

EXPERIMENTER
2010 – 2011

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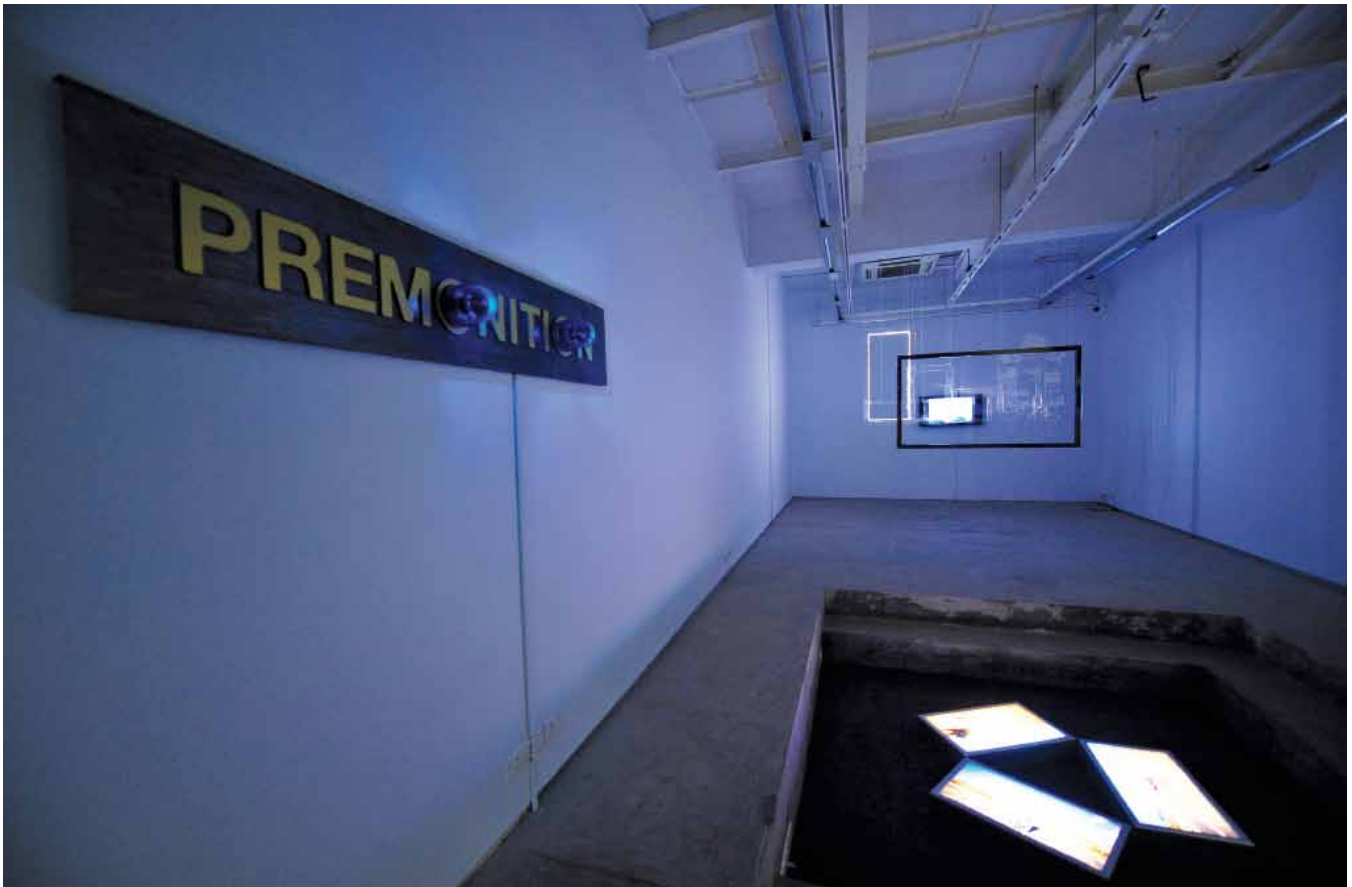
PREMONITION

