

TRANSIENTS

SHEETAL MALLAR

— Photographic Works —

November - December 2019

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ART MUSINGS

Sheetal Mallar finds her subjects in varied locales, each suggestive of the seesaw between buoyant dream and gritty actuality, a glittering past and a bleak future. If photography is, literally, the act of 'writing with light', Mallar shows us how it can also be the act of writing with shadow and darkness, penumbra and eclipse. Mallar's protagonists – her human subjects as much as the environments she so memorably records – occupy a precarious threshold between the powers of vitality and the forces of extinction. She frames her figures and tableaux, often, in the detritus of a transitory city, bathed in an unearthly green light, the residual light of a time exposure. Is it a studio set being broken down; or the next scene being readied in the theatre of metropolitan life? Mallar crafts her pictorial narrative through a poetics of allusion, working with asides, stories told *sotto voce*, intriguing traces. In the process, she explores the sets of a noir thriller that recreates World War II Calcutta, its compositions of violence, its behind-the-scenes levity. She traverses the ruins of a fire-ravaged film studio, with decades' worth of memorabilia charred, blowing in the wind. Discreetly, she enters video parlours that cater to a drifting population of workers fresh from villages and small towns, holding on to fantasy even as labour grinds them down. Mallar's camera can glide through the home of a family that specialized in producing horror movies, their everyday domestic reality as much a homage to the spectral and the grotesque as their scenography had been. Beneath these outward and visible subjects – ephemeral spaces and evanescent trades, aftermaths and afterlives – Mallar's constant theme is transience. Encountering her protagonists, we recognize them, as well as ourselves, to be transients: creatures of passage afforded a brief leasehold by the cycle of time.

**Ranjit Hoskote**



































































## SHEETAL MALLAR (1974, Mumbai)

Sheetal Mallar is a contemporary Indian photographer. In her work, she has focused on the delicate, unspoken relationships that bind people to places, and on the layers of active and latent signals by which individuals signal their identity and aspirations. She has developed an extended portraiture of various urban subcultures and professional groups, exploring the tension between the individual personality and the collective context. Several of her ongoing projects engage with the culture, topography and narratives of popular Indian cinema. Mallar's photographic work has appeared in Architectural Digest, Motherland, Verve and Invisible Photographer Asia, among other publications and platforms. It has been exhibited in Goa Photo and the Terra di Cinema Festival, Sicily. 'Transients' is Mallar's first solo exhibition.



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