

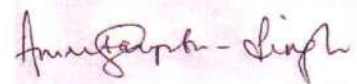
FINAL NARRATIVE REPORT | AMRITA GUPTA SINGH
ARTS, RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION GRANT PROGRAM | SCOPE II

INDIA FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS (IFA)
Grant Period: March 25, 2013 to March 25, 2015

Research Title:
REGIONAL ART PRAXIS | INSTITUTIONS | PEDAGOGY
AN ARCHIVAL RESEARCH ON MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART OF NORTH-EAST
India

ORIGINAL FOCUS AREAS // GUWAHATI, SILCHAR (ASSAM) | SHILLONG (MEGHALAYA)

ADDITIONAL FOCUS // ART PRACTICES OF MANIPUR, TRIPURA, NAGALAND,
MIZORAM, ARUNACHAL PRADESH, SIKKIM



AMRITA GUPTA SINGH
DATED: 14 / 6 / 2015



INTRODUCTION:

“We can say that for the North-East, there is a view from the inside and a view from the outside... the view from the outside sees the region as a relatively unitary entity, delimited by India’s boundaries with other countries such as China, Bangladesh and Myanmar, inhabited by vaguely differentiated ‘tribal’ people who seem ‘racially distinct’ from Indians elsewhere.

The view from inside is one of extreme diversity: of tribes, communities, languages, religions, customs, traditions and histories. This diversity in the insider’s eye... would be in consonance to the historical, cultural, spatial and economic closeness in the region... now masked by a splintered fragmented face.”

Dr. Mrinal Miri | Two Views of the North –East?

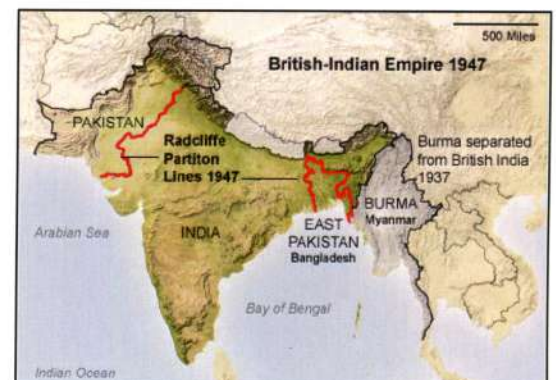
Problems of Ethnicity in North-East India | Ed. B.B. Kumar, Astha Bharati, New Delhi 2007

.....

The discourse around North-East India is one of absence and indifference, which has its colonial origins in the ‘Northeast frontier of Bengal’, disjointedly administered by the British as a set of hills on the edge of the Indian mainland. Indeed, as a geo-political space, it is ethnically, linguistically and culturally very distinct from the rest of India. The ‘Northeast frontier’ is where South Asia shades into Southeast Asia. It has been framed in the classical modes of politics and economics, as one sees in colonial administrative policies, and perhaps more so in its ‘post’-colonial incarnation. Originally, North-East India was comprised of undivided Assam and the independent princely states of Manipur and Tripura, and in a way, this provided enough scope for strengthening the issue of ethnic autonomy of the region.

➤ Colonial Rule, Modernity & Partition | Assam

- 1826 | Assam annexed to the British Empire | Treaty of Yandabo
- 1826 – 1873 | Assam part of the Bengal Presidency
- 1837 | Initiation of the tea industry | 1839 – the Assam Company was established, followed by the oil and coal industries.
- 1846 | The first Assamese literary magazine *Orunodoi* was initiated which spread the benefits of English education and published articles on science, history, geography and technological inventions
- 1857 | The ‘Sepoy Mutiny’ found resonance in Assam as well through armed revolts and several uprisings which continued till 1894, along with violent annexations by the British of tribal areas
- 1872 | The Inner Line Permit introduced by the British
- 1874 | Assam region was separated from the Bengal Presidency, Sylhet was added to it and its status was upgraded to a Chief Commissioner’s Province till 1905



