

LATITUDE 28

ELSEWHERE

In Northeast India

A solo show by
Chandan Bez Baruah

Curated by
Waswo X. Waswo

A FENCE IN THE FOREST

“The landscape belongs to the person who looks at it.”
– Ralph Waldo Emerson

“My garden is my most beautiful masterpiece.”
– Claude Monet

In January of 2021 the exhibition ‘If There Be No Ears’ opened at LATITUDE 28. The title was a play upon the quasi-philosophical notion that if a tree falls in the forest, and no one is around to hear, there is no sound. In other words, sound requires a witness. Without a witness, a tree falls in lonely, soundless, solitude. This is of course scientifically untrue, but socially and politically there is a sobering truth to it. In the first exhibition that I curated for Chandan, I felt the need to defend what many might find as beautifully intricate landscapes, made via the very demanding medium of woodcut, but possible to dismiss as merely nostalgic and romantic. “Pictorialist vocabularies hold a graphic beauty of their own.” I wrote, “Devoid of human figuration or wildlife, Chandan unashamedly subscribes to the notion of the solitary observer”, or, in other words, Chandan appoints himself as the witness: the ears that will verify that the trees are falling, and that yet again the sounds of destruction have echoed through the hills.

With this new body of work and this new exhibition, Chandan wants to speak to us through his eyes rather than his ears. His wondrously elaborate renditions of Northeast landscapes are still a main subject, but intrusions have crept in: shacks, bulldozers, unfinished construction, trucks collecting garbage, and chain-link fences. People, too, make a first appearance in Chandan’s oeuvre; representatives of the marginalized. This is not only an expansion of the subject matter, but also the maturing of an artist, whose draughtsmanship, technical skills, and hard work were never in question. Now, his visualizations

powerfully lay claim to a more deeply aware social and aesthetic ground.

Chandan is still the witness, but his beloved forests are changing, and he expresses this. “The landscape belongs to the person who looks at it,” wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson. We all enjoy the wilderness and the joys of nature, but we also must suffer the eyesores brought upon by hasty and thoughtless development. Anyone who has driven through the countryside knows this, but Chandan expresses it with aplomb. We can contrast Emerson’s statement with that of Claude Monet, “My garden is my most beautiful masterpiece.” Oh, but is it? Gardens always imply ownership, privacy, protective fences, and a need for permission to enter. Gardens are beautiful, and we love them, yet they cannot only shelter us from the city, but they can also distance us from nature. This dichotomy of the man-made would-be paradise and the natural world is the subtext of these works.

Chandan’s works still seduce us with the sublime, but he has now both opened his ears and expanded his eyes. He has also opened his talents and refined them. There is beauty here and also ugliness, made present via exquisitely crafted woodcuts. Are they in harmony with one another? Chandan Bez Baruah asks us to consider this deeply and find the truth within.

Waswo X. Waswo

Artist and Curator

Curator of the show ‘ELSEWHERE-In Northeast India’



Chandan's ability to translate the chaotic beauty of Assam's undergrowth into meticulously detailed woodcuts is truly remarkable. His work not only showcases his extraordinary craftsmanship but also his deep connection with the land and its history. By presenting these scenes through his eyes, we are given the opportunity to experience the serenity, the conflict, and the rich cultural tapestry of Northeast India in a way that is both immersive and enlightening.

This exhibition is a testament to Chandan's talent and unique vision, which intrigued me ever since I first presented his solo 'If a Tree Falls (Somewhere in Northeast India)' in 2021. Chandan's stark, mountainous undergrowth exists within ecologies and geographies of history, culture, and contemporary conflict. With 'Elsewhere in Northeast India', I am keen to have audiences engage with the artist's silent yet powerful revelations and share his maturation into a regnant artist of his medium.

Bhavna Kakar
Founder-Director, LATITUDE 28



ARTIST INTRODUCTION

Chandan is a sensitive artist whose subject of printmaking often talks about his beloved Assam. He tries to showcase the destruction of pristine forests under the garb of development and connecting remote communities via roads that cut the landscape like lacerations on a human body. His print technique creates a certain photorealism while also being poignant, while the works call the viewer to feel for the people and land of his beloved Assam. He pleads us to not anonymise the land because it is outside of the mainstream ~ a land that through its green cover secures India and Bangladesh, an exquisite biodiversity that needs to be preserved. I like Chandan's work because it is a mix of technique, point of view, sensitivity and creative visualisation.

The forests of Assam have a majestic silence that must be experienced, it is a call to our inner spirituality. Forests release water and sustain the mighty Brahmaputra that flows through the state like a soothing balm. It can also demonstrate its wrath as it wreaks havoc by flooding lands and causing extreme hardship or displacement.

Chandan's technique itself is meditative; in scarring the wood using the tools of the trade, he mimics the reality of our wanton plunder of nature. And yet the artist presents us with an end product that is a wonderful image often demonstrating a realistic play of light the likes of which you would see when you walk or drive through the green belts that are still there in his ancestral village Nagaon in Assam. Printmaking to my mind, is a very difficult technique and takes special skills to master, requires great visualisation, and controlled movement in creating the etching that is finely transposed in multiple layers on the wood surface.

Chandan comes from a family of storytellers and artists. In many ways, he has absorbed the sensitive portrayals that typify the Bhaona performances of Nagaon. He lost his mother at a very early age and his repeated moves from Nagaon to Guwahati, Shanti Niketan and now Delhi have

