

Within Four Walls

Gallery Espace presents

Within Four Walls

Nandini Bagla Chirimar

An online solo exhibition of Japanese woodblock papier collé
on the **Gallery Espace website**

June 10 – July 15, 2022



www.galleryespace.com

Within Four Walls

- Aranya

What are the elements that transform a lived space into a life? How do the spaces that we interact with on a daily basis, acquire form outside of their corporeal manifestation? What is the meaning of a home? Can we trace the tacit presences of identity in the borders of the wooden frame of a painting, or the incline of a much trodden stairway?

These are some of the questions that Nandini Bagla Chirimar asks through her practice, and her detailed study of inhabited spaces in *Within Four Walls*. This series of 11 Japanese woodblock print collages are recomposed fragments of sparse, carefully delineated spaces within the interiors of a household. The prints use minimalist black and white lines. Layers have been added that include thick black swathes, snatches of gold leaf, and translucent Kozo paper.

The genesis of these collages lies in a 12" x 15" Japanese woodblock print featured in Paula Sengupta's curatorial project 'Living in a Dark Night'. This project brought together the testimonies of various artists in a period of intense anxiety and isolation at the peak of the pandemic in 2021. Nandini found comfort within the certainty of design, the strength of wall and ceiling, lamp and wooden cabinet. This initial "master" print presents three tight frames of a household, rendered in a somewhat realistic fashion.

The process of creating these prints is a meticulous one. First, Nandini takes multiple photographs of a single household. From these she creates drawings homing in on particular perspectives and compositions, adding and subtracting elements to convey a contrast of empty space and heavy detail. Using fine Japanese woodcut tools, she carefully carves out the image, putting the outlines into relief and creating areas of varying thickness. The

final printing on Kozo paper is done by hand using a baren – a traditional Japanese disc-shaped tool.

This multi-layered process enhances the artist's close reading of a space that encloses but also centres – the act of transmission to wood and then to paper is a re-enactment of the act of looking. One is aware of the viewer, of the 'choice' of seeing a thing in a particular way, seeing the lines converge, and the spaces closing in. It is an attempt to find some unity in them, to locate order, and calmness. The print uncovers what goes into turning a house into a home, something that is revealed only through close, careful observation, even if it was coaxed by global disorder raging outside the 'four walls'.

Nandini has always been interested in our relationships with living spaces. She articulates the tensions and co-existence between a "written space", and an "unwritten space" while talking about these works: "I am interested in physical spaces created by architecture, and also the "unwritten spaces", which exist along with concrete floor plans and objects. These could be in the form of abstract configurations of the walls, historical remnants, or undefined spaces created by emotions within the walls. As an example, when we live within the same walls month after month, we start to look at them differently. Sometimes the walls seem to close in, and at other times, create an almost sacred space which holds our dreams."

In the 11 works featured here, the artist breaks down and remakes the original print, cutting and pasting, adding layers, translating movements of fantasy and imagination into surreal visions. It is this movement from certainty to uncertainty that creates a gap for the speculative connections a viewer can make.

While the converging walls invite the viewer to be inside them, they also suggest a breakdown of that space, and a reconfiguration of its contours, in the viewer's gaze. There are no people in these mise-en-scenes, but the

to pitch them from corner to corner.

Now it seeps back into itself,
unruffled and proud.
Outlines grow firmer.”

- From 'How Do I Know When a Poem is Finished?', Naomi Shihab Nye,
Honeybee (Greenwillow Books, 2008).

In a formal echo, Nandini's contemplative architectural panels are a graphic manifestation of this continuity of inscription of character into a space. While a designed space is given meaning by interventions of people, it also exists outside of this arc, in its own world. In fact, this space is not static anymore. In Nandini's prints these rooms “seep back” into themselves, and the “outlines grow firmer”, but as they reform they are changed. This liminal space between what was 'designed' for utility, and the translucent screen, is the space of the breakdown of architecture, and also the impermanence of physical constructed forms. In figurative, realistic landscapes, a vanishing point suggests the point at which a vision turns into an imagined convergence of parallel lines, but here, this notion is turned on its head, where the meeting points of lines seem to have another manifestation behind or outside the frame.

