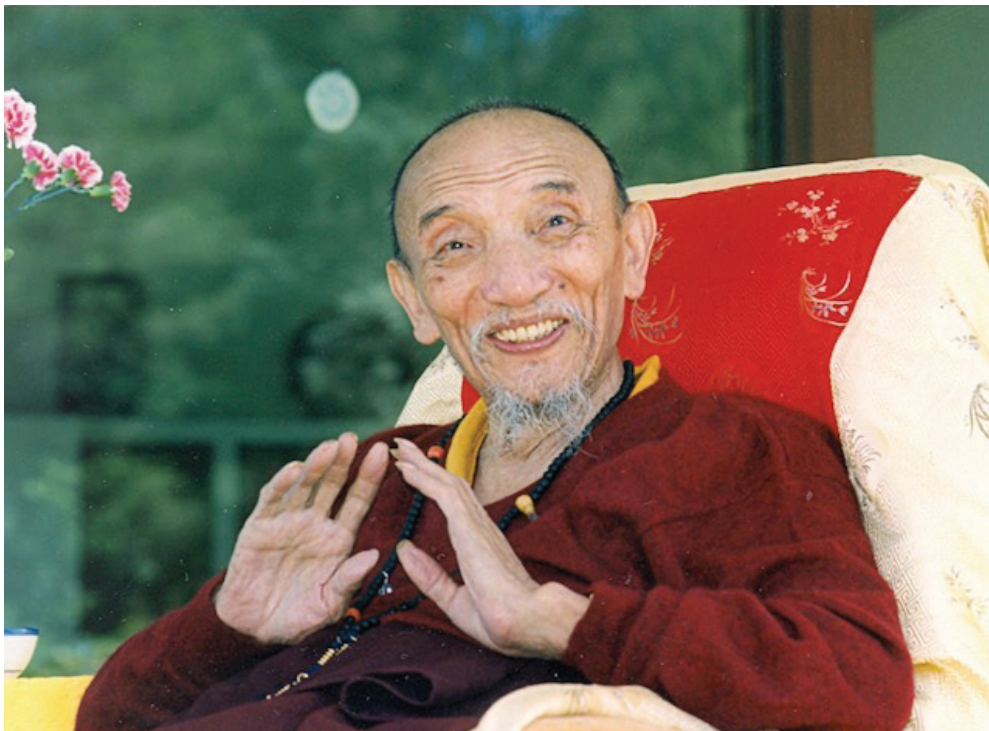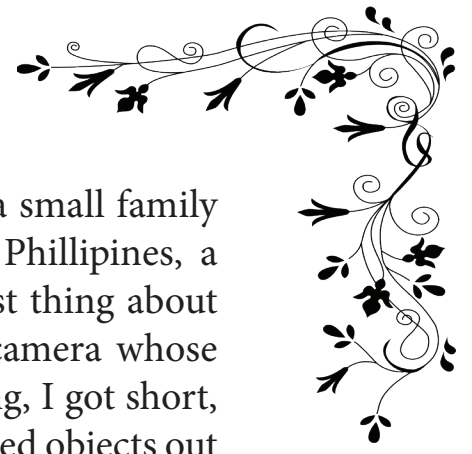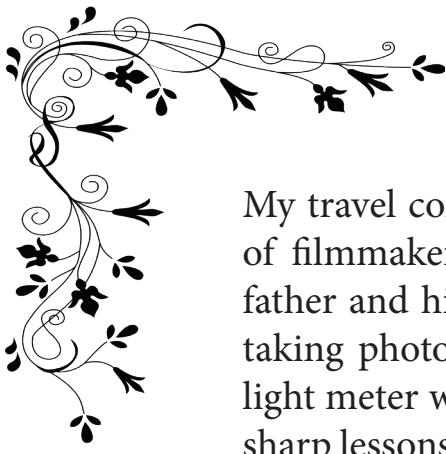
My travel companions for this journey were a small family of filmmakers and photographers from the Phillipines, a father and his two sons. Not knowing the first thing about taking photographs with a non-digital film camera whose light meter was broken, as we were going along, I got short, sharp lessons on framing the picture on intended objects out there, while simultaneously choosing the correct aperture and shutter speed values according to the amount of light on them.
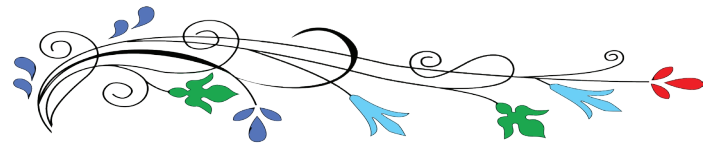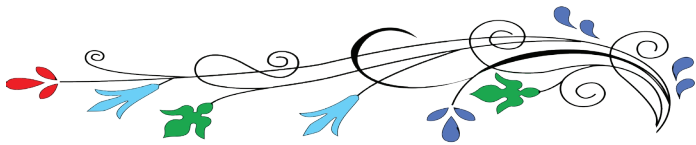
This journey was just a warm up, as a year later I took this same camera into the Annapurna range of mountains, just beyond which the valley of Muktinath is located, where I was headed. I ended up compulsively shooting more than a thousand pictures of it – film reel, not digital (!) - from all different angles; along the riverbed, high up on the tops of mountains and in small villages, temples, people of the valley, rocks, trees, fields etc…