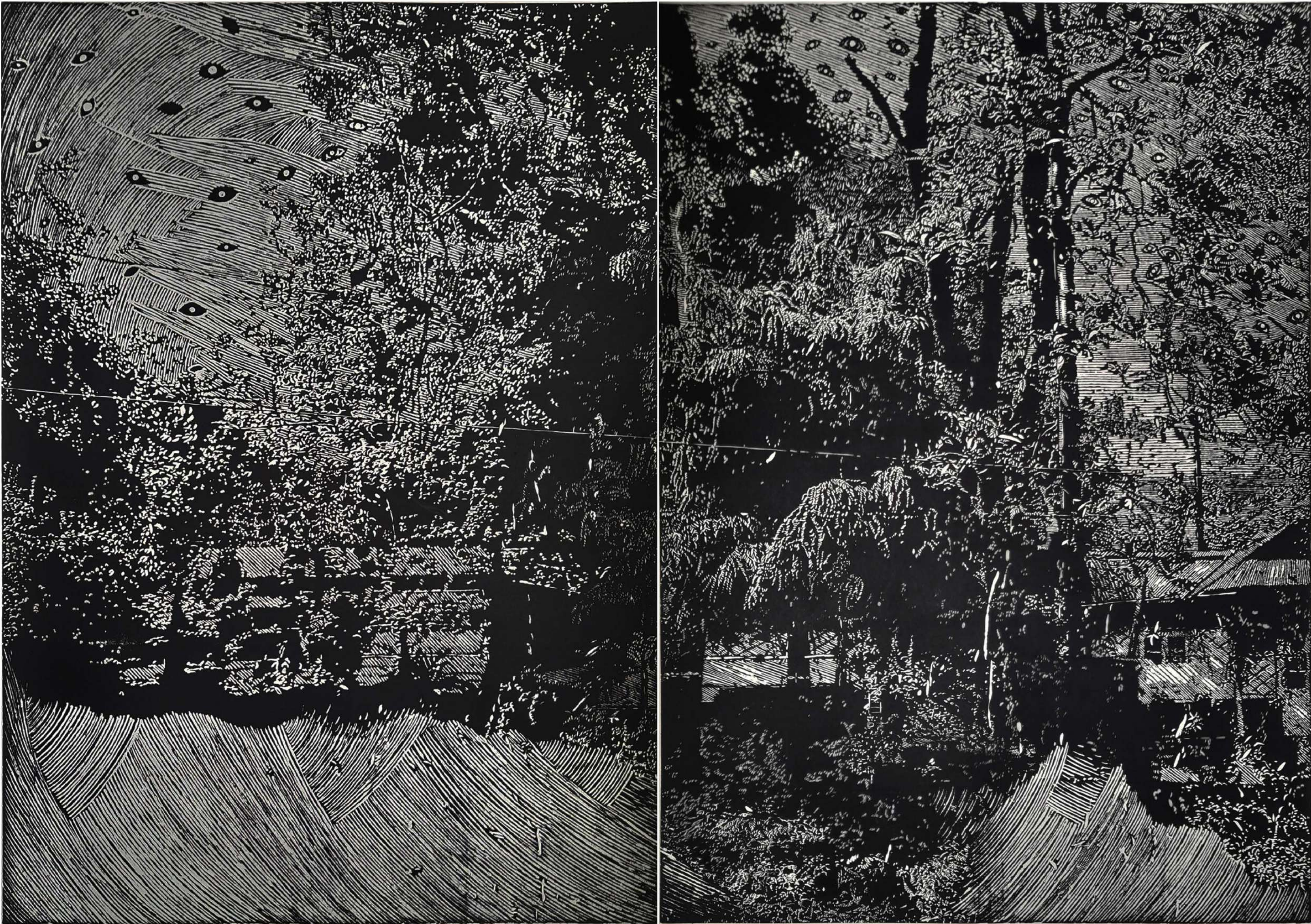
left him with a deep longing for his roots; his art is the way he reconnects. His art teacher in Guwahati who studied printmaking from Baroda was his early inspiration, from Government College Guwahati he went to Shanti Niketan where his exposure was tremendous, affording him the opportunity to meet with masters of the craft and gave him access to extensive reading materials. Chandan is most at home when working with wood, which he attributes to his childhood affinity of his natural surroundings.

His father was a strong supporter of his desire to pursue the arts, printmaking was a medium Chandan was drawn to intuitively and he feels Passion and Patience are two key tenets needed to be a good printmaker. He misses his Nagaon and beloved Assam and often wonders how much more the silent lands of his home will have to witness and endure. For him, the trees are mute witnesses of all that goes on; they hide a hundred stories in their bosom bearing it all in silence. The voiceless tree is his muse... and then one day the tree falls in the forest. Chandan asks 'If a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear, does the falling tree make a sound? I can hear their screaming and the sound of silence.'

Chandan's art draws parallels between the loss of diversity in nature and plurality in politics. It laments the commercial tea gardens and orange orchards that have denuded Assam's hills. It regards the signs of development, like paved roads, electrical wires and concrete houses as malignant. Chandan Bez Baruah's landscapes urge us to do what he did as a child so many years ago, to walk into the woods and learn to listen.

Paul Abraham

Founder and Patron, Sarmaya Arts Foundation
Sarmaya.in



*Somewhere in the Northeast
India, Part III, 2024*
Woodcut Print on Paper
36 x 48 Inches
Edition 1/5



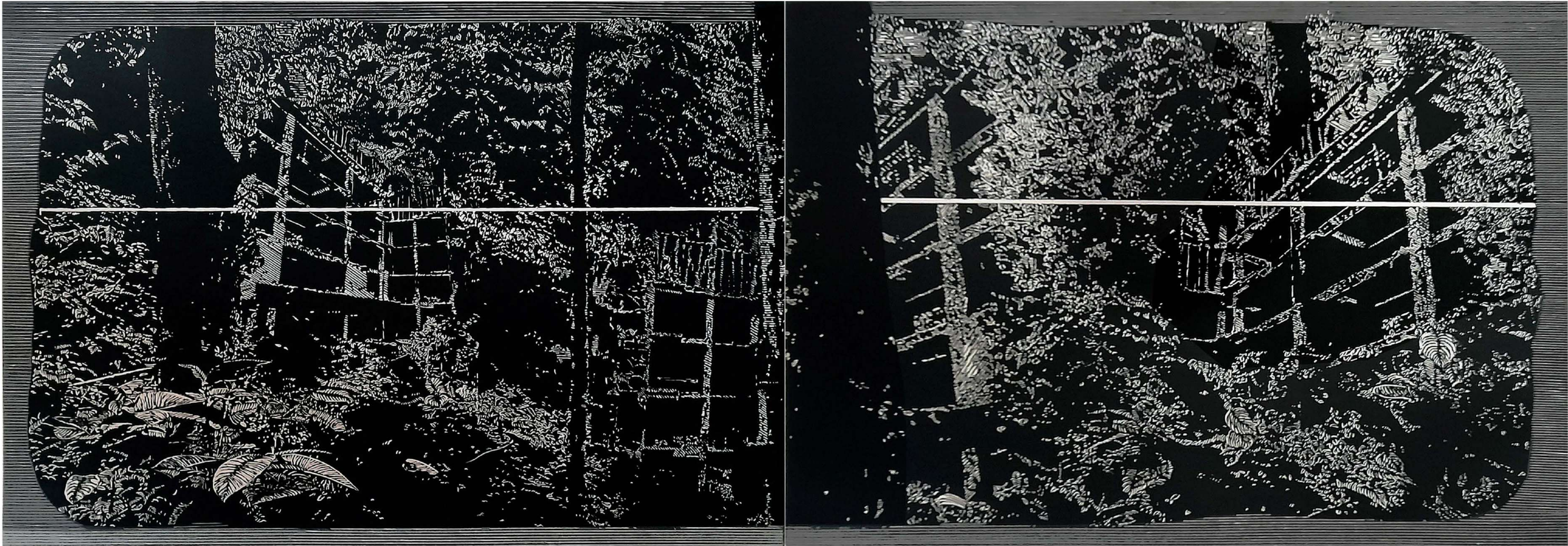
*Somewhere in the Northeast
India, Part III, 2023
Woodcut Print on Paper
72 x 36 Inches
Edition 1/5*