There is a stripping down, as the artist goes to the skeletal frames of these enclosed spaces, and pulls out hidden stories from an empty wall, or the point where three surfaces meet. Unlike the original composite image, these images don't allow for a unity. As frames of a storyboard, they incline towards an unreliable narrator who is at multiple vantage points, breaking established notions of composition, and creating imagined representations whose oblong forms bear merely the geometric semblance of coming together. These are notional spaces that live at the edges of perspective.

The texture of the prints allow for an ephemerality which contradicts the

residues of identity wash up against the surfaces, the way shadow suggests an imminent presence. As we see the disintegrated fragments of these rooms, through intersecting cross sections, they stand in for the presences that inhabit them. The act of looking transforms these spaces. Who are these people who leave imprints, who materialise as viewers in the maze of perspectives? The shared isolation of modern life is captured in a dream-making that takes tightly knit, intimate, living spaces and recrafts them into shards that are actually pieces of 'impossible architecture'.

In this regard, one is reminded of Escher who constantly questioned the very act of representation through physical illusions. The same decentring is present in these works, whose comfort lies not in the familiarity of ordinary spaces, but in the layered rearrangement of spatially dislocated elements. This rearrangement is dual – that of the physical space, but also the places where we make our other homes, our creative refuges. These creative homes are outside the laws of physics and the solidity of design. Which one is more real?

In her poem, 'How Do I Know When a Poem is Finished?', the American poet Naomi Shihab Nye uses the metaphor of a room that is constantly in the process of becoming, to talk about the creative process of writing, editing and turning unarticulated emotion into concrete form.

“When you quietly close
the door to a room
the room is not finished.

It is resting. Temporarily.
Glad to be without you
for a while.

Now it has time to gather
its balls of gray dust,

sharpness of the lines. The black sections, made thick by successive 'reprinting' and layering, along with the sudden interruptions of gold leaf, surge outside the "four walls". The minimalist aesthetic is more gesture, than explanation. You might spy a night sky stretched taut on a ceiling, or a stolen moment in an alleyway, witnessed through an open window. By only hinting at other possibilities, with no flourish of colour, the work draws us to our own impulses of how we see ordinary things. This movement from definition to abstraction allows the city, and the imprints of our meandering interactions with the urban sprawl, to be fashioned from the fragments of inhabited rooms. The lines are first unhinged from their function, and then cast as utopic or dystopic pieces, at once turning the ordinary objects of daily life into magical artefacts of urban furniture.

These are glimpses from a process, rather than discrete finished elements of a holistic work - milestones in the breakdown of architecture. In this breakdown, there is the kindling of other visions, shapes and forms that have a shade of familiarity, but a movement towards something completely new. In essence these works open up traditionally enclosed spaces as environments imprinted upon by social and emotional interactions.

The movement from the whole to the fragments is rooted not in the mind of the artist, or the inhabitant of these spaces alone. Because of the way perspective is blurred – each viewer makes different associations, and is called upon to think of the act of viewing itself. From the initial backstage of the material human activity of entering, exiting and being in domestic spaces, the often ignored movements that populate "meanwhiles", the works draw out impulses and intuitive acts – opening up a window into a hidden antechamber, a memory of some forgotten clearing, or an expanse of darkness in a bare partition of flooring that could symbolise a forest or an open field.

It is fascinating that such freedom can be imagined from the detritus of the same space, but this is the work of the artist – to show us mysterious realities

even in objects that are familiar. Nandini stands as a framer of these motions, and as we confront the works in their entirety, there are some moments of absolution. This is a mixture of authorial design, of the viewer's own experiences and emotional attachments, but also that faint spark of inspired chance that brings together even dissonant compositions in a moment of epiphany. Nye articulates that closure in the last part of her poem.

"When you return,
you might move the stack of books,
freshen the water for the roses.