- 1905 | First Partition of Bengal, East Bengal a deed to the Chief Commissioner's Province. More uprisings and the partition was annulled in 1911
- 1912 – 1920 | Assam Legislative Council
- 1921 – 1937 | Dyarchy
- 1937 – 1947 | Assam Legislative Assembly
- 1947 | Partition of India | East Pakistan was demarcated
- 1950s – 70s | Assam demarcated to the other NE states, except for the princely states of Manipur and Tripura which were already independent earlier
- 1971 | Bangladesh attains independence from East Pakistan



The North-East is the quintessential borderland, yet the challenge is to locate borders in the centre of our analysis. It consists of eight federal states: Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Sikkim, whose carving by the Indian State after Independence almost normalized the notion of “exclusive ethnic homelands”, and a culture of ‘routine and unspectacular violence. Though the different states have their own historical, cosmological, racial, social and transnational narratives, yet their modernisms can be placed against a violent political landscape.

RESEARCH THRUST:

- **LOCATE** | Visual Art Histories (Modern and Contemporary Art) of North-East India set against its historical, political, and social landscapes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Conceptual Methods:

- **INTERDISCIPLINARY** | Critically engage with the disciplinary rupture of Art History and apply the tools of visual culture in the interdisciplinary research project – **anthropology, art history, sociology, politics and image reading/analysis.**
- **THEORIZATION** | Re-calibrate the **centre-periphery dichotomy**, often used to engage with the art history and practices of the Northeast, by looking at the ‘regional modernisms’ of the region in the context of its geographical and cultural affinities with South, East and South East Asia, and its counterpoint to the Indian mainland.
- **IDEA OF THE RHIZOME** | Challenge the very notion of the ‘periphery’ being a **site of delayed growth and derivation**, and place its modernisms/contemporary practices as an[other] site of practices that developed simultaneously (particularly Assam) with other **rhizomatic modernisms** of India.

Practical Methods:

- **INTERVIEWS** | With artists/writers/ art historians based in **New Delhi, Guwahati, Shillong, Santiniketan and Silchar** as a process of research.

- **TRAVEL / FIELD VISITS** | New Delhi, Guwahati, Shillong // July and October 2013
- **COLLECTION** | Original information on **artists, artworks, art cultural institutions** through books, journals, periodicals and rare documents such as newspaper clippings, reviews and first-hand information.
- **ARCHIVE** | Accessible ways of **archiving and writing** so that a greater knowledge exchange is possible between North - East India, Asia and the larger world.
- **ONLINE RESEARCH** | Skype. Email, and Web Sources | Phone Conversations

RESEARCH OUTCOMES:

1. International Publication // Forthcoming

Twentieth-Century Indian Art

Editors: Partha Mitter, Parul Dave Mukherjee and Rakhee Balaram

Publishers: Skira Publishers and Art Alive.

Main Essay | **Practices of Looking: The Art of Assam**

Text Box | **Art Practices of the North-East: An Overview** / Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura & Nagaland

- Both essays submitted to IFA in December 2014. IFA given due acknowledgement for supporting the research.

2. North-East Art Archive | Online Archive (Ongoing) // Completion: October - November 2015

Secondary Literature | Field & Online Research Findings:

ARTISTS NAMES:	
<p>Guwahati / Assam</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muktanath Bordoloi • Suren Bordoloi • Jagat Singh Kachari • Pratap Baruah • Tarun Duvarah • Asu Dev • Hemanta Mishra • Shobha Brahma • B.C. Sanyal Dhubri / New Delhi • Lakhi Ram Baruah • Sashidhar Saikia • Jibeshwar Baruah • Madan Mohan Lahkar • Neel Pawan Baruah • Benu Mishra • Madhav Baishya • Tapan Bordoloi 	<p>Shillong / Meghalaya</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prithpal Singh Ladi • M.H. Barbhuiya • Ng. Bobby Singha <p>Khasi Artists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raphael Wajri • Benedict Hynneiwa • Lawan Mawlong • Banshamplang Lanong • Pynshngain Lanengpan • Khraw Lanong • Peter Suting • Bala Nakpentam • Careen Langstieh • Wanphrang Deingdoh • Treibor Mawlong

