

Grantee : Indrani Baruah, Guwahati

Grant amount : Rs 5,00,000

Grant period : Six months from January 1, 2013

Précis

This grant supports background research and the building of a raft-like structure in collaboration with bamboo artisans and boat-builders in Guwahati. It also supports a two-week long journey on the Brahmaputra, during which the raft will function as a mobile, habitable receptacle to gather, share and document stories, songs and local knowledge about food and ecology. Grant funds will pay for research and documentation costs, workshop costs, costs towards materials and labour, artist fees, and travel and transportation costs.

Grant Description

Indrani Baruah is an architect and visual artist who has been teaching cultural studies for the last few years. Having felt constrained by disciplinary boundaries, Indrani has been keen to develop an arts practice which will enable her to work in a truly interdisciplinary way. Indrani explains, “As a visual artist I was working within the confines of a painterly studio practice in the form of mixed media paintings. My architecture practice was restricted within the boundaries of the formal and linear processes of a design practice—from conceptualizing a building in response to a strict set of parameters to designing, detailing and taking it through construction. In cultural studies, I was researching, analysing and presenting ideas and theories in the form of a thesis within the confines of an academic framework. Architecture is a form of practice that is usually conducted in response to a precise set of parameters, and art is characterized by freedom from such restraints. I am searching for an interdisciplinary practice, one that cannot be slotted simply as art or architecture or cultural studies, but a hybrid practice that forms a continuum between the three.”

In a previous residency with The Desire Machine Collective in Guwahati, Indrani developed a project titled ‘Cultural Re-imaginings-I’ where she worked with bamboo artisans to sculpt a public installation on the Periferry site—which was originally an abandoned ferry, restored as an arts space on the banks of the Brahmaputra. ‘Cultural Re-imaginings-I’ was the initial realisation of Indrani’s search for an interdisciplinary practice. Building upon this earlier work, Indrani will be supported for the second phase—‘Cultural Re-imaginings-II’—which she envisages as “a series of projects conceived as an ongoing experiment in challenging the traditional boundaries between art and architecture, artist and artisan, crafts and arts, and towards developing a new, critically engaged hybrid practice that integrates cultural history, architectural traditions and current environmental concerns, along with creating art that leads to unanticipated interdisciplinary convergence”.

Much of Indrani’s earlier practice responds to issues of sustainability. Drawing upon her experience of growing up in Assam, she points out that the imminent shortages of land, water and energy continue to increase the pressure to find innovative solutions in the North-East, especially in communities that live in close proximity to the natural environment. In ‘Cultural Re-imaginings-II’, Indrani proposes to build a raft based on the sustainable principles of the itinerant vernacular bamboo rafts of this region, conceptualised as a ‘sustainable habitat’, which will sustain up to five individuals at a time over a series of riparian journeys. Indrani visualises the raft structure functioning as a ‘vessel’ or a ‘receptacle’ for ideas, processes and innovations, and ultimately as a site for creative introspections and collective cultural experiences: “the raft structure will be symbolically re-imagined as an “itinerant bard” of the river – a *jajabor* as it is called in Assam and Bengal based on the anthem of sorts *moi eti jajabor* (in Assamese) or *aami ek jajabor* (in Bengali) by musician, folklorist, writer and social reformer Bhupen Hazarika, evoking the ‘wanderer’ in each one of us. The raft will personify the storyteller of important narratives of the two banks of the river Brahmaputra, of the maritime history of this region, the everyday lives of the people and their transforming relationship with the river.”

The raft structure will be a poetic antidote to the motorized ferryboats and water taxis that currently are most conspicuous in the urbanscape. The design of the

experimental raft structure will explore sustainable opportunities for foraging, cooking, living, sleeping, composting as well as energy, food, art, music, crafts and cloth production. The entire project is proposed as a collaborative endeavour, where from the beginning, Indrani will involve bamboo artisans, boat-makers, and artists from the region. The grant will support Indrani to carry out the preliminary research to conduct workshops with the wider communities involved in this project. Based on these workshops, Indrani and her collaborators will determine the raft design and put together a work-plan for the construction of the raft. The grant will also cover material, labour, documentation, travel and lodging costs incurred towards the construction of the raft. In addition, the grant will support an exploratory two-week journey along the Brahmaputra including costs for overnight stay where necessary, documentation, and dissemination of materials as determined appropriate by the communities involved in the project.

Indrani hopes to be open and attentive to the uncertainties built into a collaborative and community-based project like this and seeks to document the process carefully, which she will explore disseminating in creative ways at a subsequent stage of her work. "My long-term vision is to see the processes and products generated from this entire project as catalysts for triggering a network of ideas and exchanges in sustainability," Indrani underlines.

Budget

Travel and living costs	Rs 1,59,950
Material costs	1,35,500
Material transportation and labour costs	1,34,100
Documentation costs	47,950
Research and fieldwork costs	11,500
Equipment and venue hire	8,000
Accountant's fee	<u>3,000</u>
Total	<u>Rs 5,00,000</u>