I think you could keep doing this
forever. But the blue chair looks best
with the red pillow. So you might as well

leave it that way."

Aranya is a Delhi-based poet, curator and He writes on arts, culture and society and is also editor of Poetly, a newsletter/journal that curates poetry along with critical and intuitive commentaries.

Within Four Walls

Japanese woodblock & collage on kozo paper
mounted on lanaquerelle paper
Image size: 8 x 8 inches
Sheet size: 16 x 12 inches
2022
EV 1/21



EV 1/21

Within Four Walls

August 2022

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Japanese woodblock & collage on kozo paper
mounted on lanaquerelle paper
Image size: 8 x 8 inches
Sheet size: 16 x 12 inches
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EV 1/21



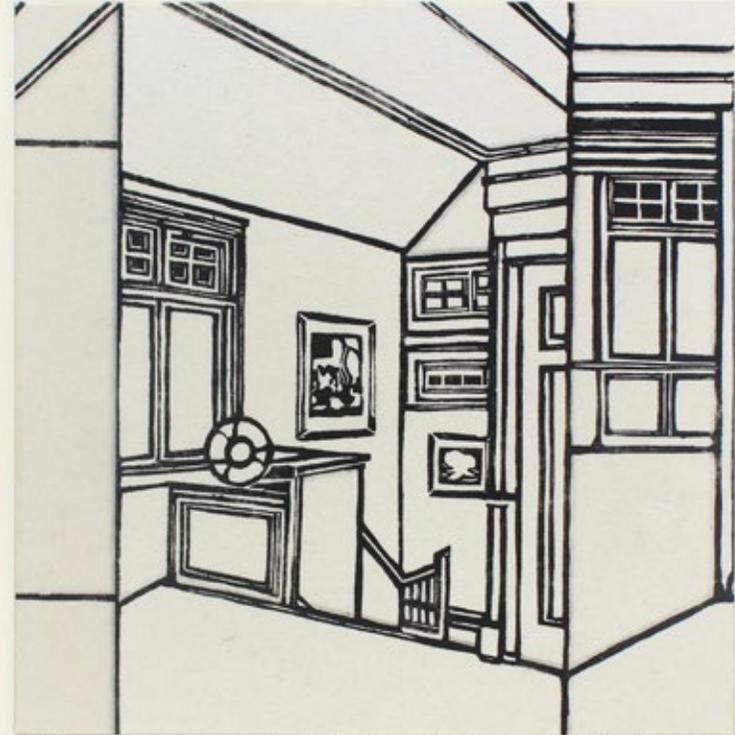
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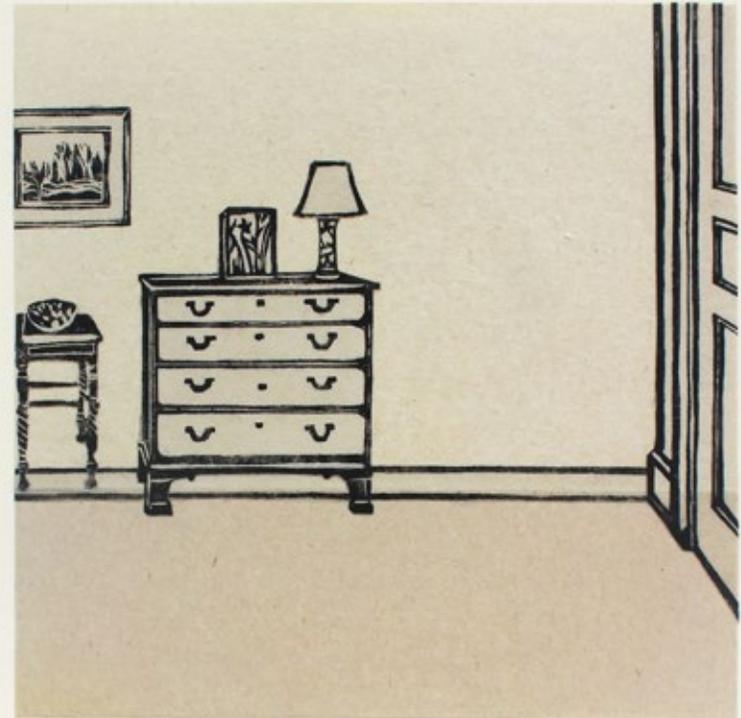
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Within Four Walls