They called it the Twentieth Century (from "The Impostor in the Waiting Room"), Digital Video on a loop, 14 mins, Ed of 3, 2004

RAQS MEDIA COLLECTIVE
February 4 – March 26, 2011







Premonitory Machines

When a collective interacts with a space one expects that a machine should result: an exhibition machine. The products of this spatio-temporal machine are not just artworks but the movement and stasis of spectators themselves. In producing, this machine only seems smoothly functioning yet is itself disjointed—and so must be its products. Seemingly free in having entered this gallery without coercion, the automatons that we call the subjects of spectating similarly are exposed and divided by this exhibition apparatus in the to-and-fro of their scopical functioning. As outside in society, so inside an exhibition.

So at the entrance, the emergency that introduces and runs through the exhibition is continually announced as the steady state of premonition, even though “emergency lights flicker away a wasting sense of urgency.” From the start, the swirling lights of Premonition make us tread warily.

The exhibition then offers two paths, but they are not easy or assured. The one straight ahead with a terminus in view rather is an obstacle course. In order to move ahead we need watch our step as we encounter pitfalls. The first challenge is one of Auto Measure. Are the three sunken photographic light boxes—one of a donkey, another of a surveyor, the last of a tripod—a rebus for the Raqs Media Collective itself with its three members? No, but we are met there in this sandy desert scene with the age-old auto-referring question of identity that the Sphinx (not a Yaksha) riddled: “What walks on four feet in the morning, two in the afternoon and three at night?” Passing this test in the light of high noon is no success if time itself is riddled. More than just triangulated between its tenses of past, present, and future, time itself is fractured. Premonition haunts time and disrupts its unbroken smooth flow forward. Progress is not (self)-assured. Time here rather is achronological. The future that beckons us with its fluctuating video glare from the far wall of the gallery is not what was past promised by the progress of history.

Thus we move on wending our way toward this flickering light as if through a mirage, not of images but of their absence, past empty translucent Plexiglas frames that drip their décor as if the entropic waste of a depleted forest. We are conveyed forward, fuel to the fire of industry’s cauldron, but we find wasting technology having preceded us as if an advancing Birnam wood had upset capital’s logic there. For a tree grows from the desuetude chimney of a derelict Kolkata jute factory, the pixilated animation of its bewitching foliage having supplanted the semaphore smoke signals testifying to onward and upward industrial production [(Landscape at Baranagar, Factored for) Déjà Vu and Distance].

The future took a turn that idled this factory; history was provenance with no progeny for its haunted shell. The present is only a haunted intersection of an occluded past and a failed future. And so we veer from this ruin, which is now a monument to a different order of time than its genesis, to turn around to the second exhibition path, down that oblique other corridor. Perhaps we should have been warned already by Auto Measure that the future was not forward, warned by its void that the triangulated third produces a swerve instead. Onward is ever wayward.

We are caught once more by some other dubious image, by an odd performance of images, at its end. Yet getting there, in transit down that corridor past other works, do we know that we are scanned by these images as much as we scan them passing by? X-rayed to the bone in We the Fuel. All that is solid may melt in the air but here spectrographic metrics measure another grinning countenance. No neutral mug shot gaze, a grimace is all we leave behind—a residue more resistant than rusting factory steel.

The end is a mug's game, though. In a room named after a century, a protagonist mugs before us trying out faces and costumes, but whether as a simpleton or thug we do not know [They Called it the Twentieth Century (from "The Impostor in the Waiting Room")]. They called it the twentieth century but it was only a waiting game. Maybe a costume foretelling future performance is a key to unlock the crypt of its beckoning. Departure beckons like the chimney beacon forestalling us once again in a waiting room. Stationary though seemingly destined, we rest there in this antechamber to modernity, waiting for, anticipating, even expecting our eventual entry into history. Colonials of one stripe or another, we wait for departure in this dead end room with no exit.

