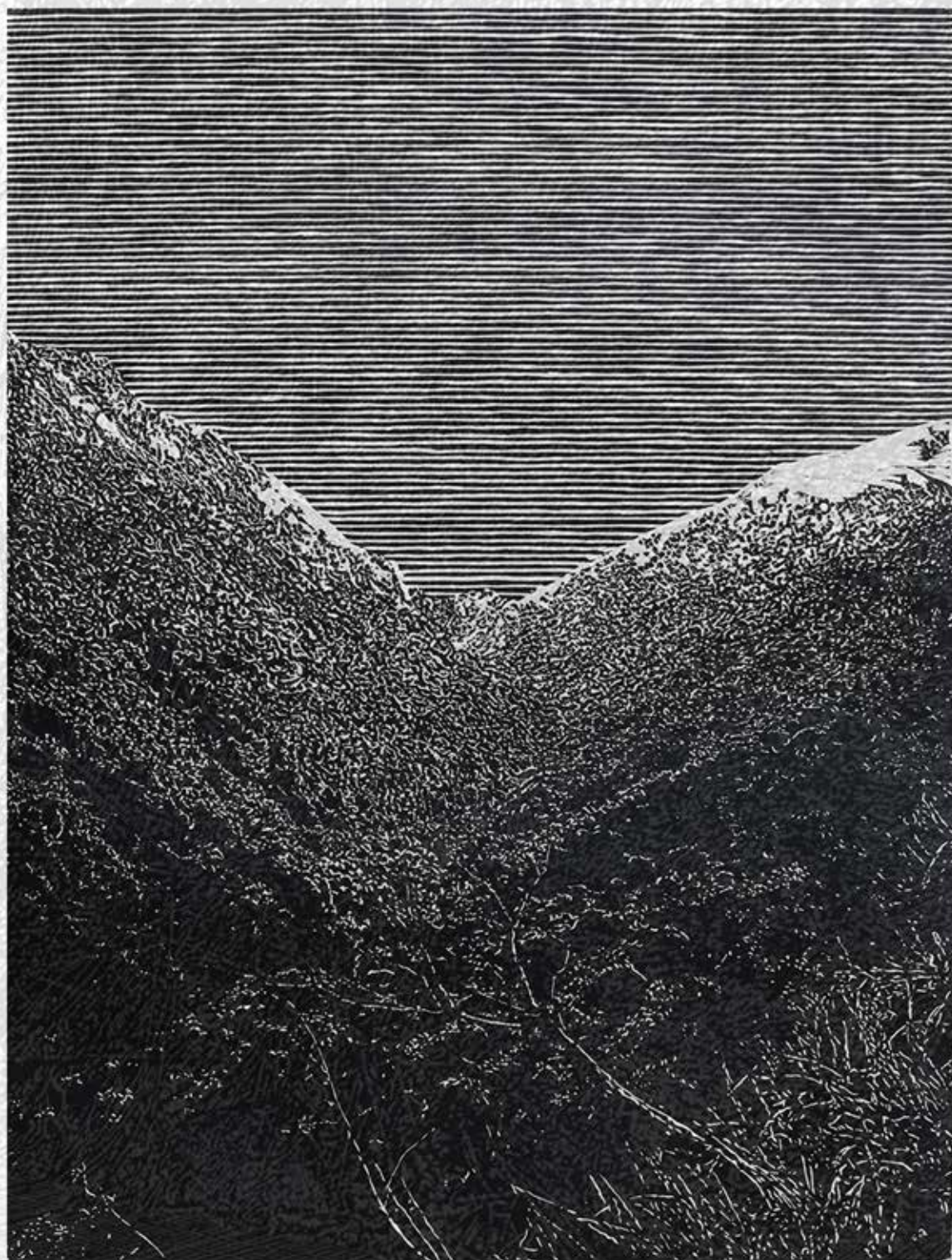


If A Tree Falls (Somewhere In Northeast India)

An exhibition by **Chandan Bez Baruah**



GALLERY LATITUDE 28

If there be no ears

Chandan Bez Baruah

Sound is vibration, transmitted to our senses through the mechanism of the ear, and recognized as sound only at our nerve centres. The falling of the tree or any other disturbance will produce vibration of the air. If there be no ears to hear, there will be no sound.