- Pranab Barua
- Pulok Gogoi
- Atul Barua
- Aminul Haque
- Kandarpa Sarma
- Gauri Barman
- **Dilip Tamuly**
- **Noni Borpujari**
- **Ajit Seal**
- **Rajkumar Mazinder**
- **Kishor Kumar Das**
- **Maneshwar Brahma**
- **Samiran Baruah**
- **Debanananda Ulup**
- Subhakar Laskar
- Monica Devi
- Manindranath Bhattacharjee
- Kamal Mahanta
- Paranmanti Devi
- Lutfah Akhtar
- **Dadul Chaliha**
- Gatul Gogoi
- Girish Bora
- Niva Devi
- Manoj Das
- Mamra Barua Harland
- Bula Chakrabarty
- Pinaki Barua
- **Sonal Jain/Mriganka Madhukaiillya**
- **Indrani Baruah**
- Aniruddh Baruah
- **Nikhileshwar Baruah | Guwahati/Baroda**
- Ganesh Gohain | Guwahati/Baroda
- Santana Gohain | Guwahati/Baroda
- **Ashim Purkhayastha | Digboi/Delhi**
- **Samudra Kajal Saikia | Guwahati/Delhi**

Silchar / Assam

- Birendralal Bhowmik
- Mukunda Debnath
- Asit Kumar Roy
- Ashwini Kumar Roy

Mizoram

- James Khamliansawma
- Lalhmiagmawii Amoi
- Rosimele Ralte

Manipur

- **N. Bhadra Singh**
- **R.K. Yumjaosana**
- **Priyobrata Singh**
- Haobam Shyamsundar Singh
- **Kumari Binodini Devi**
- **Banamali Sharma**
- Th. Tombi Singh
- B. Ruma Sharma
- Ch. Premananda Roy

Tripura

- Nalini Kanta Mazumdar
- Dhiren Krishna Deb Barman,
- Bipul Kanti Saha
- Prasanta Sengupta
- Chinmoy Roy
- Swapan Nandi
- Barun Chakrabarty
- Hare Krishna Pal
- Kajol Deb
- Jibonkrishna Seal
- Sudip Barman
- **Radha Binod Sharma**
- **Jayanta Bhattacharya**
- **Rathin Barman**
- Mrinmoy Deb Barma

Nagaland

- Bedang
- V. Noudi
- Munglei Jamir
- Niboto Keyho
- Ato Lorim
- Temzo Wapang Ozzie
- Neikhuzo Shekose
- Akup Buchemphom
- **Temsuyanger Longkumer**
- Sangwa Aonok

Arunachal Pradesh

- Taka Riba
- Punyo Chobin
- **Minam Apang**

Sikkim

- Vijoymoni Thulung

NB: The artists in bold are the ones whose work I have engaged with till date.

In my original research proposal, my aim was to start with researching the contemporary art practices of Guwahati, Shillong and Silchar from the 1980s onwards. But having discovered a wealth of material and a rich modern art history of Assam, I began my research from the 1920s onwards for Guwahati, and drawing a modern and post-modern art historical lineage till now. This has culminated in the first essay, **Practices of Looking: The Art of Assam**.

On the other hand, the modernism/contemporary art practice in Shillong is very recent, starting from the 1980s onwards, particularly, more so because the Khasi tribe has had a more musical/folkloric/oral tradition – than a ‘visual’ one.

The modernism of Silchar is again slightly different from that of Guwahati – this has appeared from my first conversations with artists there. This falls under the migrational history of the Barak Valley, research into this history in conjunction with its modern/contemporary art history is ongoing.