"The image of the 'waiting room' gestures towards the sense of incompleteness and elsewhere-ness that fills those spaces of the world about which the overriding judgment is that they are insufficiently modern—that they are merely patchy, inadequate copies of 'somewhere else'. Such waiting rooms exist in the very heart of that 'somewhere else'—in New York and Los Angeles, in London and Singapore—but it is outside these islands that they have their truest extent. Most of the world, in fact, inhabits such antechambers of modernity. We know such antechambers well; we are at home in them, everywhere."

The Raqs Media Collective is no key to the departure door, its members no gatekeepers. Impostors then? No, not performers themselves like the man in the video but tellers of our tales, travelling where thought must go. For them this exhibition is a way station as they move on, while for us it is a waiting room. Time for us in this waiting room and exhibition space is durational, merely situational, whereas the time of the work there is fractured. To take on the time of the work would be our task, not fated but faced with its haunting facets reordering our histories into other premonitions.

Philip Monk
2011

Philip Monk (Toronto, Canada) is a curator, critic and writer. He is currently director of the Art Gallery of York University, Toronto. Recent exhibitions there include Daniel Barrow: Emotional Feelings (2010); The 1984 Miss General Idea Pavillion (2009); Jennifer Marman and Daniel Borins: Project for a New American Century (2009); and Saskia Olde Wolbers (2008). He was previously curator of contemporary art at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, and curator at The Power Plant, Toronto. He has published extensively; his monographs include: *And while I have been lying here perfectly still: The Saskia Olde Wolbers Files* (AGYU, Toronto, 2009); *Disassembling the Archive: Fiona Tan* (AGYU, Toronto, 2008); *Stan Douglas (DuMont, Cologne, 2006)*; *Spirit Hunter: The Haunting of American Culture by Myths of Violence: Speculations on Jeremy Blake's Winchester Trilogy* (AGYU, Toronto, 2005); and *Double-Cross: The Hollywood Films of Douglas Gordon* (The Power Plant and AGYU, Toronto, 2004).

Premonition

Sometimes, not even the insistent repetition of phenomena finds you prepared for the uncanny tug of premonition. Premonition: the anticipatory call of things forever about to happen. Even if nothing happens. Even if the emergency lights flicker away a wasting sense of urgency.

But he, who acts, always prepares. The impostor in the waiting room tries his own patience, working things out an epoch at a time. A beast becomes a god becomes an injury becomes a peasant becomes a prisoner becomes a worker becomes a corpse becomes an unbuttoned policeman and a ledger and a gentleman in a bowler hat. The actor had a script. The script had a name. They called it the twentieth century.

The surveyor reads a landscape like an actor trying out his lines. A camera takes an exposure. A photographer attempts to leave the picture. A beast of burden crosses the road. And then it all happens again. You rehearse a reading between tenses. Past continuous, present imperfect, future tense. You triangulate time. But what load can you carry between times? You gauge your own measure. Self-Timer, Auto-Measure.

The picture is a mirage in the desert of the now. A thing made of vapour and thirst that hangs over the horizon. A loop caught repeating itself endlessly, like a premonition that is also a memory that is also a warning that is also a moment of reflection. Like a mirror that is also smoke. Empty frames that show you nothing but déjà vu. Have you factored for Déjà vu and Distance at Baranagar?

