

# Eyes that saw are wide shut



Residency/Open Studio





## Archival Residency

Eyes That Saw Are Wide Shut is a collection of ongoing bodies of work that found its origin in the archives of North East Network (NEN) - A Women's Rights Organisation. The artists engage with the archives and expand conversations contextual to their practices. They retell women's stories in different art forms and mediums. The process of art-making, incubated in a Residency by Northeast Lightbox, comes alive in an interactive Open Studio at the Assam State Museum, where the audience will engage with, and participate in the artist's works in Progress.

# NorthEast Lightbox

Responding to an urgency for materialising and facilitating individual and collective expressions of shared concerns and understanding, NELB is an address for a shared call for action in the Northeastern states of India. Since its conception, NELB has aspired to create work that engages hyper-local communities through values of transparency, inclusivity and accessibility towards visual arts, that aid in a sustainable future. NELB aims to facilitate more accessibility towards visual art in the public realm as well as generate new audience. In the process, NELB seeks to cultivate inclusive spaces for dialogue and exchange between audiences and practitioners through workshops, residencies and seminars. At the same time, NELB seeks to bring art directly into the public realm through public actions, interventions and exhibitions.

# North East Network

North East Network (NEN) is a women's rights organisation linking with rural and urban women and organisations on development and related issues within North East India.

NEN also connects to different civil society organisations on development and social justice issues within North East India. It was set up as part of the preparatory process for the Beijing World Conference on Women in 1995. In the 20 years since its establishment, NEN has become a platform to address women's human rights. NEN is one of the first organisations in the North East to combine activism with advocacy from a liberal feminist perspective, conveying critical gender issues from the region through dialogue and dissemination. NEN is based in Assam and its work extends to Manipur, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Delhi. NEN has a registered office at present in Guwahati, Assam, with a unit in Tezpur, Assam and Branch Offices in Shillong, Meghalaya, Chizami and Kohima in Nagaland.

## Artist In-Residence

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Akhu Chingangbam  
Chingrimi A Shimray  
Lapdiang Artimai Syiem  
Pranami Rajbangshi



Bodies that hang from the ceiling fans,  
bullet pierced vaginas and dismembered  
flesh stuffed in polythene bags.  
Silent muffled cries behind bedroom doors  
and high pitched vocals from  
the procession through the streets and  
barbed wire gates. What a spectacle!

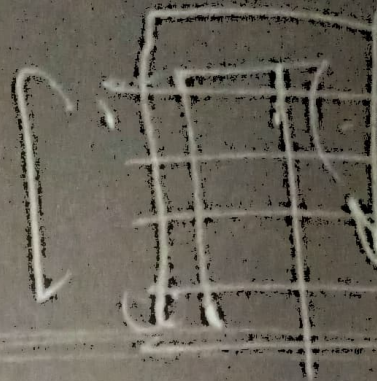
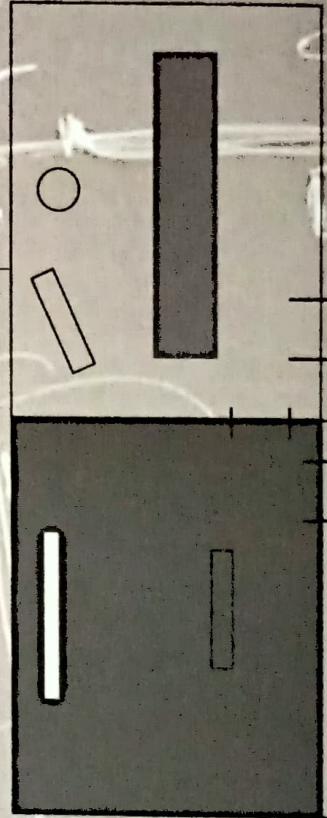
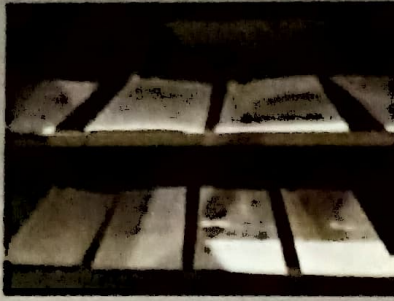
Spectacles that you saw and turned a blind  
eye to because you are told a 'witch is a  
witch' and a 'mad woman a mad woman'.  
Thus stories of women are told through  
eyes that were never really theirs -  
Edouard Manet's *Le Dejeuner sur l'herbe* to  
Ved Vyas's *Draupadi*.

