

# The Four Harmonious Friends

(Right) The image of “Four Harmonious Friends” is a popular theme in traditional and contemporary art seen throughout Bhutan.

(Below) Meaningful art is everywhere in Bhutan, even on trucks.

Photo by Julia Brennan



The “Four Harmonious Friends” is one of the most universal and beloved tales in Bhutan. The image of a bird, rabbit, and monkey standing on each other’s shoulders on the back of a patient elephant portrays social and environmental harmony. Paintings of the “Four Harmonious Friends” appear in Bhutanese homes and in official and other public buildings.

As the story goes, the bird finds a seed and plants it. Then, the rabbit waters it, and the monkey fertilizes it. Once the seed sprouts and begins to grow, the elephant protects it.

After some time, the small plant grows into a big, beautiful tree full of healthy fruit. By working together and using their individual talents, the four friends are able to reach and enjoy the fruit.



The Endless Knot (*pelgibeu*) symbolizes the infinite wisdom of the Buddha, compassion, the ongoing nature of time, and the web of life.