



Autopsy of the Great Indian Camera (above); The Archaeology of Absence on display at the exhibition

Death of the Camera

An exhibition in the Capital marks the demise of the National Camera Factory which existed in Kolkata

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"The strongest man in the world is he who stands alone" — these famous lines from playwright Henrik Ibsen's work are scrawled in chalk, on the peeling walls of the National Instruments Ltd in Jadavpur, Kolkata. Ironically these words appear almost like an RIP inscription for the factory where the National 35 camera, was once made. It now lies abandoned, ravaged by time and has been handed over to the the Jadavpur University in January 2009 for establishing a

vision of national factories that didn't quite realise itself," says Mitra, 37, who holds a doctorate in Cultural Studies. "We shot in colour using a digital camera specifically for this reason, so that we did not come up with romantic black-and-white images that would be read a certain way," adds Bhattacharya, 33, who studied cinematography in the Satyajit Ray Film & Television Institute, Kolkata.

The duo spent six months at the factory documenting this slow decay and transition and have come away with some riveting close studies captured with a Nikon Digital. The exhibition is divided into series of still images that form a loose narrative, while four animation films made from the still images document the play of light in the



new campus. Much of its locked interiors seem to have been caught in a time warp and Madhuban Mitra and Manas Bhattacharya, two photographers, give us a ringside view of the factory in this state of slow decay and transition. Their collaborative exhibition *Through A Lens, Darkly*, is currently on at Photoink Gallery in Jhandewalan.

"Our approach is intentionally not nostalgic, ruing the death of the National Instruments Ltd. In fact, we are unpacking the idea of nostalgia in this exhibition, questioning the idea of the 'National Camera' as a symbol of the Nehruvian

labyrinth of ruins.

One section showcases time worn images of Indira Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore and Christ plastered on the blistered walls of the factory; another, abandoned machinery, camera parts and work desks that have been left as if its workmen would return. "The factory shut down in stages. Now there is no one left and yet the human presence lingers. We are lucky to have got a chance to document this moment before everything changes," remarks Mitra.

The exhibition is on till February 12. For details, call 28755940