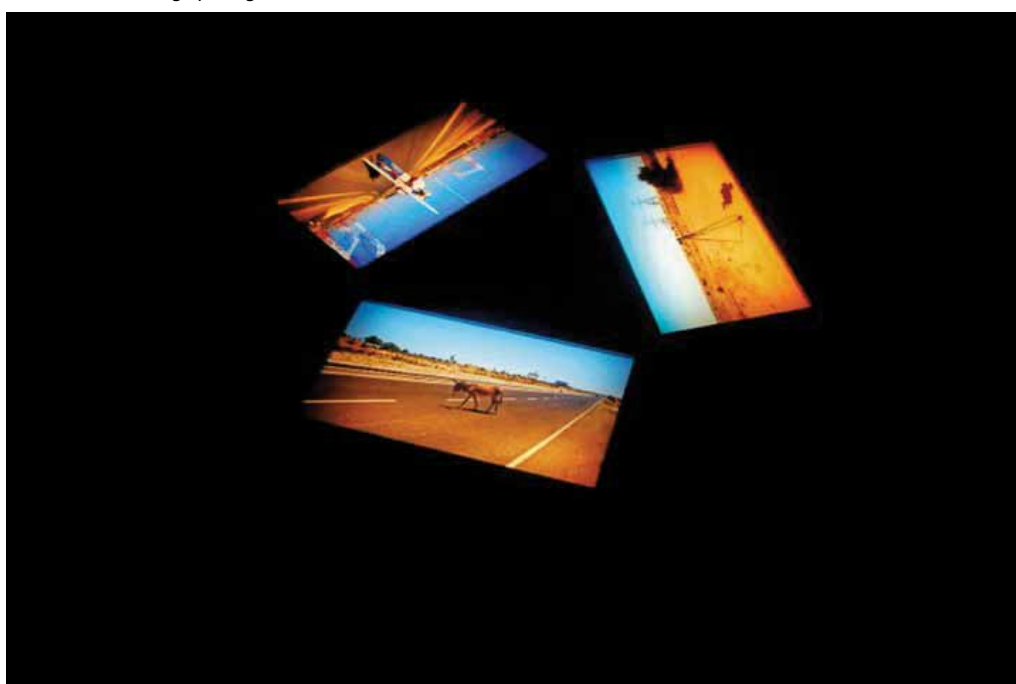
A chimney once sent out a smoke semaphore foretelling a cancelled future. A furnace once burnt fuel. We are the fuel. Sleeping under tons of earth like the ghost of a forest, waiting for prospectors with toothy grins. Meanwhile, a tree rehearses an industrial occupation. Macbeth is the manager of the jute mill. He came from Dundee to Baranagar to feed the furnace. The tree growing out of the chimney is just a signal, resolving itself into eternity. He knows the forest will defeat him, eventually. Premonition reigns.