ART BY NANDINI '22

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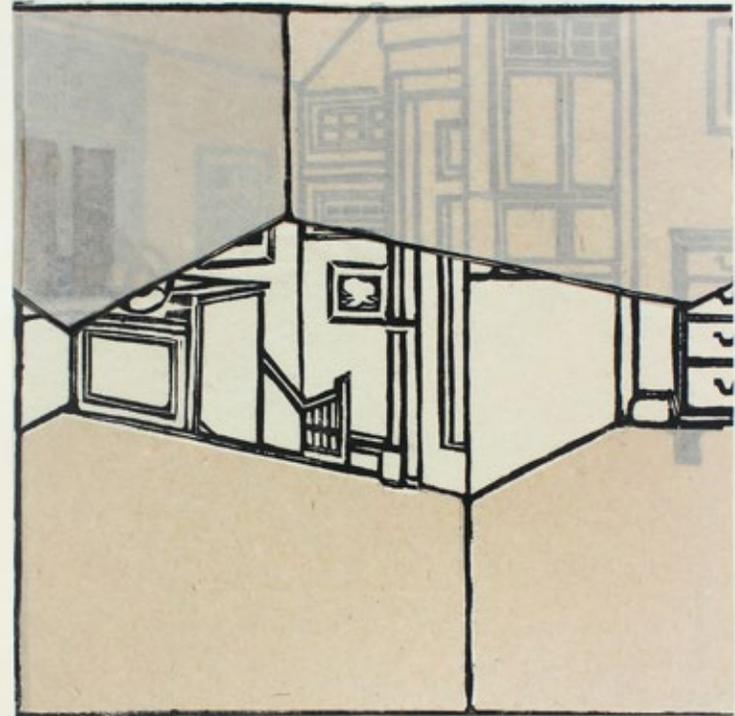
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Within Four Walls

EV 1/21 22

Within Four Walls

Japanese woodblock & collage on kozo paper
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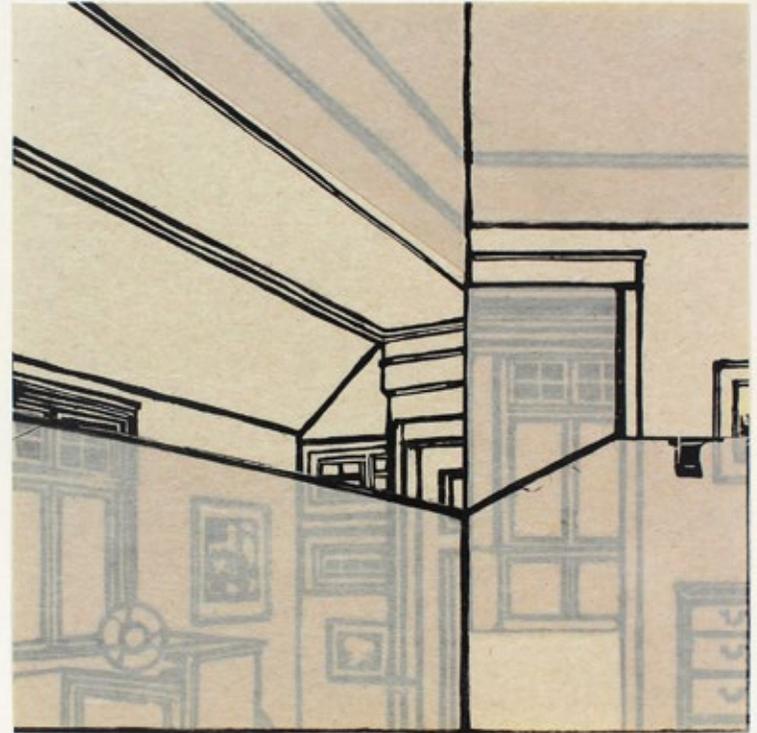
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Within Four Walls