- from a controversial article in Scientific American, April 5, 1884

Chandan Bez Baruah was born in Nagoan, the fourth largest city of Assam, which is cut through its border by the Kolong River, a tributary of the Brahmaputra. Indigenous Assamese communities such as the Karbi and Tiwa (Lalung) are natives to this city, which is also home to twenty-five colleges and the rich spiritual and cultural tradition of Bhaona, a mythology-based live performance that enthralled the artist in his youth. When Chandan was in fourth standard, his mother tragically passed away, causing the remaining family to shift to Guwahati, the state's largest city, which is bordered by the Shillong plateau and the Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary. Guwahati is also divided by a river, the Bharalu, also a tributary to the Brahmaputra. It was in Guwahati that Chandan developed a keener love for the forests, seeing them as an escape from the congestion of the city and a soothing retreat in a time of newfound loneliness. He says, "When I lost my mother, at an early age, I was deeply disturbed and depression was always with me. When we shifted to Guwahati city, I became lonely. The whole of Guwahati city is surrounded with hills, and my home also was near the lower end of the hills. I used to go to the green jungle more than entertainment or other activities. In the midst of the jungles, I talked with them. I enjoyed my talks with the jungles more than my friends."

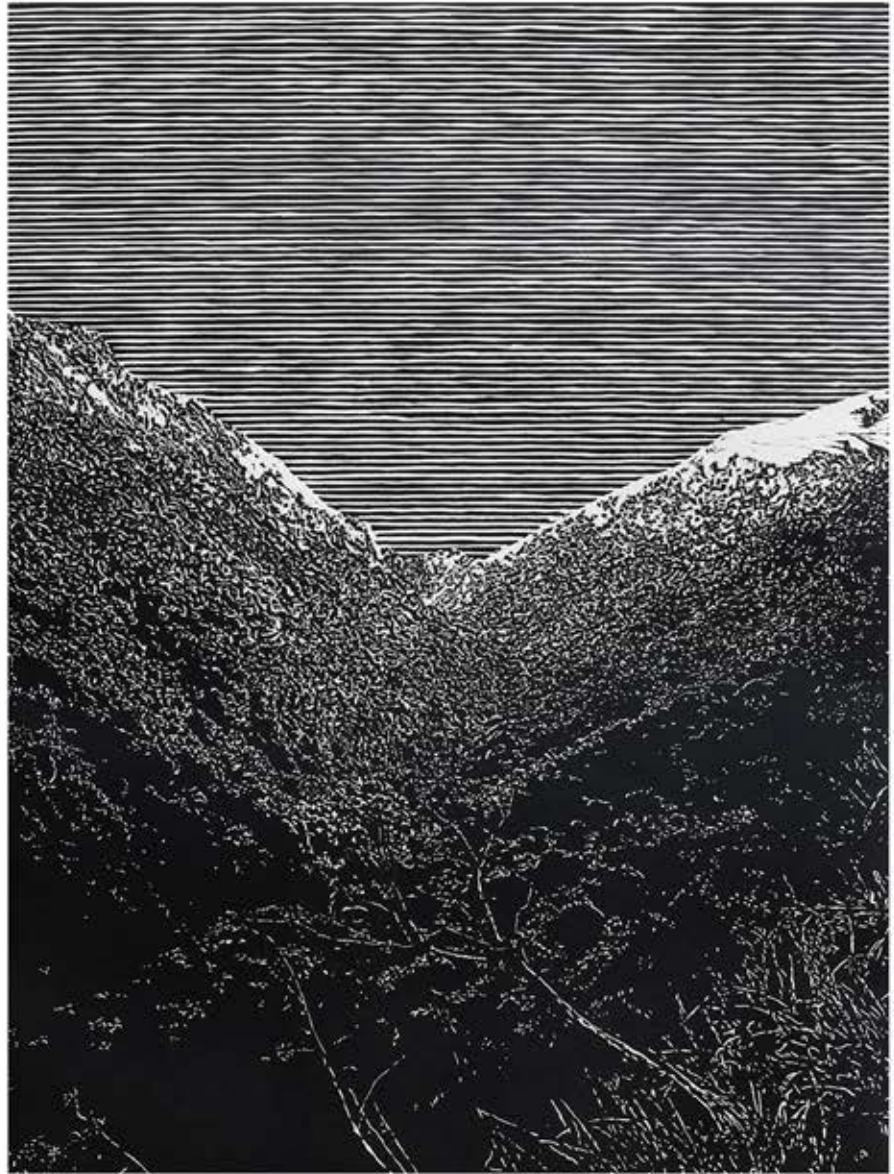
In 1669, Andre Felibien, the secretary to the French Academy, declared in his Preface to a series of published lectures a hierarchy of painting genres that he felt had become evident since the Renaissance, with the most respected form being history painting, followed by portrait art, genre painting, landscape and still life (in that order). This valuation of forms followed the primacy that Greek aesthetics gave to the human body, especially the nude. Unlike Chinese art, which nurtured a landscape tradition beginning in the fourth century CE, landscape as a genre did not exist in Western art until the Renaissance. Indian traditional painting was devoid of the pure landscape as well, only employing it as backdrops for historical or religious depiction, or as geographies to royal hunts. Oddly, this devaluation of the landscape is perpetuated in today's Postmodernism, which is inclined to deconstruct landscape art as romantic nostalgia at worst, or expect from it visual criticisms of the Anthropocene at best.