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*Somewhere in the Northeast
India, Part III, 2023*
Woodcut Print on Paper
72 x 24 Inches
Edition 1/5

SOMEWHERE IN THE NORTHEAST

Chandan Bez Baruah's woodcuts evidence more than his skill at detailed realism. This body of works presents an unexpected visage due to its processual complexity, involving a double transfer of medium – wherein, the artist's world of inspiration is captured digitally to be then arduously transformed into woodcut prints.

This transcription of the virtual image onto the material of wood – as a negative – and then its transfer back onto paper as a print – not quite photographic, not as a positive of the negative – but as a black and white negative of the negative – in wood, effects an alteration. The exceptionally large prints, predominantly of forest landscapes, now present themselves like silent apparitions – the more they show, the more they seem to conceal. Devoid of human forms, yet often holding within them signs of habitation, the forest-scapes exercise an enigmatic pull – as if inviting a walk-in exploration. Yet, at the same time, here a grid formed by the juxtaposed paper panels, there a white horizontal line cutting across the image, or somewhere a wire fence – makes the vista seem unapproachable.

If Chandan's efforts were to be narrativised, it would perhaps reveal a part of the grand narrative of secession and dispossession that has resulted in the ambiguity of locational identity for many people of the northeastern states of India. There is that of physical dispossession caused by the displacements due to natural calamities or inter-ethnic animosities. But then there could be an entirely personal sense of dispossession; of being taken away from the familiar to a state of unfamiliarity – a predicament of alienation.

These works are informed by this double context of both personal and situational changes. The trauma of having lost his mother in early childhood has haunted Chandan ever since. The shift of location by the family at about the same time also took him away from the verdure of Assam's remote Nagaon to a more populated Guwahati. Fortunately,

the forest close to his home there provided him with some comfort of familiarity.

The artist's subsequent relocation to Delhi, however, further distanced him from the reassuring green ambience of home and led to an increased sense of loss and isolation. In his over a decade-long stay in the capital, he also witnessed changes like the rampant deforestation associated with developmental projects that take away from the future possibilities of a clean and green environment. Chandan has worked to translate his experiences and environmental concerns into the graphic medium of his training acquired in Guwahati and Santiniketan. Having started with the more popular options of etching and lithograph, he was able to innovatively adapt the process of woodcut printing to his requirements. Being in Delhi also revealed to him a set of limitations of both, medium and scale, and the ancillary logistics of the production process that he had to work around. In effect, he brought the project to his home studio and a compact-sized printing press. It offered intimacy and freedom as it helped to address the constraints of the available resources.

The graphic medium is already known for its highly mediated process of transfer of effects; Bez Baruah adds another layer to his adaptation of it. He returns, time and again, to his beloved forest landscapes in different parts of Assam to capture them with his camera. These photographs are then selectively transcribed onto wood by him. The resultant woodcut prints – like negatives of the carvings – are now separate entities, like apparitions or revelations – as in intense scenarios of dreams and reveries. The granular nature of the woodcut, combined with the panoramic format, the fractured visual of multiple panels and intermittent areas of abstract texture and extreme detail enhance the apparition-like or ghostly after-image quality of the works.

The series title of these prints, 'Somewhere in Northeast

India' could be a trigger for the viewer – it proffers and defers – as in an allegory. A viewer in today's world of information overflow might want to look for specifics, such as that of the state – what with locations and their tales which constantly flood the media world and its public. Whereas, the intimate geography that a migrant carries within may have physical overlaps way beyond a state border and the anthropocentric habitation map. It would easily unfold for the dweller and especially for those who have been distanced from it, any trace of where a natural continuum such as a river or a forest or a mountain appears.

The works on display have variations within the overall theme of 'Forest'. In certain compositions, there are ramshackle dwellings or abandoned structures nestled inside the dense vegetation, evoking a haunting forlornness. One landscape has a tattered man-made barricade separating the background from the foreground. Some of the images rise from Bez Baruah's anxieties about construction equipment moving into the landscape and removing the traces of the past, paving the way for a future made of concrete. These consist of singular excavators or loaders ominously dominating the frame, with the trees pushed to the back or the edges.

Among these images, the mendicants around a temple in Assam, the only odd frame in which any human presence is registered, does not come as a surprise. They seem as ancient as the anonymous trees in the forests, they remain afloat in a world of precarity, just as the forest as an apparition – a soon-to-vanish entity – reveals itself to the eye, defying its digital source.