Over the years, art that seeks to  
challenge the dominance of cis men and  
patriarchal values, both in art and  
society, has pushed the boundaries and  
practices of art. The coming together of  
art, women and feminist movement, and the  
ever-expanding alliance with  
the queer-trans movement have brought  
about fresh perspectives and content  
to emerging art.

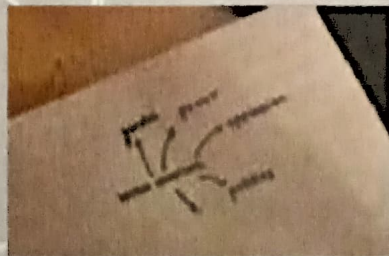
Can art today enable women to become  
'subjects and story-tellers of their own'  
from merely being spectacles and muses of  
artists throughout history? What happens  
to women's narratives if we retell them  
through the eyes and perspectives of women  
and feminists? What happens to women's  
narratives when we open  
eyes that are wide shut?

Curator's Note  
Kumam Davidson Singh

Open Studio/Residency







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# Song of Women

(working title)

Akhu Chingangbam



Songs of Women is a collage of women's struggle that I have experienced in my own way as a male and as part of a larger society. From domestic to socio-political level,

women of Manipur have suffered and fought.

Here I used two poems by Manipuri poet Moirangthem Borkanya, which talks about the frustrations and sexual violence a woman suffers. The poems were written in the 1980s. The piece ends with

the Meira Paibis (torch bearers) which emerged in the 1970s as Nisaband to fight against intoxication

within the Meitei society but later became the 'Guardian of civil society' or as some may also call them the ultimate 'human rights defenders'.



Sister Meera, Sister Meera  
Inside the demonstration Room  
For years you have been  
losing K rolling. Like a patient.

Your dismembered plastic limbs  
are scattered everywhere.

Memcha, Biyo, Many. Nadeusa  
They would move you one after another

Sister Meera, Sister Meera  
Inside the demonstration room

Ventral position, Sim's position

Vaginal position, ...

Your helpless  
at everyone

Sister Meera  
Inside

North East Network's archive was a knowledge bank for me. It has shown how the women of NE have suffered because of the conflicts and patriarchy. Yet their resilience and courage is Unparalleled.

When I created the audio I didn't want to use any male voices. It had to be the voices of mothers, sisters and daughters.

I recorded voices of a manipur poet, Moirangthem Borkanya. She was kind enough to recite two poems of hers which she wrote in 1980s. I also used sound of Imphal's women market as a bridge in the audio. When one talks of women's struggle in Manipur, you can't ignore the naked mothers's protest that took place in 2004 post the rape and killing Thangjam Manoram by Assam Rifles. So it was an unconscious decision to use the voice of the protesting mothers. I ended the audio with a folk song which is a lullaby, often sung by a mother to her child on her back. Folk singer Nganthoi Ningthouja sang the folk song.

entire Manipu  
alley declared  
disturbed area

entire Manipu  
alley declared  
disturbed area



# Ka Jingiathuh Biang

(working title)

Lapdang Artimai Syiem

Ka Jingiathuh Biang (a retelling) has been scripted from the film 'haba kynih KI SYIAR KYNTHEI (when THE HENS CROW)' by Tarun Bhartiya and produced by the Action Northeast Trust. This

piece invites the audience to participate in the retelling of an event that took place in 2008 in Jongksha Village in Meghalaya. It has been accounted from the perspective of three women



and the narrator about the filing of an RTI in relation to the implementation of the MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) in Jongksha village. Today in Meghalaya when there is an ongoing debate on



whether women have a place in governance especially in the local Dorbars, this film acts as a reminder of the struggle and victory of these women who chose to speak out at the risk of

being ostracized from their village and community. I invite all of us to be part of the retelling as we provide a space for this story to continue to exist in our collective memory, as we consciously perform the act of 'Ka Jingiathuh Biang'.



