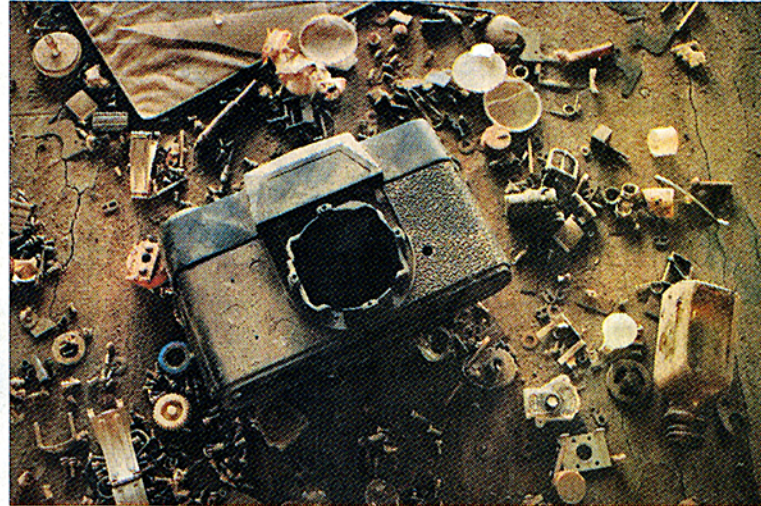


Still moments, forgotten factory



the factory. It's a real mystery why these people left these personal belongings when the factory shut shop," says Mitra.

Apart from the photographs, the exhibition also displays photo-based animation work. One shows a moving exhaust fan and the other

Venue: Photoink, MGF Hyundai Building, Ground Floor, 1 Jhandewalan, New Delhi.
Dates: Till February 12, 2011
Timing: 11am-7pm

From the series, *The Archaeology of Absence*

COURTESY: MADHUBAN MITRA AND MANAS BHATTACHARYA

Autopsy of the Great Indian Camera

COURTESY: MADHUBAN MITRA AND MANAS BHATTACHARYA

SABA SIDDIQUI

The capital is playing host to a unique photo exhibition that poses questions about the decisions taken on the way to India's brave new economic dawn. The nationalisation of industry has had a number of positive effects, but it has also left a legacy of locked up and abandoned factories that have been ravaged by time. *Through A Lens, Darkly* is a collection of photographs and photo-animation by pho-

tographers Madhuban Mitra and Manas Bhattacharya. These photos capture the ruins of India's first and only still camera factory, National Instruments Ltd. in Jadavpur, Kolkata.

This factory produced National 35, the only 35mm still camera ever manufactured in India, but it was shut down after a few years because it was running into losses. "In the late 1980s, the company dissolved its workforce and it was declared a sick industry. And in 2009, it was even-

tually handed to the Jadavpur University to establish a new campus. Ironically, at the time of the shutdown, the factory was developing the National Reflex 2000, which would have become India's first SLR camera, but unfortunately that never happened," says Bhattacharya.

When Jadavpur University decided to renovate the factory, they struck upon the idea of inviting Mitra and Bhattacharya to document how time and weather had slowly taken their toll. This factory

is actually one of the oldest in India, beginning life in 1830 as an industrial space where the Survey Department in British India would make mathematical instruments.

These are haunting pictures, stark images that provide a glimpse of the silent and eerie world the factory is today. There are pictures of dusty broken camera shells, spare parts, and debris.

"Since it shut down, we've been perhaps the first ones to enter the factory premises. It was a bit scary initially. Two

things that struck us instantly was a 5 feet cardboard cut-out of the National Reflex 2000 camera (which was about to be released) and the personal belongings of the workers. Both seem to be caught in a time warp. We found a comb, a few pieces of clothing, a quotation of Henrik Ibsen on the switch-boards ("The strongest man in the world is he who stands alone"), a book on Soviet literature, and tucked inside a small cupboard, a love letter written by an employee to someone working in

captures the rays of sunshine amidst its ruins.

"We were given full freedom to use whatever medium we wished to. But since this place is linked to the history of the still-camera, we opted to click stills. The photo-animation have been made by clicking a lot of pictures at a high speed and then merging them to show light and wind playing visual illusions on the broken assembly tables," says Mitra.

Bhattacharya concludes poetically: "In a way, the photographs and animations are the last images of a shipwreck."