Anshuman Dasgupta
Associate Professor at Visva Bharati University, Santiniketan



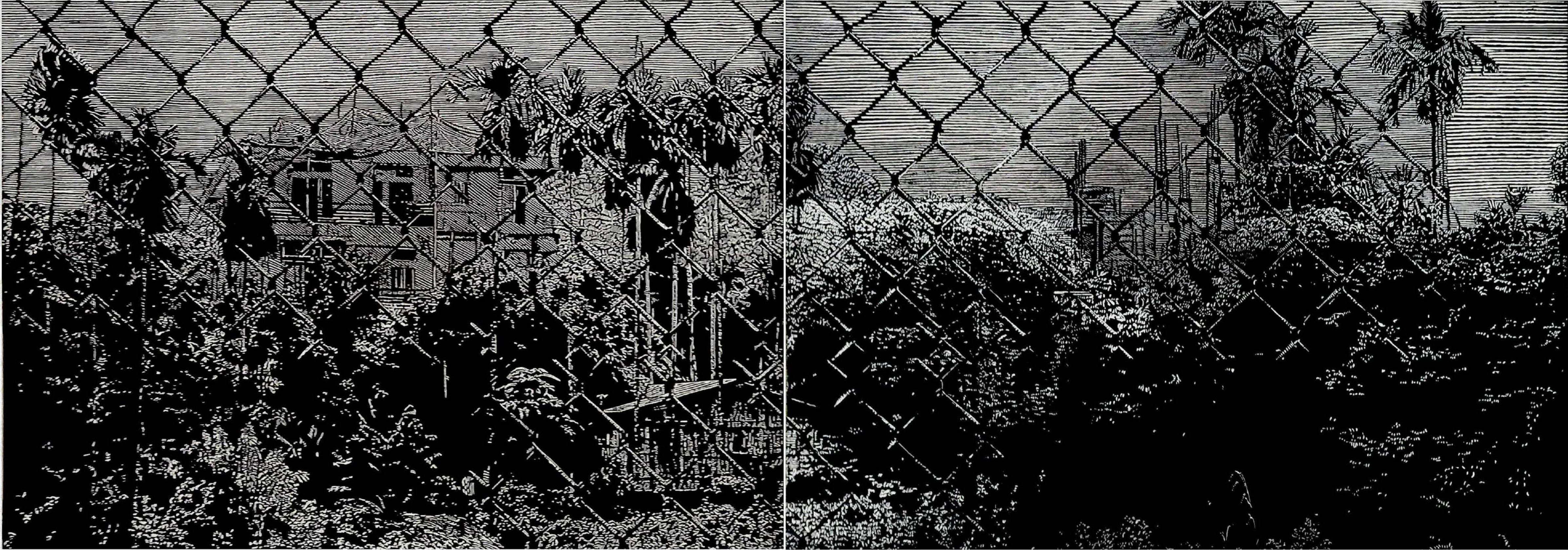


*Somewhere in the Northeast
India, Part III, 2022
Woodcut Print on Paper
72 x 36 Inches
Edition 1/5*



*Somewhere in the Northeast
India, Part III, 2023
Woodcut Print on Paper
72 x 24 Inches
Edition 1/5*

