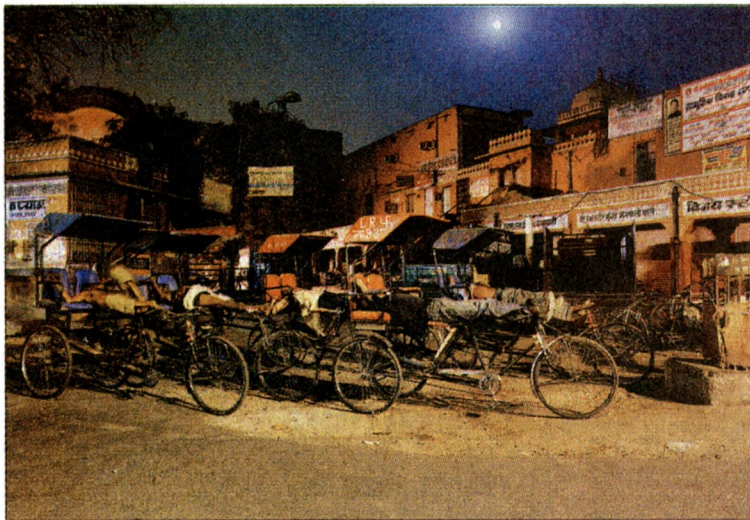


THE NIGHT'S NARRATIVE

Dhruv Malhotra trains his lens on sleeping figures

COURTESY: DHURUV MALHOTRA/PHOTOINK



Two of the 41 works on display at the exhibition

PALLAVI CHATTOPADHYAY

DARKNESS has always held a fascination for me,” says Dhruv Malhotra, 27, a chronic insomniac who has often wandered the streets of Goa, Delhi, Pune and Mumbai at night to unravel what is concealed in the shadows. Night after night, he has taken his Mamiya 6X7 camera and a tripod to photograph people sleeping on streets, taxis, parks, pavements, shacks and construction sites. A bunch of these images make up his latest solo exhibition, “Sleepers”.

With 41 works on display, Malhotra has captured the silence of the night — making rickshaw-pullers, construction labourers and taxi driv-

ers the protagonists of his narrative. “People sleeping under the open skies is so common in India,” says Malhotra, who studied economics at Mumbai University. “Sleepers” was born out of his 2007 project, “Noida Soliloquy”, when he travelled through the streets and parks of Noida and stumbled upon several sleeping figures. Soon, he travelled beyond Noida to photograph “sleepers”.

Among his various untitled works are photographs of taxi drivers sleeping atop the boot of their taxis in Mumbai, rickshaw-pullers sleeping on seats of their rickshaws and a man sleeping covered with a sheet on a pavement in Goa. Often while photographing, people would wake up — once can recognise these moments as the figure in the photo appears blurred and hazy.

But photographing at night comes with its share of challenges. For instance, Malhotra was once surrounded by four drunk men in the middle of the night, who tried to run him down with their bikes. He escaped with the help of a pepper spray that he always carries for safety.

After his late night shooting spree, Malhotra packs his bag every morning at 5 am and heads back home, and sleeps for five hours. “I think that much is more than enough to recharge the body,” he says.

“Sleepers” is on display at Photoink gallery, Jhandewalan, till March 2.

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