In a rambling (and ultimately self-rejected) concept note to his series Somewhere in Northeast India, Chandan had opined that one purpose to his landscapes was “to see the insight terrain of the marginalised or the subaltern, and to situate Postmodern landscapes as encountering Romantic theory”. The truth of Chandan’s statement is evident when looking at the work. Meticulously carved upon medium density wood-fibre matrixes, these woodcuts nonetheless spring from the digital photographs which Chandan has earlier captured for reference. The artist’s inspired translation of these photographs, and highly skilled hand-craftsmanship, is astounding. The photorealist style he painstakingly employs is complicated by the chaos of the scenes; a chaos unlike the orderly compositions one might expect in more traditional and Pictorialist vocabularies, yet which holds a graphic beauty of its own. Devoid of human figuration or wildlife, Chandan unashamedly subscribes to the notion of the solitary observer, or, as the American photographer Ansel Adams once put it, To the complaint, ‘There are no people in these photographs,’ I respond, ‘There are always two people: the photographer and the viewer.’

Yet, there are many more than two people in these woodcuts. There are multitudes. Chandan’s stark, mountainous undergrowth exists within ecologies and geographies of history, culture, and contemporary conflict. Above and beyond these wooded hills floats our awareness of current debates: illegal immigration, the National Register of Indians, The Citizenship Amendment Bill, the threat of Palm Oil production, environmental destruction, authoritarian right-wing politics, communal divides, and also liberal misunderstandings, overreach and complicity. The silence that is implied in these images is not just the silence of a beautiful stillness, nor the transcendental hush of the cosmos we might imagine they conjure, but the silence of the marginalized, the guilty, and the afraid to speak. Art conveys that which cannot be articulated. Chandan fuses spiritually romantic longings for beauty, solitude, and the sublime, with a postmodern awareness of chaos, politics, and lived experience. If there is any doubt of the artist’s awareness of politics, one only needs to refer to his earlier series, Behind Me, with its graphic foregrounding of ordered military troops, barbed wire, and martial power.

The artist has skilfully coaxed these images out of wooden board because the woods itself is asking for revelation. There is an intimacy to these images, as if the artist has trekked us through the jungle to his most favoured haunts, asking us to stay silent and observe what he treasures and wishes to reveal. We are seeing things from Chandan’s eyes - the young man who once conversed with these woods and walked in step with Indian soldiers he would befriend as similarly needing a desi pair of eyes. Chandan has heard the songs of birds, the peep of frogs, the swift clicking buzz of beetles and the rustle through the leaves. He has heard trees falling in the forest. He asks us to use our eyes as ears, and hear their falling, too. Be a witness. It is only the act of hearing that makes these fragile treescapes real.

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Somewhere In Northeast India
Woodcut print, 15 x 20 inches, 2018
Edition of 10



Somewhere In Northeast India, pt-I
Woodcut print, 20 x 20 inches, 2020
Edition of 10



Somewhere In Northeast India, pt-II
Woodcut print, 36 x 40 inches, 2020
Edition of 5



Somewhere In Northeast India, pt-II
Woodcut print, 20 x 20 inches, 2020
Edition of 10



Somewhere In Northeast India, pt-II
Woodcut print, 14 x 20 inches, 2020
Edition of 10