Looking into and interacting with the NEN (North East Network) archives through this Residency, I was consciously aware of my position; that of a Khasi woman, from a matrilineal society, working towards dismantling notions of an idealistic concept of belonging to one of the few surviving matrilineal cultures in the world. This documentary gave me a strong impetus to retell and remember the fight that we Khasi women continue to have even now in present day Meghalaya as we challenge, assert and strive to claim our rightful place in areas of governance and administration. NEN as an organization since 1995 has opened up conversations and spaces where women can claim their rights to having a voice, their expression, their safety and their dignity. This documentary has provoked my process as an artist to look deeper into the significance of our indigenous cultures and their relevance today; our identity, our orality, our memory and reinterpreting and perhaps challenging traditional mindsets, and at the same time channeling values that can have an impact in how we live and survive today.

**Angela:** You managed to decode the papers, catch its lies and unravel the workings of the system. But what use is that knowledge when no one listens to your story? And what if that story was not just a tale of an individual? But had many voices each aggrieved, each trembling with hurt?

This journey for me has been so meaningful in providing a link to how I identify as a Khasi woman and the stand I take to remember and retell the victories that women have in our everyday lives as we evolve as a community. The act of remembering and retelling for me constitutes an integral part in how we can interact with the archives and search for their relevance especially in redefining our post-colonial identities today.

# Pictures in My Head

(working title)

Pranami Rajbangshi

Exploring and focussing on the socially skewed aspects of witch hunting in Assam, I looked at visuals that accompanied the news reports of witch hunting cases in Assam, in both print and digital media. As an exercise, people were supposed to write over the images reacting to how they felt when looking at the visuals without the supporting text. The display includes photographs of women who are survivors of witch hunting, with audio recordings of their personal narrations and accounts.



Use the transparent sheet to write on. Use the markers.

I am not happy. I am not a happy person. I am not a happy person. I am not a happy person. I am not a happy person.

I am not happy. I am not a happy person. I am not a happy person. I am not a happy person. I am not a happy person.



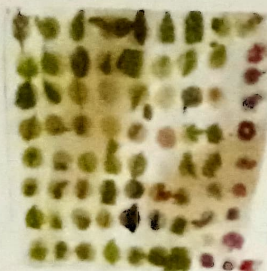
When I came across the newspaper cuttings of reportage related to witch hunting in the NEN archive it helped accentuate the ongoing visual research on the witch hunting practices of Assam. It helped me experience the viscosity of print as well as digital reportage of crime related to witch hunting and how that manoeuvres our experience around the consumption of news.



# how do you see a flower?

(working title)

Chingrimi A Shimray



What does it mean to see the invisible? Making, creating, producing has been central to the ways of a woman. Textile weaving in the Naga Community is pre-dominantly practiced by women. When we talk of narratives in the context of Oral Traditions,

how have textiles been a part of the conversations? The visual series is an interrogation of the relationship between a weaver and her surrounding, her inspiration, how have stories and knowledge remained within communities, how the act of nurturing and creating is more spoken than seen.



'How do you see a flower?' Looks at textile as a medium of archive in the context of Oral communities. As a researcher of Textiles, it was crucial to bring in a perspective that looked at the medium beyond the aesthetic and utilitarian strands of a cloth. The NEN Nagaland archive explores agriculture and textiles as a means of preserving indigenous knowledge. What drew me to work with the archive was familiarity.

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