More than just curiousity had compelled me to take these detailed pictures, each being a piece of the mosaic of this mysterious valley that holds a unique quality to it. I was not to understand their real value until some time later.

I returned to Kathmandu and printed out the photos. Some turned out to be quite 'ordinary', but others, displaying rainbows pouring into valleys and lights appearing in splendid visions upon certain objects, 'extraordinary'.

The entire space of our Universe is filled with 'light' that may not be seen to the naked eye, as it is outside of the vibrancy range of human eyesight, but in this case the manifesting aspect of this type of light was actually the result of my unprofessionalism and inability to set up the coordinates of the camera correctly. This apparent disability worked to my advantage, showing me a kind of inner realm of Muktinath.

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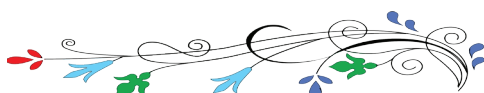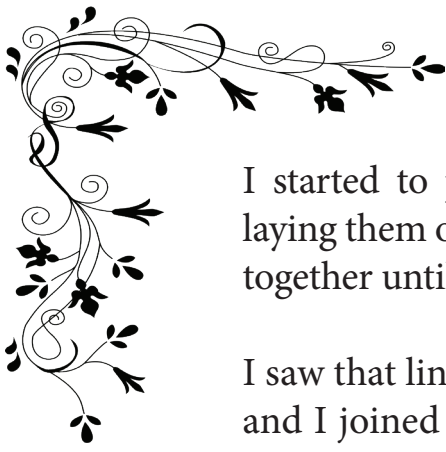
I started to play around with the pictures, first of all just laying them out randomly and then bunching several of them together until I started making flowing patterns with them.

I saw that lines ending in one picture would start in another and I joined them together like jigsaw pieces. But overall, I saw how pictures just melted into each other as colour, lines and perspectives.
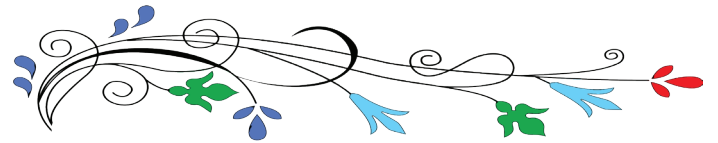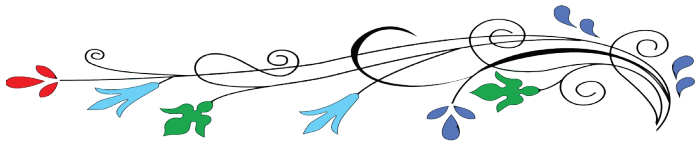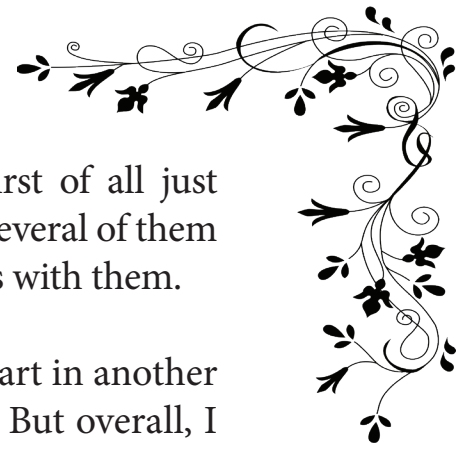
These days, each time I saw Chogye Trichen Rinpoche he would repeat the same sentence to me, so that after the third time, I started to question why he was telling it to me.

It went like this; "Thangtong Gyalpo was a very important master of Tibet, who went to Muktinath. He overcame the nature of the five elements and flew around the world three times".