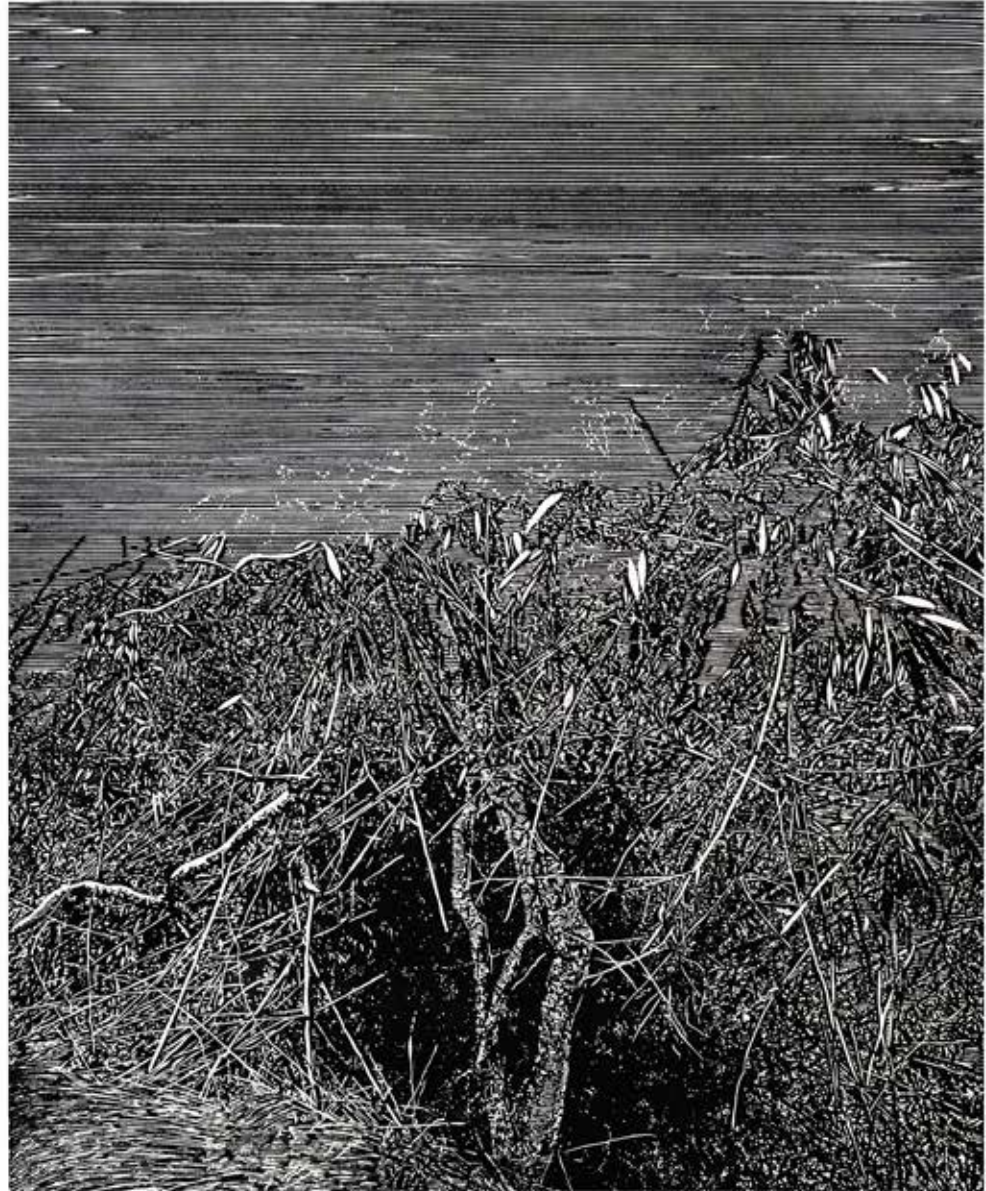
Somewhere In Northeast India, pt-II
Woodcut print, 20 x 20 inches, 2020
Edition of 10



Somewhere In Northeast India, pt-II
Woodcut print, 19 x 22 inches, 2020
Edition of 10



Somewhere In Northeast India, pt-II
Woodcut print, 42 x 42 inches, 2019
Edition of 5



Somewhere In Northeast India, pt-II
Woodcut print, 20 x 24 inches, 2020
Edition of 5



Somewhere In Northeast India, pt-II
Woodcut print, 20 x 24 inches, 2020
Edition of 5



Somewhere In Northeast India, pt-II
Woodcut print, 20 x 20 inches, 2020
Edition of 10