NB: In the second essay, **Art Practices of the North-East: An Overview**, I have done research beyond what was presented in the original proposal to IFA, which focused on 3 cities of the North-East: Shillong Guwahati & Silchar. This expanded research includes the modern & contemporary art developments of Manipur, Tripura, Nagaland & Meghalaya. I have not been able to source documentation for Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh & Sikkim - as the art scene is very nascent there, though few names have been sourced through phone conversations with an Assamese artist.

INSTITUTIONS / COLLECTIVES / GALLERIES / ART PEDAGOGY:

➤ **ASSAM:**

1. The Assam State Museum was established by the Assam Research Society in 1940
2. The first art school was established by artist, Jibeshwar Baruah in 1947
3. The convention of the 4th National Art and Crafts Exhibition by Lalit Kala Akademi was held in 1958
4. The National Art and Craft Exhibition was organized by the Art and Craft School of Assam in the 1960. This art school later became the Government College of Art and Crafts, Assam.
5. Assam Fine Arts and Crafts Society was founded by artist, Neel Pawan Baruah in 1971
6. The Guwahati Artists’ Guild was founded by Asu Dev, Benu Mishra + other eminent artists in 1976
7. Assam State Gallery was established in 1976, and was housed inside the office of Assam Sahitya Sabha. It closed down in 1999, and was reopened as the State Art Gallery, Rabindra Bhavan in 2006
8. Kokrajhar College of Music & Visual Art, 1991
9. Department of Fine Arts at Assam University, Silchar, 1996
10. Srimanta Sankardev Kalakshetra was established in 2004
11. Desire Machine Collective, 2004
12. College of Fine Arts, Barpeta, 2006
13. Yellow Cab Artists’ Collective /Founding date to be sourced

➤ **MANIPUR:**

1. Establishment of the Karigarh Loishang or the artists’ guild under the rule of Maharaja Bhagyachandra (1759 – 1798)

2. The Imphal Art School was established in 1949, which later became a college in 1959
3. Manipur State Kala Akademy in 1972
4. Manipur Art Society / Founding date to be sourced
5. SACH (Sharma Arts and Craft House) in Imphal that was established in 1972
6. Neo-Genes Artists' Group, 1997

➤ **MEGHALAYA**

1. The Centre for Creative Arts, North Eastern Hill University (Shillong), was set up in 1977, to provide incentive to promote art appreciation and art education in the field of visual arts and performing arts. The Centre for Literary and Cultural Studies was started in 1984 to promote cultural studies, with special emphasis on folklore in the North-Eastern Region. In 1997, the above two Centres were re-structured and amalgamated into one Centre called the Centre for Cultural and Creative Studies. Centre for Cultural & Creative Studies, North Eastern Hill University
2. Meghalaya Artists' Guild, 1987
3. Riti Academy of Visual Arts, 1991
4. Meghalaya Fine Arts & Crafts Society / Founding date to be sourced
5. The Small Art Project / Founding date to be sourced
6. The 18 Degrees Festival / Founding date to be sourced
7. Creative Arts Literature and Music Festival (CALM) / Founding date to be sourced

➤ **TRIPURA**

1. Government College of Arts and Crafts in Agartala, 1975
2. Department of Fine Arts, at Tripura University, Agartala, 2009

➤ **NAGALAND**

1. Nagaland Art Society was formed in 1974

➤ **ARUNACHAL PRADESH**

1. Arunachal Academy of Fine Arts was formed in late 1980s

PROBLEMS / OBSTACLES IN RESEARCH PERIOD:

- The major problems during the research period were two serious **medical occurrences in my family** which slowed down my research, and delayed the completion of the online archive, the main outcome of my research. My plans for field visits were stalled due to the same.

1. **Grant Period: March 25, 2013 to September 25, 2014 | 18 months**

Travel | Completed

- July 2013 | Bombay-Delhi-Bombay
- October 2013 | Bombay-Guwahati-Shillong-Bombay

Travel | Not done

- Bombay – Silchar – Bombay
- Could not travel to Santiniketan

The last part of my travel to Silchar was scheduled in end-May 2014, but could not take place due to severe lung infections (**Bronchiectasis + Pneumonia**) of my husband in June 2014. He was admitted in the ICU and underwent Bronchoscopy for recovery. The lung infections were followed by **Vivax Malaria**, and the hospitalization occurred twice in the month of June. The initial convalescence period was till September 2014, but he was again unwell with a bad throat infection in September; thus the convalescence was a prolonged one till November 2014.