ART NANO '22

Within Four Walls

Japanese woodblock & collage on kozo paper
mounted on lanaquerelle paper
Image size: 8 x 8 inches
Sheet size: 16 x 12 inches
2022
EV 1/21



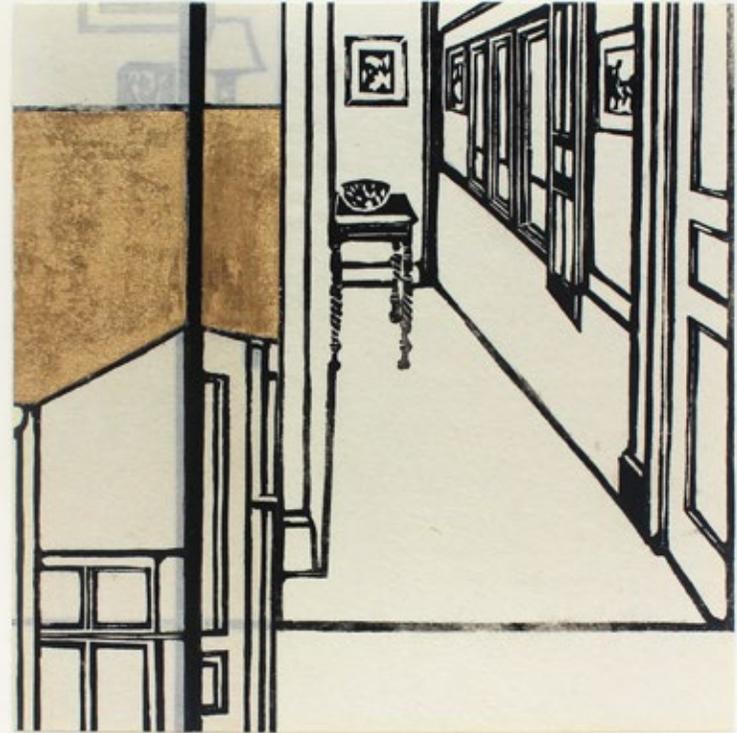
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Within Four Walls

EV 1/21 NANDINI '22

Within Four Walls

Japanese woodblock, 23.6K gold leaf & collage on kozo
paper, mounted on lanaquerelle paper
Image size: 8 x 8 inches
Sheet size: 16 x 12 inches
2022
EV 1/21



EV 1/21

Within Four Walls

सिद्धी नावोनी '22

Within Four Walls

Japanese woodblock, 23.6K gold leaf & collage on kozo
paper, mounted on lanaquerelle paper
Image size: 8 x 8 inches
Sheet size: 16 x 12 inches
2022
EV 1/21



EV 1/21

Within Four Walls

EV 1/21 22

Within Four Walls

Japanese woodblock, 23.6K gold leaf & collage on kozo
paper, mounted on lanaquerelle paper
Image size: 8 x 8 inches
Sheet size: 16 x 12 inches
2022
EV 1/21



EV 1/21

Within Four Walls

EV 1/21 2022

Within Four Walls

Japanese woodblock, 23.6K gold leaf & collage on kozo
paper, mounted on lanaquerelle paper
Image size: 8 x 8 inches
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2022
EV 1/21