Raqs Media Collective
2011

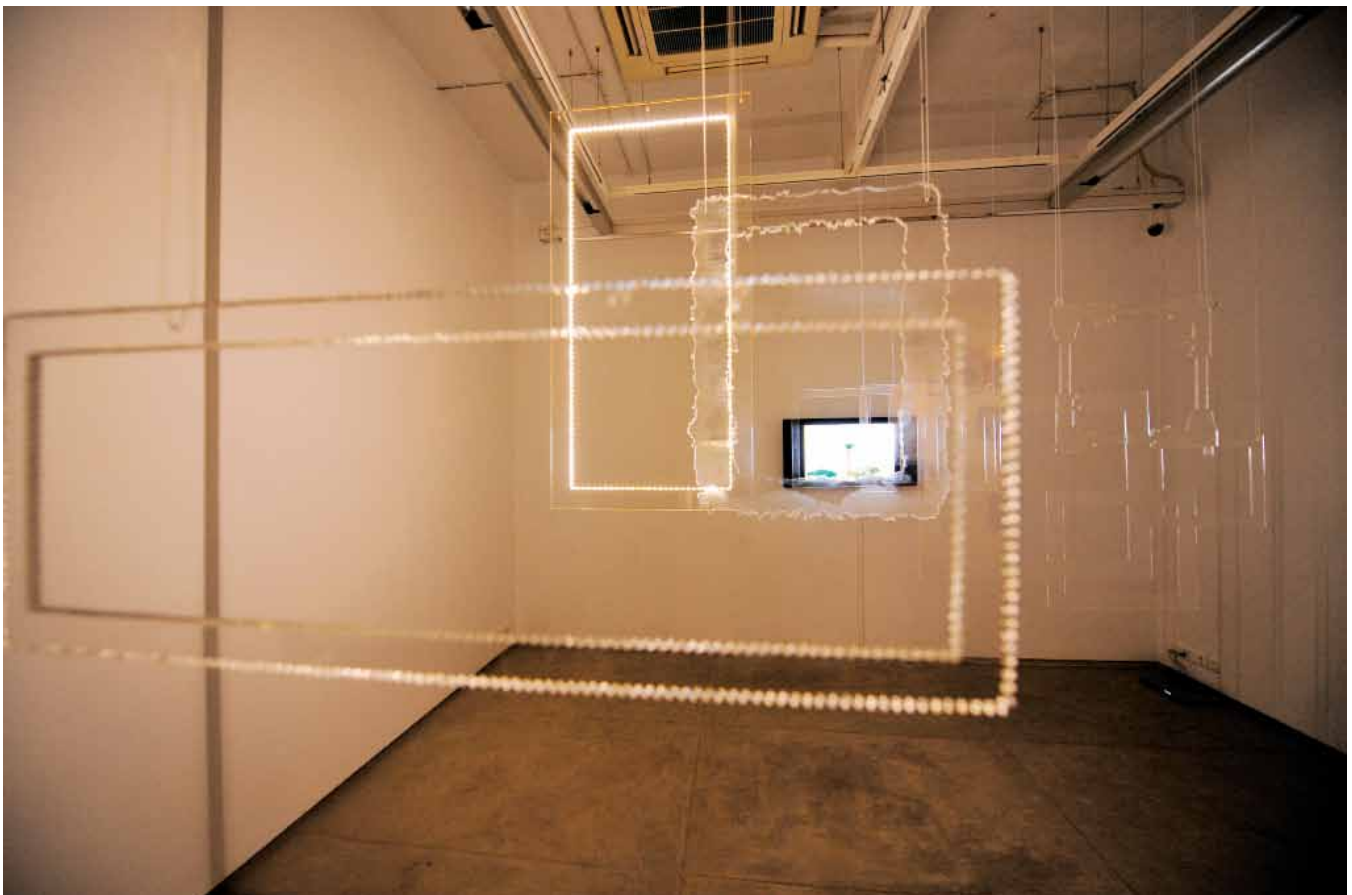
Landscape at Baranagar, Factored for Déjà Vu and Distance (Installation view), Variable acrylic frames suspended in mid air, LED and single channel video, Installation dimensions variable, Non-edited, 2011