- ✚ Given this, I had no mind-space to build the online archive, though I continued my research for the essays through online sources, phone interviews and Skype conversations. IFA extended my grant period to March 25, 2015 for time to complete the online archive.

2. Grant Period: September 25, 2014 to March 25, 2015 | 6 months

- ✚ I completed the 2 essays in December 2014. As I have a full-time job, I re-planned my travel to Silchar in January 2015, but another medical crisis in the family took place. My father-in law was diagnosed of terminal neck cancer, and came to Bombay from Kolkata in end-January to stay with us for treatment. His demise occurred on April 30, 2015 in Bombay. The online archive could not be completed in the grant period due to the above.

NB: Apart from these medical obstacles, I received lots of support and encouragement from my research sources in the grant period. As I am from Shillong, it was easier for me to understand and negotiate in the field from an insider/outsider matrix, and even if I could not travel in 2014-15, I received information in multiple ways.

THE WAY AHEAD:

IFA has been very warm and supportive towards my personal obstacles, and work is continuing for the online archive.

Online Archive: This has expanded in scope; while phase 1 will focus on the original outcome of material uploaded for Guwahati, Shillong & Silchar, the archive will be an ongoing and long-term project for me and will slowly cover the art practices of the other states of the NE, based on my findings in the second essay. I will also continue my research, and may develop it into a PhD.

1. I bought the domain for 2 years from GoDaddy in February 2015
2. While I had started designing it on my own, given the second medical crisis, the work was stalled.
3. A friend is a web designer, and he started helping me in building the design in late March 2015. The idea was to complete the design by end May 2015
4. My father-in-law's health deteriorated in April 2015, and I had no time to offer my feedback to the web design. The work got stalled at the home-page. His demise on April 30th and later the rites and rituals entailed travel to Kolkata, and completing family obligations took time till May 20.

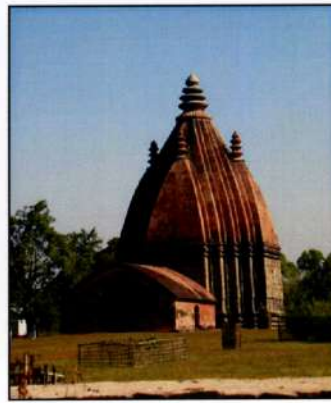
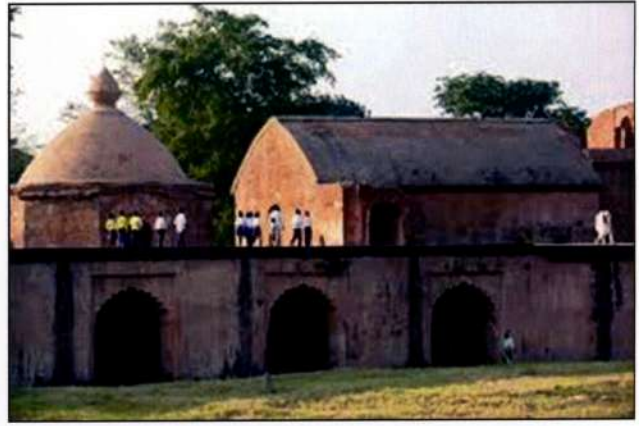
5. The web design has been re-started, and is an ongoing. The design should be over in 5 – 6 weeks from now.
6. After that, I will start uploading archival material, and I hope to complete the online archive (Phase 1) by **October - November 2015**
7. Apart from the archival material, I will conduct interviews with artists there, which will offer art historical material to the field. These interviews will be published in the archive.