Now, when a sentence like this comes out of the mouth of your spiritual master, one does not ignore it. It is not a random, flippant comment, but something that has a very precise meaning and purpose to it. In Tibetan Buddhism it's called a 'pith instruction' and it was meant for me alone. I not only poured over the standard history of Thangthong Gyalpo making connections as to how he could have ever ended up in the Muktinath valley, but also started researching the nature of the five elements.
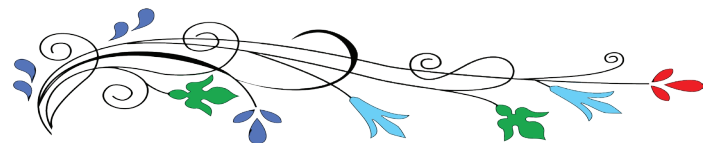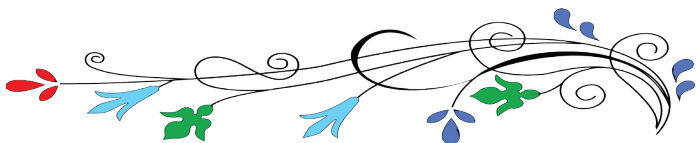
Fairly quickly, the photos lying on my floor started to take the shape of the four elements pointing in four directions, with the fifth, of space in the centre. This play of photos turned into **'Two Keys, One Lock'** that I subsequently showed as one of the two pieces in my first photo collage art exhibition in Kathmandu, in November 2005, the other being **'Pure Vision, Transformed into Organized Confusion'.** Both pieces are made up of some of the photos I took in the Valley of Muktinath at that time.

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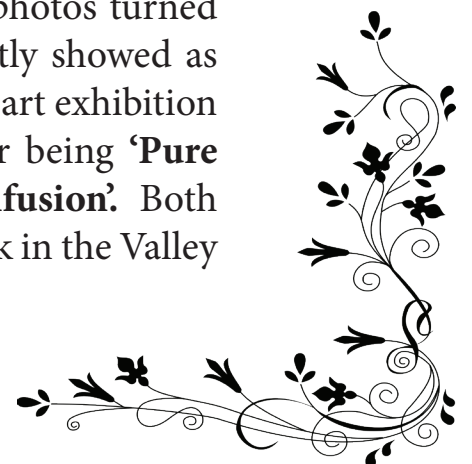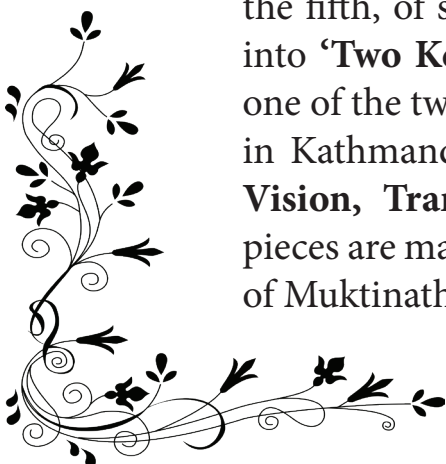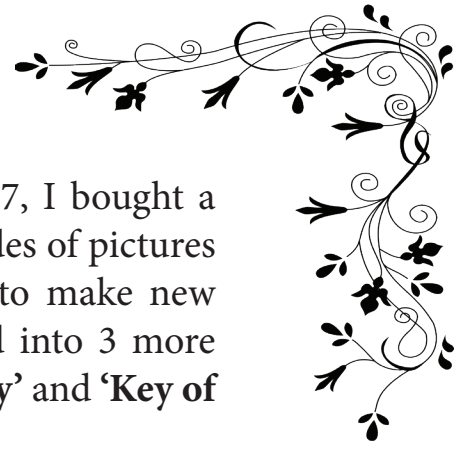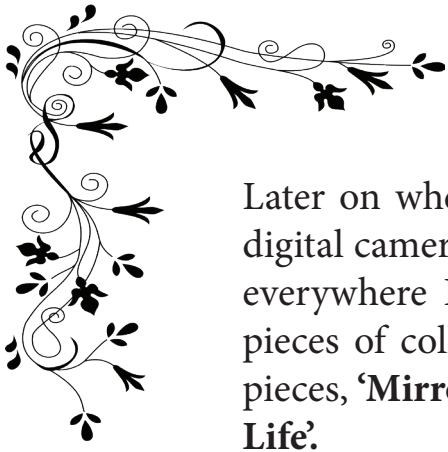
Later on when I went to live in India in 2007, I bought a digital camera and as I started taking multitudes of pictures everywhere I went, decided to find themes to make new pieces of collage art. These eventually turned into 3 more pieces, **'Mirror of Space', 'Rainbow Symphony'** and **'Key of Life'.**