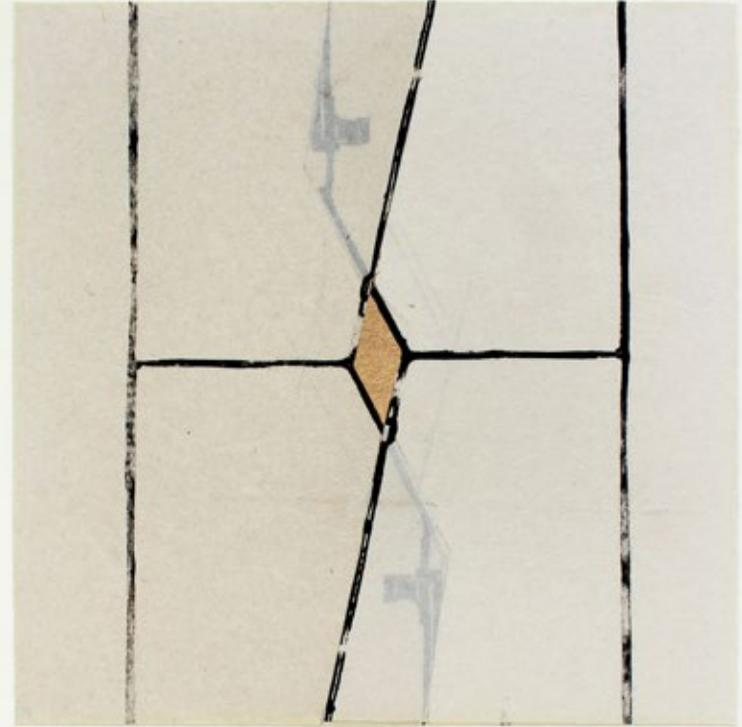
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Within Four Walls

Arjun Nandan '22

Within Four Walls

Japanese woodblock, 23.6K gold leaf & collage on kozo
paper, mounted on lanaquerelle paper
Image size: 8 x 8 inches
Sheet size: 16 x 12 inches
2022
EV 1/21



EV 1/21

Within Four Walls

हरि शं. शान्ति 22







About the artist

Nandini Bagla Chirimar grew up in Jaipur, India, and studied at the College of Art, New Delhi, Cornell University (BFA, Drawing and Painting), Maryland Institute College of Art (MFA, Painting) and Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. She learned printmaking from Arun Bose and Vijay Kumar, and spent four years in Tokyo studying Japanese woodblock printing with Taika Kinoshita.

Nandini was awarded the Joan Mitchell Painters and Sculptors Grant in 2016 and the Wave Hill Winter Workspace Program in 2019. Her work has been exhibited at many international venues including Twelve Gates Arts, Philadelphia; Queens Museum of Art, New York; Gallery Espace, New Delhi; Ganges Gallery, Kolkata; Allen Gallery, New York; CWAJ Print Shows, Tokyo and fairs Art Basel OVR, India Art Fair, Delhi Contemporary and Slick Art Fair, Paris.

Nandini works extensively with drawing, printmaking and mixed media techniques, and her work is part of many collections including the Philadelphia Museum of Art, US Department of State, and RPG Group. She lives in New York City, and teaches at the Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop and Manhattan Graphics Center.

About us

Established in 1989 by Renu Modi, Gallery Espace is among the foremost arts spaces in New Delhi, recognized widely for having nurtured the contemporary moment in Indian art with its ambitious and expansive programming. It has presented large format exhibitions such as Drawing '94, Sculpture '95, Miniprint '96, Bronze (2006), and Video Wednesdays (2008-09 & 2011-12) which sparked commercial and critical interest in these hitherto overlooked art categories, and also pioneered cross-disciplinary approaches to exhibitionary practices with *The Self & The World* (1997), *Kitsch Kitsch Hota Hai* (2001), and *Lo Real Maravilloso* (2009). Gallery Espace has worked with several generations of Indian artists, starting with legendary modernist painter MF Husain, and has also presented fresh talent and supported experimental practices. The gallery's eclectic and nuanced aesthetics is reflected in its roster of artists which include Zarina, Nilima Sheikh, Manjunath Kamath, GR Iranna, Ravi Agarwal, Manisha Gera Baswani, Chitra Ganesh, Waswo X Waswo with R. Vijay, and emerging artists such as Ishita Chakraborty and Purvai Rai, whose works reflect changing concerns and tastes.

GALLERY SPACE

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