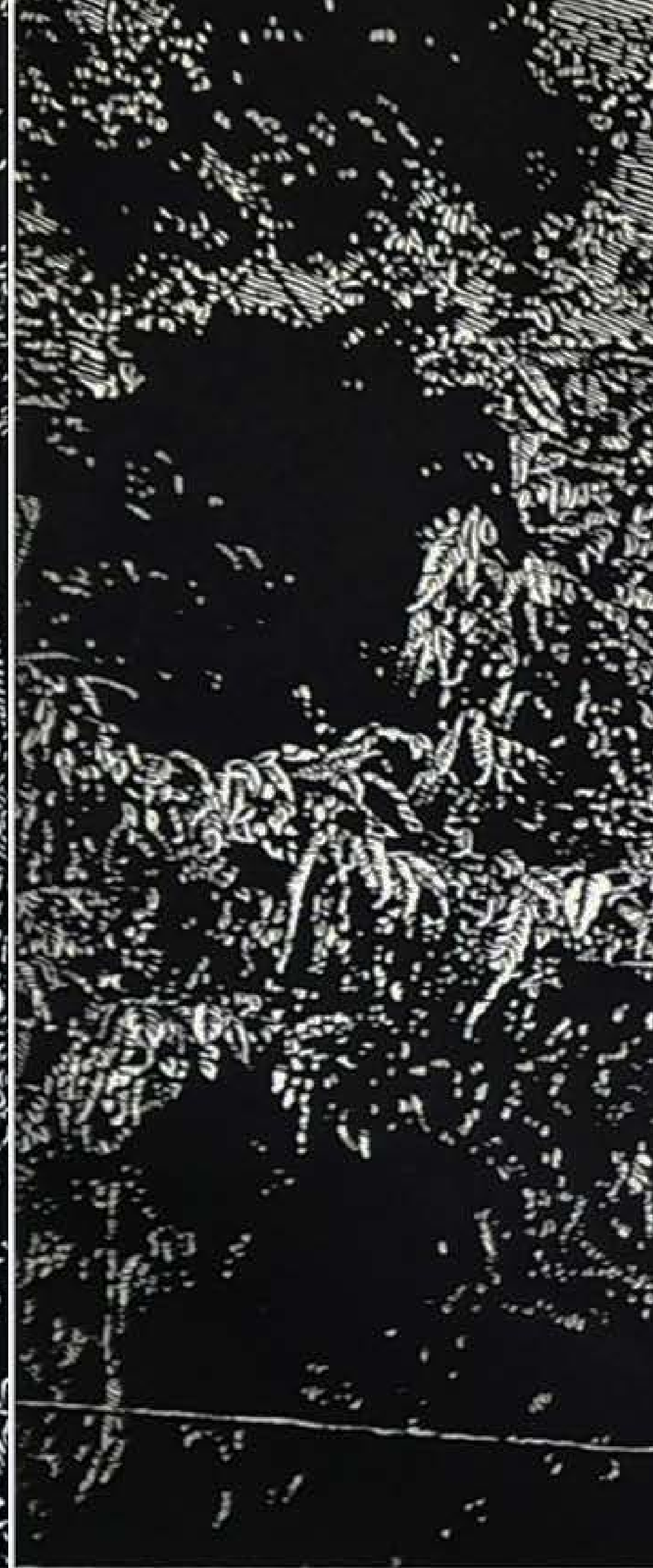


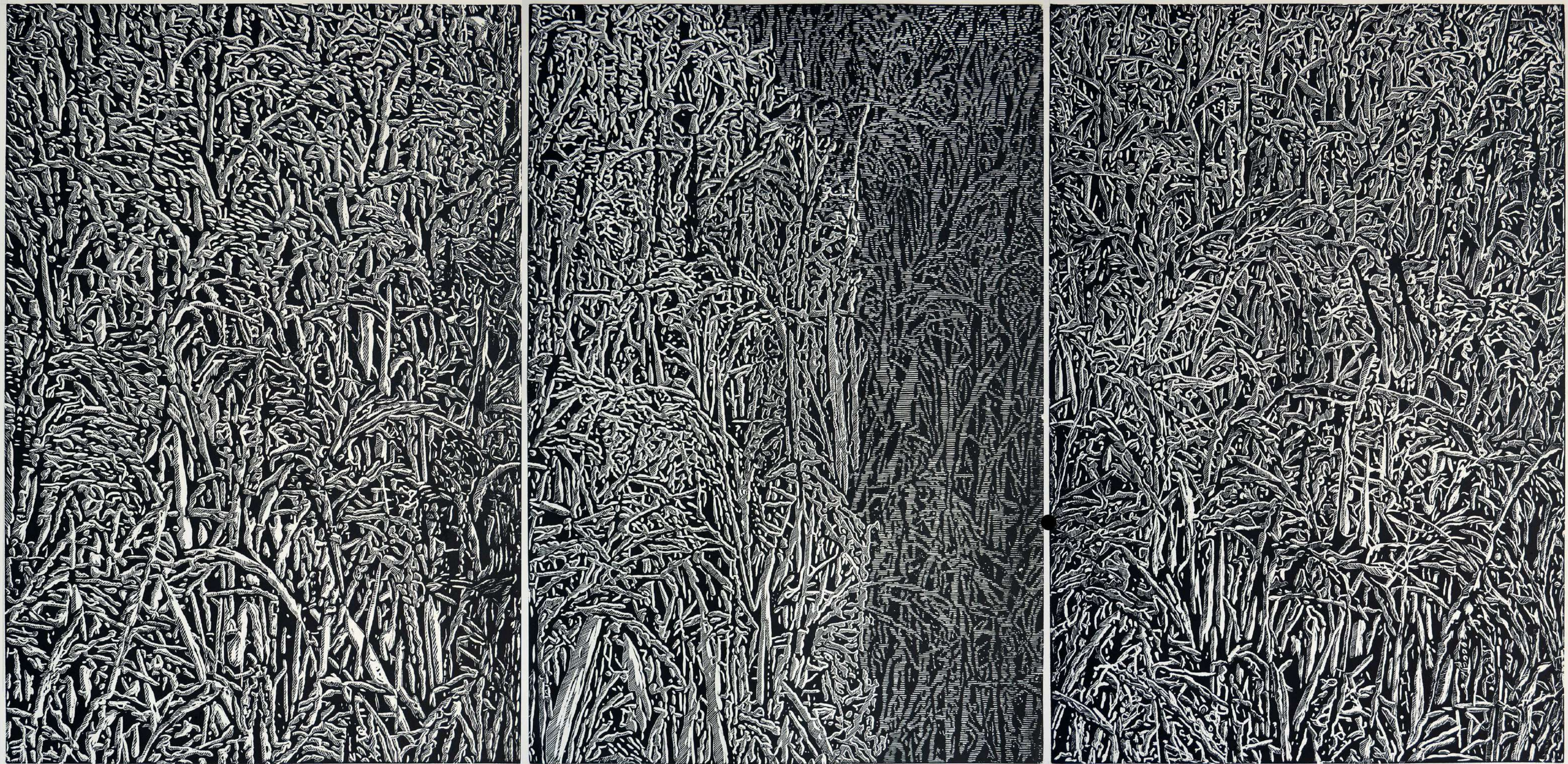


*Somewhere in the Northeast
India, Part III, 2023
Woodcut Print on Paper
72 x 24 Inches
Edition 1/5*



*Somewhere in the Northeast
India, Part III, 2023
Woodcut Print on Paper
108 x 48 Inches
Edition 1/5*