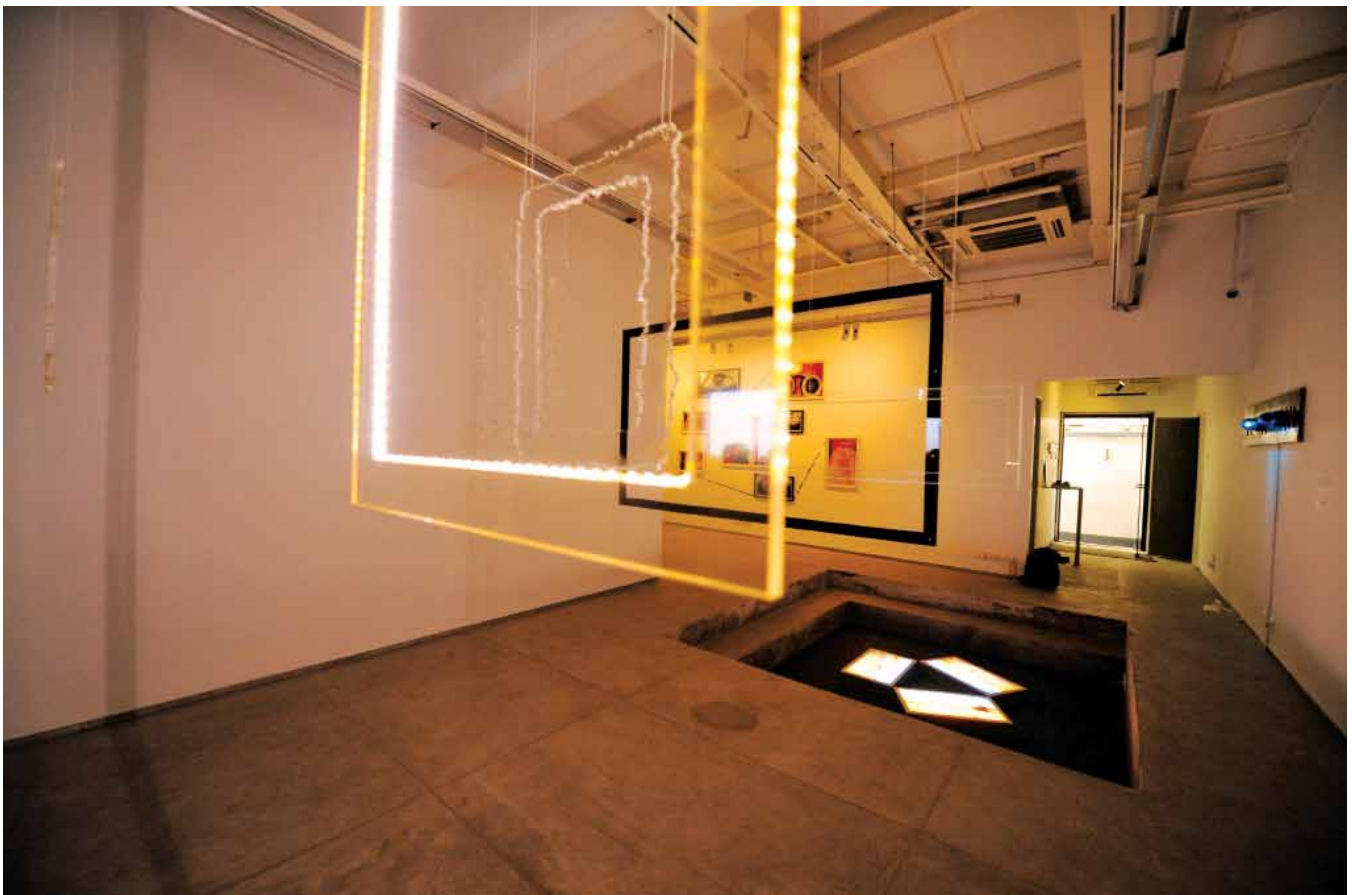
Automeasure, Photographic lightboxes, 26.5 in x 4 in x 16 in each, Ed of 3, 2011



Landscape at Baranagar, Factored for Déjà Vu and Distance (Installation view), Variable acrylic frames suspended in mid air, LED and single channel video, Installation dimensions variable, Non-edited, 2011