E-Monographs: I have also developed an idea of creating e-monographs of specific artists whose work I respond to in this NE research. The first artist will be Prithpal Singh Ladi, who is based in Shillong, a fantastic sculptor who studied in Baroda, worked in Delhi, and was the founding members of KHOJ. Unfortunately, personal issues proved difficult, and he moved from Delhi to Shillong. He has a fantastic studio in Shillong, and continues to work, though shows very less, and his work is totally undocumented, except for few articles in ArtIndia & some exhibition writings.

NB: The e-monographs will be an ancillary wing to the online archive, and a sort of curatorial project for me. With time, more artists will be included.

➤ **Scroll below for representative images of the research project.**

*** END***



↑ Ahom Palaces, Arsenals & Temples | Assam



Satras are basically monasteries and centers of traditional performing arts where Vaishnavism was propagated in Assam by Assamese Vaishnavite Srimanta Sankaradeva also known as the father of Assamese culture.



Folio from Chitra Bhagwata, Assam Museum, Guwahati



Lord Vishnu, Assamese Manuscript



Hathi Puthi Manuscript
Auniati Satra Museum in Majuli, Assam



Stone Monoliths, Kachomari, Assam



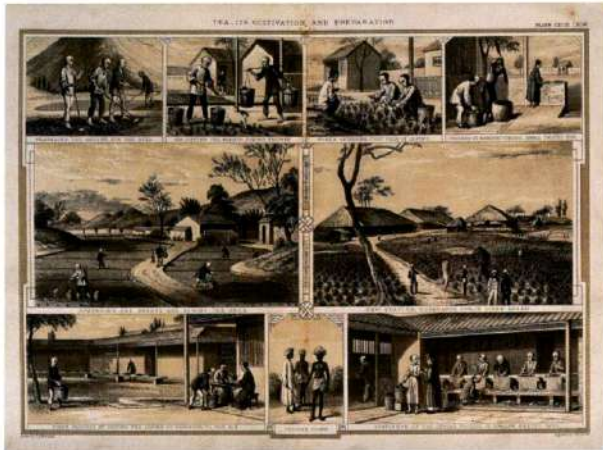
Stone Monoliths, Meghalaya



Deo Pahar Ruins, Assam



Ganga and Yamuna, Da Parvatia Temple, Assam



Tea Cultivation in Assam, Serampore Missionaries, Serampore Press C. 1850



Orunodoi print, Rail Road Car (train), January, 1846, Wood Engraving



Orunodoi print, Description of Elephant, August, 1848 Wood Engraving



Orunodoi print, Young Man & Woman in Australia, January 1851 Wood Engraving



Suren Bordoloi, Portrait of Radhakanta Handique, 1936, oil on canvas



Muktanath Bordoloi, Opium Eater, 1926



Tarun Duvarah, Weaver c. 1930s



Birendralal Bhowmik, Cover page of
Chitalekha, 1952



Sashidhar Saikia, *Untitled*, lithograph, 1930



Abahan illustration, Madan Mohan Lahkar, wood engraving, 1952



Benu Misra, *Lottery Ticket Seller*, 1987, block print



Asu Dev, *Harijan*, Oil on Canvas 1965



Hemanta Misra, *Wood Gatherers*, 1961



Noni Borpujari, *Bondage*, 1984, Lithograph



Raj Kumar Mazinder, *Tribute*, Installation, 2006



Maneswar Brahma, *Victim*, lithograph, 2004



Kishore Kumar Das, *Mosquito Net*, Installation 2012



Police point- Laitamkhrah



Mol Phrah

KALI KAMAI
WANPHRANG K. DIENGDH
FICA PUBLIC ART GRANT 2009



Wanphrang Deingdoh, Kali Kamai, Public Art, Shillong, 2009



Stills from *Residue*, 2010,-2011 35mm film, 39 mins. Image courtesy of Desire Machine Collective



Periferry1.0', First International Residency at Periferry, barge M.V. Chanderdinga, organised by Desire Machine Collective, Guwahati, 2008.

NB: Images sourced from artists, art historians & research from online sources, with permission.