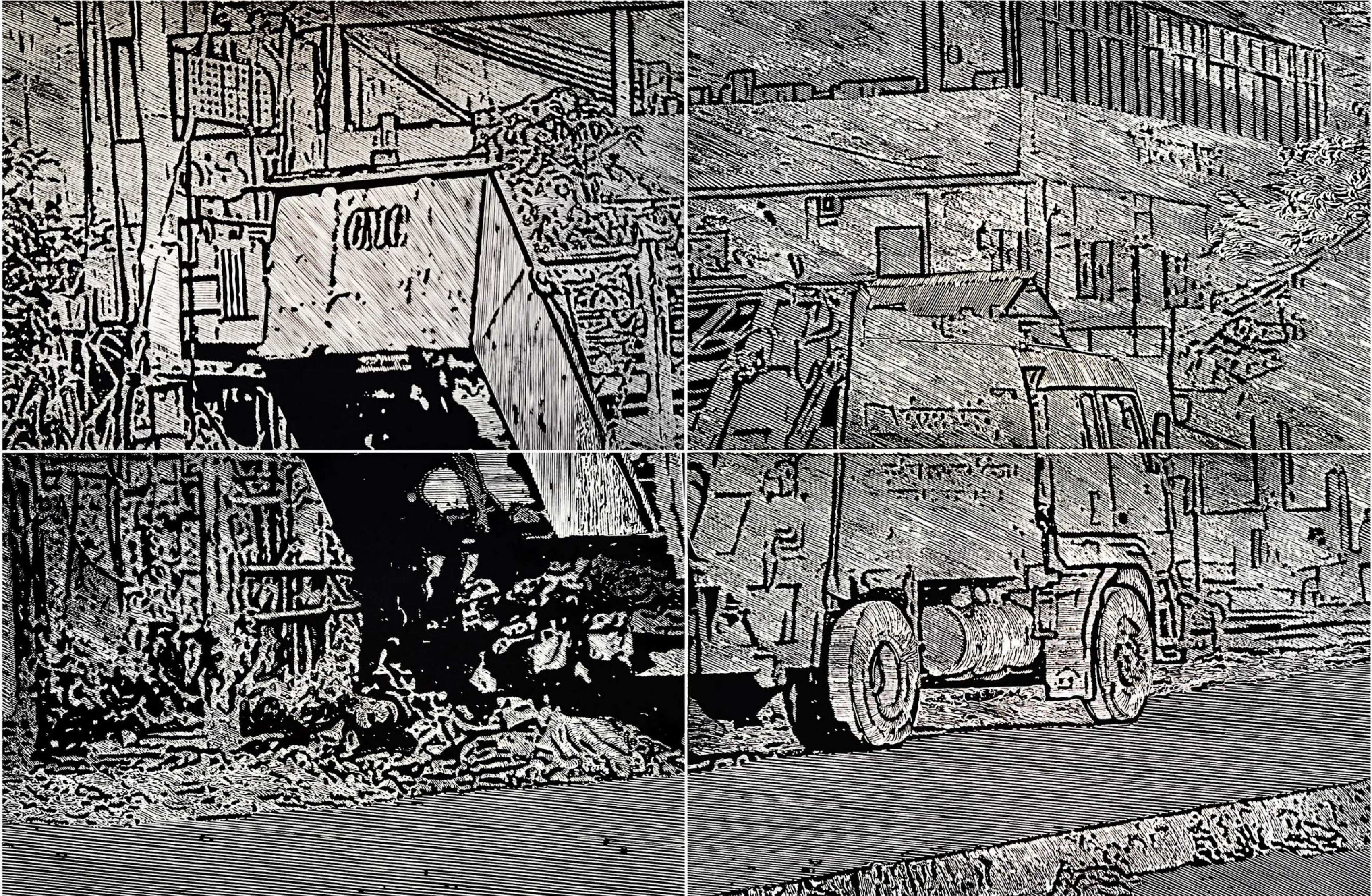




*Somewhere in the Northeast
India, Part III, 2023*
Woodcut Print on Paper
72 x 36 Inches
Edition 3/5



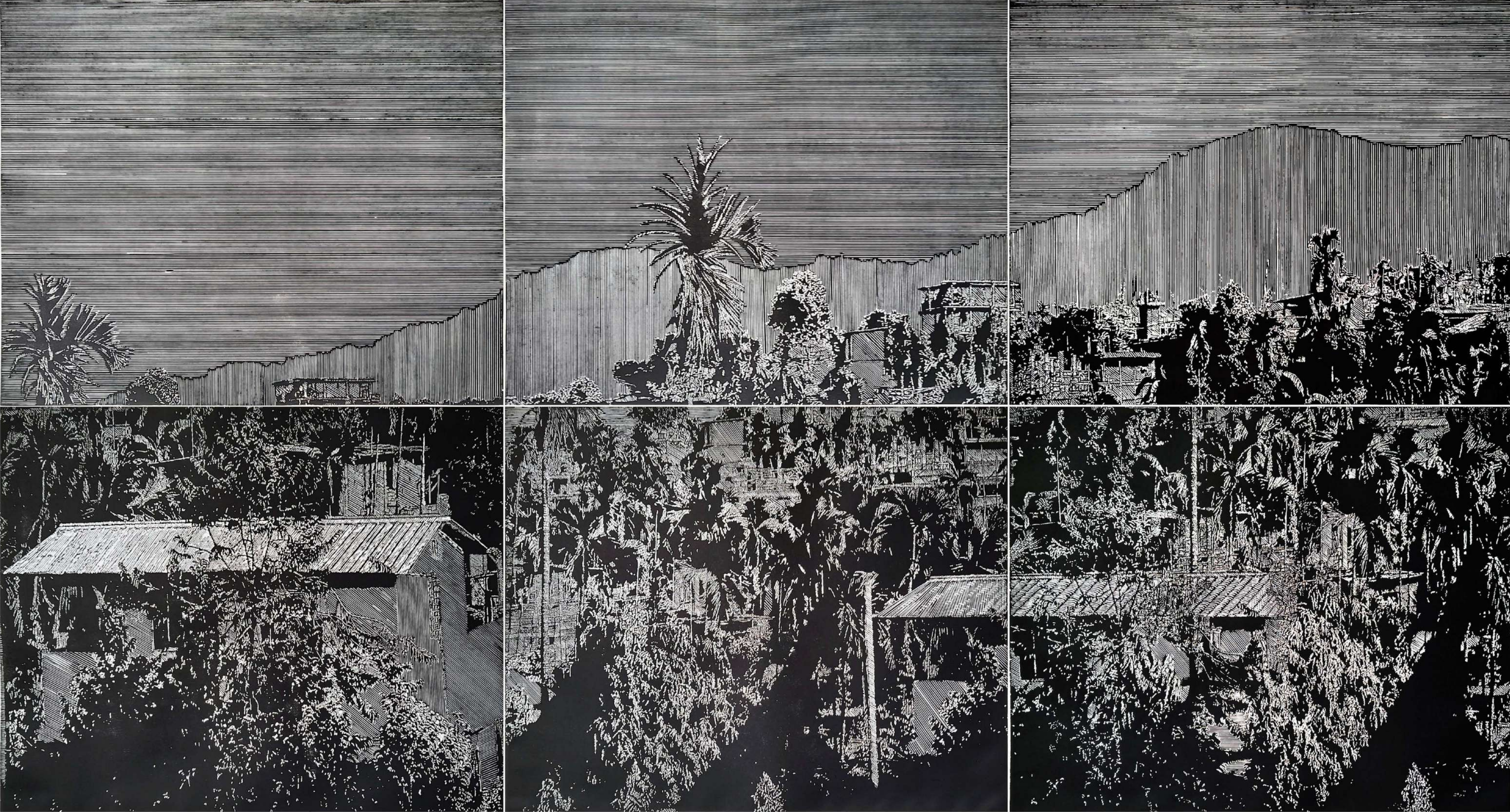
*Somewhere in the Northeast
India, Part III, 2022
Woodcut Print on Paper
72 x 36 Inches
Edition 1/5*



*Somewhere in the Northeast
India, Part III, 2023
Woodcut Print on Paper
48 x 72 Inches
Edition 1/5*



