

## ARTIST STATEMENT

Four years after *Through a Lens, Darkly*, we return to the material from National Instruments Ltd, photographed in 2009, in our current exhibition *Afterimage*. While the earlier work was largely “documentary” with some rare leaps into fantasy, the new exhibition shifts focus and looks at ruin, transience and memory in a more conceptual, often poetic way. *Through a Lens, Darkly* was as much about the demise of a public sector enterprise from the Nehruvian era as it was about photography. *Afterimage* takes the latter imperative further, opening a penumbral zone between images made and found, negative and positive, analogue and digital, painterly and photographic, abstract and figurative, still and moving. It is also about traces, both physical (abrasions and marks on objects) and metaphorical as in the stain an object leaves in the eye to form an afterimage consequent to its disappearance. *Afterimage* is about residues, about what remains when the document exhausts itself, when both the place and its record have become memory.

*Light, For Example* meditates on the fundamentals of photography, light and darkness, by going up close to disintegrating layers of paint on the blackened windows of a laboratory housing photo-sensitive chemicals. Evoking the photogram, the images are “straight” photographs made without optical, chemical or digital manipulation, so exposed as to bleach out the exterior and accentuate lens flare, allowing light to acquire a materiality and a body.

*Mount Analogue* uses a cache of battered 35mm negatives found in the garbage of the factory, belonging to and shot by the workers who left long ago. These vernacular images are an informal record of their lives while also being camera-tests to assess the capabilities of the National 35 camera they were building. The found negatives, digitized to positives, were rendered back to negative images; and the singular colouration of the photographic negative was recreated using a method akin to the old processes of hand-tinting photographs, albeit with digital tools. They contain optical errata resulting from the mechanical aberrations of the camera-in-the-making, like double exposures, ghostly superimpositions and light leaks, as well as scratches, dirt and moisture. When the photographic negative is gradually becoming memory, these marks endow the images with a double time – the time when they were made and the time that acted upon them.

The term “montage” as a foundational concept in image editing comes from engineering where modular parts of disparate tools are taken apart and recombined to make new tools and extend their use. Ten grids of isolated parts of disused machines from the factory that make up *Machinations* play on this idea as also with the principles of seriality, sameness and difference that inform industrial production.

*Sentinels* inverts the suggestion of movement built up through inter-frame configurations of stilled levers, wheels and cranks in *Machinations* and applies it to silent moving-image portraits of the security guards in the factory. A special technique of editing hides the cuts in the footage so that the immobile subjects remain in their position before the camera for an impossible period of time, acquiring the attributes of statues. It is only the blink or the occasional fidgeting of the fingers that distinguishes them from the still photograph. The six videos are pure loops where the notion of length or runtime does not apply as the absence of any cuts renders their duration infinite. *Last Action Movie* is a variation on *Sentinels*, but also its opposite, and unfolds as a series of rapid-fire flashbacks, like hallucinatory fragments of a life lived elsewhere, made ironic by the monotony of the guard’s present occupation. In *Last Action Movie*, all “action” is displaced to the spoken word, to the realm of the heard rather than the seen.

# PHOTOINK

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In contrast, *A Speech in a Play Consisting Entirely of Stage Directions* immerses the viewer in a relentless inertia of movement. The strict horizontal movement of the camera invokes both the assembly line and the conveyor belt, while the orientation of the channels allows survey but no elaboration, like scenes glimpsed from a moving train. The work is particularly interested in the condition whereby a place exists only in and as image.

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Madhuban Mitra and Manas Bhattacharya are based in Kolkata and work together across a range of media including photography, video, animation and text. Mitra studied English Literature in Presidency College and the University of Calcutta, and holds a doctoral degree in Cultural Studies from the English and Foreign Language University, Hyderabad. After completing a Masters degree in Comparative Literature from Jadavpur University, Bhattacharya went on to study Cinematography from the Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute, Kolkata. They received the Skoda Breakthrough Artist Award, 2011 for their debut solo exhibition, *Through a Lens, Darkly* at Photoink, New Delhi, 2010-2011. Their photographic work has been shown in the Thessaloniki Photobiennale, Greece and the Singapore International Photography Festival, and their videos have been screened in public spaces worldwide in the *Art By Chance* festival, Crosstalk Video Art Festival, Isle of Wight Festival, and the International Film Festival Rotterdam. Their most recent shows include *Palimpsest*, Mumbai Art Room, 2013 and *Bright Noise*, Art Chennai 2014. Their work is part of the current exhibition, *Postdate: Photography and Inherited History in India* in the San Jose Museum of Art (on view till August 2015) and Ulrich Museum of Art, USA 2015 (September – December 2015). Currently, they are working on a new photographic project as a finalist of the GD4PhotoArt Award, Bologna, Italy, which will be part of an exhibition curated by Urs Stahel at the MAST Museum, Bologna, Italy in October 2015. The exhibition coincides with and is part of the FotoIndustria biennale.