

## Flash back



COURTESY MADHUBAN MITRA AND MANAS BHATTACHARYA/PHOTOINK

**The creoo of time** An image from "Temps Morte"

A photographic exploration shows that India's first camera factory was not abandoned when it shut shop, says **Shweta Upadhyay**.

A tripod stalks into a room where a collection of cameras lies on a table. It puts one on as its head, and in a cartoon motion, hovers around the factory precincts rearing to shoot the clutter of machines. But it always retracts at the climactic moment of taking the photograph. In this animation, called "Phantom camera", Madhuban Mitra and Manas Bhattacharya reflect on their own struggle to photograph the photography machine, and its industrial ecology, as they crumble into dust.

Mitra and Bhattacharya's show at Photoink, *Through a Lens, Darkly*, literally explores the defunct factory in Jadavpur, Kolkata that produced India's first "national" camera. The firm National Instruments Limited was supposed to be the producer of India's first "indigenous" camera (disregarding the fact that it was actually a rip-off of the Regula Sprinty BC made by German

company King KG). The National 35 was part of a wave of nationalised production schemes that unfolded through the '70s. But like many other public sector undertakings, NIL had to shut shop in the late '80s, while it was developing the National Reflex 2000, which would have become India's first indigenous SLR. At least 2,000 workers were driven to take voluntary retirement. In January 2009, the factory was handed over to the Jadavpur University to establish a new campus.

Before renovating the factory, however, the University invited Mitra and Bhattacharya to shoot the plant. The collection of their photographs and animations in *Through a Lens, Darkly* captures the relics of the factory caught in a Miss-Havisham-like time warp. Its chambers and niches are crammed with leftovers of workers' daily life, bric-a-brac like love letters, pamphlets and hanging shirts. These are portrayed in the series "Archaeology of Absence". You almost feel like the workers might

return the next day to carry on their interrupted routines.

The literal interruption of time is the theme of the second series, "Temps Morte", which uses the leitmotif of wall-clocks from the NIL factory. In one photograph, a vintage picture of goddess Kali, decorated with plastic flowers, hangs on a dank wall with peeling plaster that makes patterns like cauliflowers. On a lower shelf, medicine bottles and jars are kept, but despite this mundane façade, an eerie atmosphere is communicated by the dead clock that looks like a Stoic with a stiff moustache.

"Fluctuations", part of the artists' series of video animations, studies the objects lying around the camera laboratory lit by a fluctuating bulb – the mis-ensemble mimicking a tragic theatre tableau. The trembling light evokes prophecies of doom made against a lightning-cut sky, another reflection on the fate of the National 35. *Through a Lens, Darkly* is ongoing at Photoink. See *Photography in Listings*.

## How to use this section

Galleries and other venues are listed by geographical region. Exhibition listings also include information on related activities. Listings relating to photography, contests and workshops are at the end of the section. Events include student shows, lectures, performances and screenings. Admission for all art venues is **FREE** unless otherwise stated. Venues are shut on public holidays, unless otherwise stated. \* denotes critic's choice. ⊕ denotes the nearest Metro station, if applicable.

## If you want to be listed

Submit information by mail (*Time Out*, Plot No 82 Okhla Industrial Estate, Phase-III, New Delhi 110 020), by fax (4656-5733), or email ([listings@timeoutdelhi.net](mailto:listings@timeoutdelhi.net)) to Shweta Upadhyay. Include details of event, dates, times, address of venue, nearest Metro station, telephone and any entry fee. Send images (scanned to at least 300 dpi and at least 5" X 7" in size) to [timeoutart@gmail.com](mailto:timeoutart@gmail.com). *Time Out* is a fortnightly publication, appearing on the stands every other Thursday. **Deadline for information is a fortnight before publication.** Listings are free, but inclusion cannot be guaranteed due to limited space.

# Central

## American Centre

**Edwin Lords Weeks:** A show of paintings by Edwin Lord who came to India in 1800 and left a large pictorial legacy. From Wed Jan 12. *The American Centre, 24 Kasturba Gandhi Marg (2347-2000). Mon-Fri 8.30am-6pm, Sat 11am-6pm. ⊕ Rajiv Chowk. Please carry proof of identity.*

## Art Heritage

**Bodies that matter:** A solo show of pen and ink washes by Somnath Hore. From Fri Jan 14.

**Dimensions in Time and Space:** A group show by Raj More, Ali Akbar Mehta and Shally Mahajan. Until Mon Jan 10.

**Performing the Self:** A group show by artists including Bhupen Khakar, A Ramachandran, and Arpana Caur. From Fri Jan 14. *Triveni Kala Sangam, 205 Tansen Marg, Mandi House (2371-8833). ⊕ Mandi House. Mon-Sat 11am-7pm.*

## The Carpet Cellar

**Hadji Jalili revivals:** A collection of carpets inspired by the works of nineteenth-century Persian carpet weaver Hadji Jalili. It is a modern take on antique rugs decorated with gardens, hunting scenes and medallions. Also see *The Carpet Cellar* in South. Ongoing.