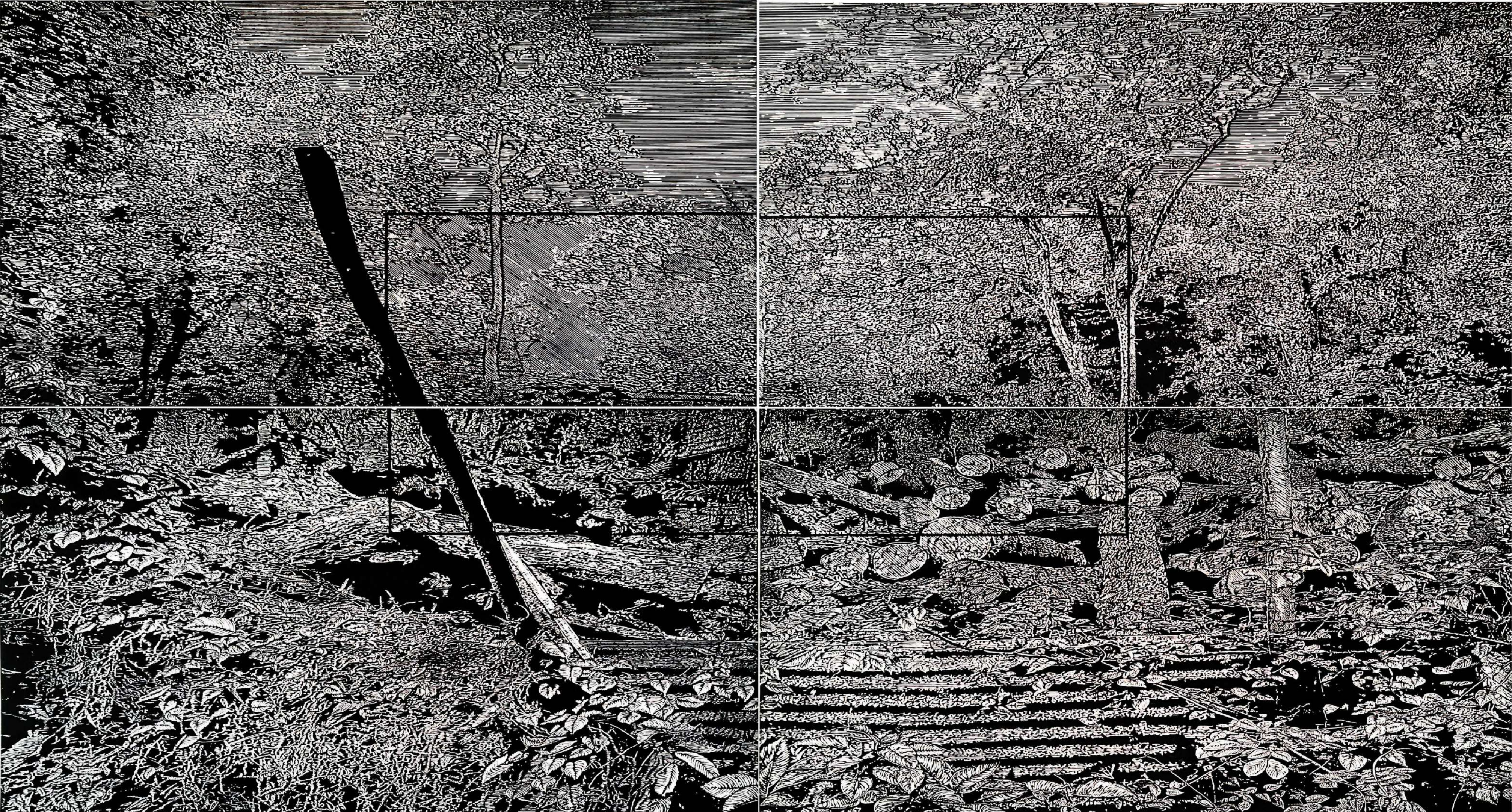
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India, Part III, 2023
Woodcut Print on Paper
108 x 24 Inches
Edition 1/5*



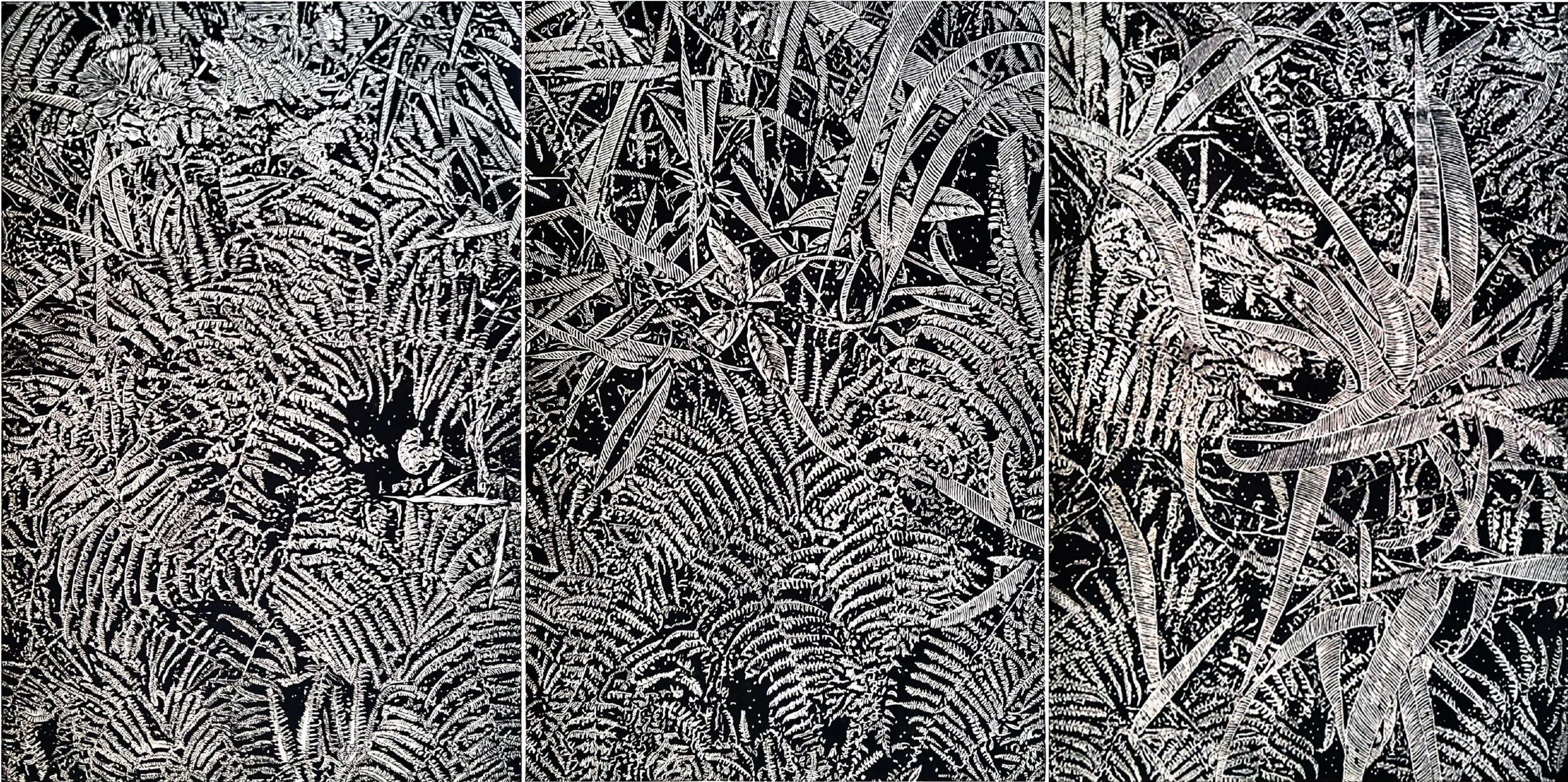
*Somewhere in the Northeast
India, Part III, 2023
Woodcut Print on Paper
108 x 48 Inches
Edition 1/5*