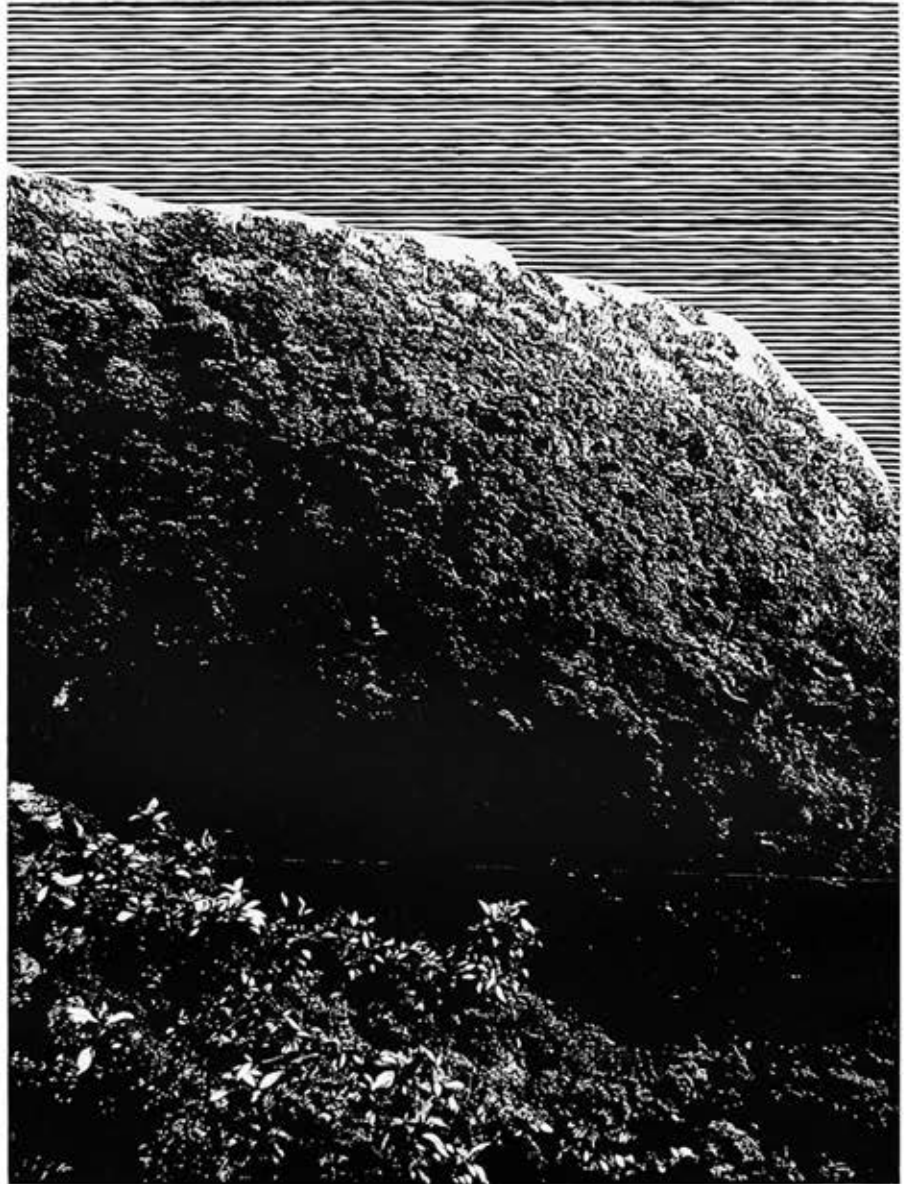
Somewhere In Northeast India, pt-II
Woodcut print, 20 x 20 inches, 2020
Edition of 10



Somewhere In Northeast India

Embossed woodcut print, 11.7 x 16.5, 2019

Unique print



Somewhere In Northeast India pt-I
Woodcut print, 15 x 20 inches, 2018
Edition of 10



Chandan Bez Baruah did his BFA in Printmaking from Government Art College Guwahati, Assam, and MFA in Printmaking from Visva-Bharati University Santiniketan, West Bengal. Some of his exhibitions include 'TIME WARP – an exploration of the unusual', at Gallery Veda, Chennai (2021). 'The Print: Matter in Matrix', Gallery Latitude 28 at Sridharani Gallery, New Delhi (2020); 1st Print Biennale India, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi (2018); 'On the Threshold of Time', Art Heritage Gallery, New Delhi (2017); 56th National Exhibition of Art, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi (2017); 10th Triennial Print Exhibition, France (2016); Daejeon International Art Show, Korea (2015); 9th Triennial Print Exhibition, France (2014); International ICAC Printmaking Show, Mumbai (2014); Kyoto International Wood Print Exhibition (KIWA), Japan (2014 and 2013); 7th Bharat Bhavan International Biennial of Print, India (2011); 49th National Exhibition of Art, Lalit Kala Akademi, Bhopal (2006). Chandan Bez Baruah is more sensitively working on postmodern approach of landscape. His work 'Somewhere in North East India' is a significant continuum of series, and a short take on his visual cultural practice in a confined and comprehensive manner. His references for the woodcut prints are his digital photographs. His attachment to the Northeast landscapes, is used during the image making process. While using the curving tools he always goes through his experiences and this creates a peculiar attachment between the particular frame and him. It is here that the works open to emotional interpretation and atmospheric transformation on the wooden surface using wood carving tools or one can say through his expressions and visualisation.