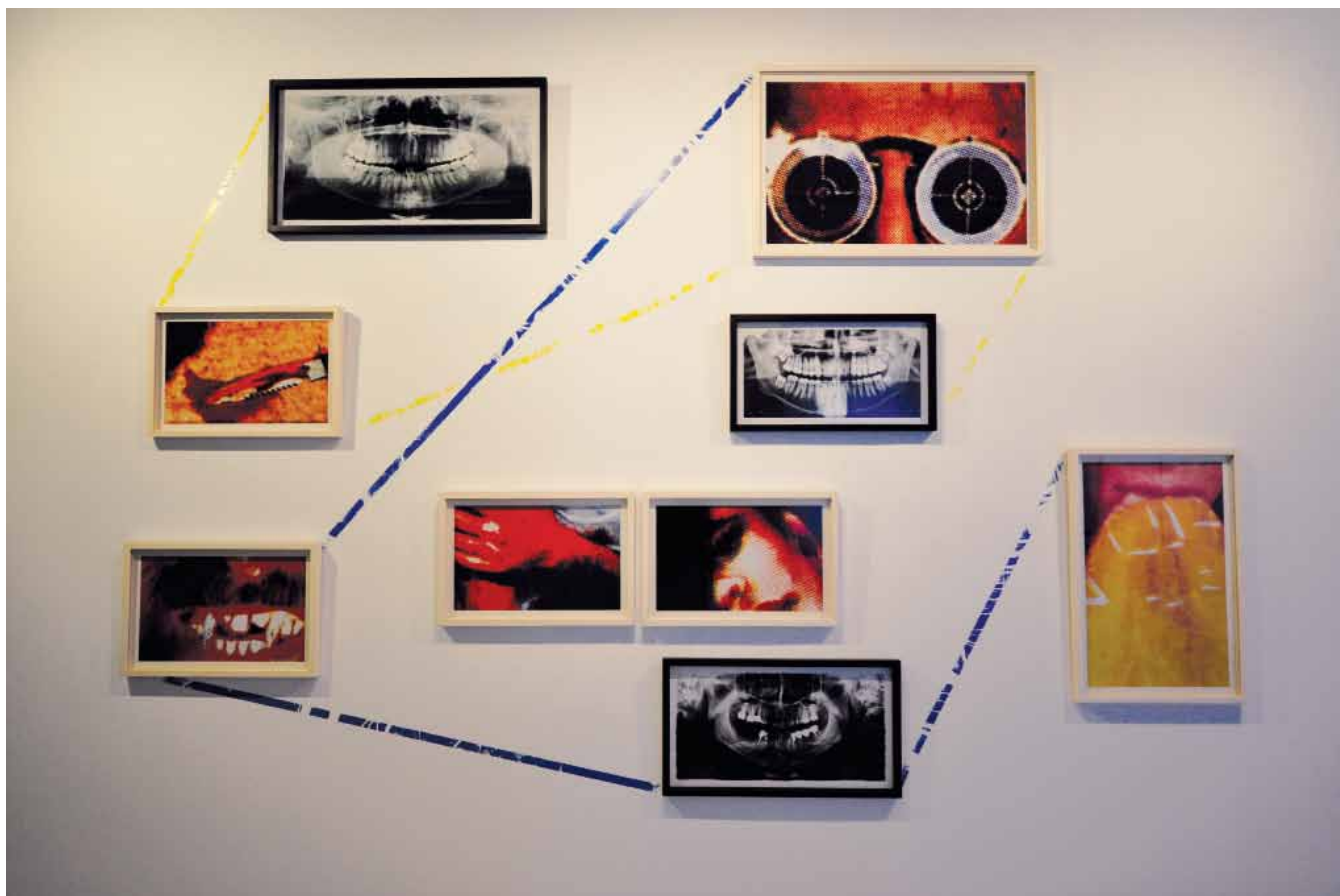
Landscape at Baranagar, Factored for Déjà Vu and Distance (Installation view), Variable acrylic frames suspended in mid air, LED and single channel video, Installation dimensions variable, Non-edited, 2011



Premonition, Aluminium composite panel, revolving lights, metal sheet, 71 in x 14 in x 2 in, Ed of 3 (1 AP), 2011



We The Fuel (Installation view), Digital Lambda prints interconnected by colored wall tapes, Variable sizes, Set of 9 images, Ed of 5, 2011



Commissioned and published by
Experimenter Contemporary Art, Kolkata, 2010 – 2011
www.experimenter.in

Catalog Design: Letterpress

Photography: Amarnath Dutta, Vipul Sangoi, Monica Narula and Prateek Raja

Communication Design: Olive Design – Hemal Kapadia and Priyanka Dutta
www.olivedesign.in

Print: Pragati Offset Pvt. Ltd.

Text © 2010 – 2011 Experimenter & various contributors

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