*Somewhere in the Northeast
India, Part III, 2022*
Woodcut Print on Paper
36 x 24 Inches
Edition 1/5



*Somewhere in the Northeast
India, Part III, 2023
Woodcut Print on Paper
48 x 72 Inches
Edition 2/5*



*Somewhere in the Northeast
India, Part III, 2022*
Woodcut Print on Paper
72 x 36 Inches
Edition 1/5



*Somewhere in the Northeast
India, Part III, 2021*
Woodcut Print on Paper
15 x 24 Inches
Edition 1/10





*Somewhere in the Northeast
India, Part III, 2023
Woodcut Print on Paper
72 x 36 Inches
Edition 4/5*



*Somewhere in the Northeast
India, Part III, 2022
Woodcut Print on Paper
36 x 48 Inches
Edition 2/5*



Somewhere in the Northeast
India, Part III, 2022
 Woodcut Print on Paper
 36 x 48 Inches
 Edition 2/5



সান্তিপুৰ নাগালিকি উন্নয়ন সমিতি
সান্তিপুৰ নাগালিকি উন্নয়ন সমিতি
স্থাপিত: ২০০৮ চন
স্বত্বাধিকাৰ সংখ্যা: ২১/১৭৭/০৭/২০০৯
SANTIPUR NAGALIKI UNNAYAN SAMITI
প্ৰতিষ্ঠাপক: হানুমান গিৰি-২৯
ESTD: ২০০৮
ফোন: ২৭১১৭১৭০০ | ২১/১৭৭/০৭/২০০৯-১০



*Somewhere in the Northeast
India, Part III, 2023
Woodcut Print on Paper
24 x 36 Inches
Edition 2/5*

Chandan Bez Baruah
B. 1979, Assam, India



Chandan Bez Baruah has been working with a postmodern approach towards landscape but always with deep sensitivity. He uses his digital photographs as references for intricate woodcut prints, in a process that transforms a historic craft into new media image blends. In an ode to the Forestscapes of his native place, Assam, he builds an attachment between the place and himself through his works, bringing new context to print-making via his atmospheric and documentative yet hermeneutic style. While engaged in his meticulous carving process he re-lives his emotions and memories connected with the forests, creating an intrinsic attachment between the frame and himself. His works are open to emotional interpretation and atmospheric transformation as he extracts images from the wood. His emotive involvement with each landscape moves the works beyond being mere representations of photographs, rather they open up a new dimension in the context of printmaking.

Chandan Bez Baruah completed 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, Delhi Contemporary Art Week with LATITUDE 28, Bikaner House, New Delhi (2023 and 2022); Art SG with LATITUDE 28, Singapore (2023); India Art Fair with LATITUDE 28, New Delhi (2023 and 2022); 'In the Blink of an Eye', curated by Shruthi Ramlingaiah, Gallery Dotwalk (2022); 'World Within World Without', co-curated by Prima Kurien and Rahul Kumar, presented by Art Incept at Bikaner House, New Delhi (2022); 'Maximum Minimum' with LATITUDE 28, Artissima (Hub India) curated by Myna Mukherjee and Davide Quadrio, Oval Lingotto, Italy (2021); 2nd Print Biennale India, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi (2021); 'TIME WARP - an exploration of the unusual', Gallery Veda, Chennai (2021); 'If A Tree Falls (Somewhere in Northeast India)', curated by Waswo X. Waswo, LATITUDE 28, New Delhi (2021); 'The Print: Matter in Matrix' presented by LATITUDE 28 at Shridharani Gallery,

New Delhi (2020); 60th National Exhibition of Art, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi (2018-19); 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); Graphica International exhibition by 4bid gallery, Netherlands (2017); G5, International print biennale, Romania (2017); the first International Biennale of Lithography, Serbia (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); Solo Exhibition of painting, drawing, print and installation, A.C Art Gallery, Kalakshetra, Panjabari (2004); Duet Exhibition of drawing, painting, print and exhibition, Studio of Sri Somnath Hore Lalbandh, Santiniketan (2002).

Chandan Bez Baruah is represented by LATITUDE 28.



Since 2010, LATITUDE 28 has probed into a gallery practice that is lateral, disruptive and avant garde. Mentoring and nurturing emerging artists from South Asia, the gallery focuses on experimentation with medium and material fostering critical dialogue, perspective and practices by writers, critics and researchers alike. These maker-market relationships amongst collectors, art enthusiasts and art practitioners have grown through the gallery's interactive incubation space, where ideas have been generated through innovative curatorial projects located on the cusp of art history and sociopolitical context through site specific artworks and artist talks. The gallery makes art accessible and inclusive with exhibitions located at the intersection of artists, institutions and art education. LATITUDE 28's vision is shaped by its Founder/Director, Bhavna Kakar, who is also the Founder and Editor-in-Chief of TAKE on Art - South Asia's leading contemporary art publication.

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LATITUDE 28

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