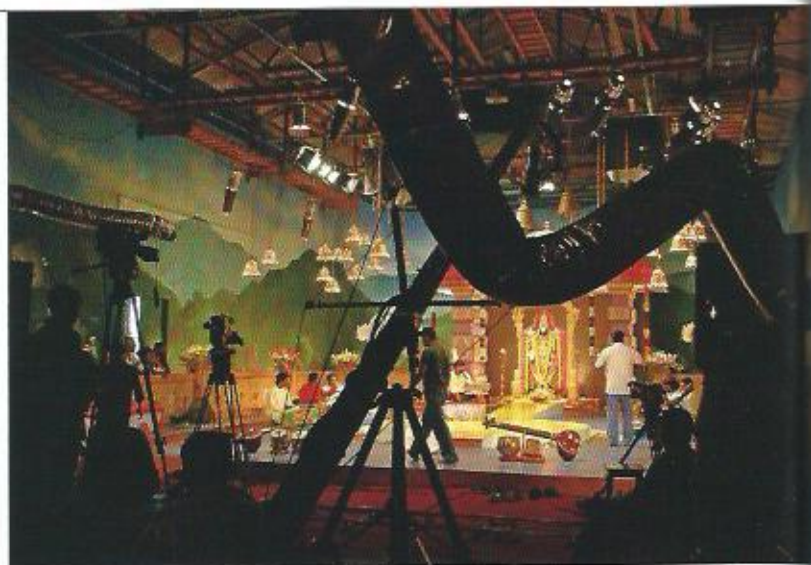


PAST CONTINUOUS

An exhibition of Clare Arni's photographs, titled *Disappearing Professions of Urban India*, was held at Tarq, a new gallery in Mumbai, from the 1st of March to the 7th of April. The 50 images on view, supplemented by Oriole Henry's notes, captured moments and spaces as they slipped into our collective past.

Arni excels when she trains her lens on architectural elements and inconspicuous setting details, moving away from predictable portraits of individuals amidst the tools of their disappearing professions. Images like *Drawers in Unani Pharmacy*, *Drying Ledgers* and *Ramchandrapa's Loom* stand out for their arresting composition. The row of violins in *Mondal and Sons* is equally compelling – the dust-covered instruments in the foreground of this photograph hint at a faltering struggle against neglect. And a single fluttering flag in *Bombil Fish Drying on Bamboo at Madh Island* brings to mind a besieged outpost of the past making one last stand against the forces of urbanisation. Rather than merely evoking pity or superficial nostalgia, Arni's images demand thoughtful engagement with contemporary predicaments.

A number of photographs linger on in your memory: a view of empty tables in an Irani restaurant in Mumbai, a shot of the imposing interiors of The Coffee House in Kolkata, and a stunning look at the interiors of the AVM Studios in Chennai, among others. However, they also raise questions about the exhibition's theme: Are these 'disappearing' professions or merely evolving ones? Indeed, some images expertly capture transitional moments, with both the old and the new in the same frame. *Hand-pulled Rickshaw* is one example, where the cycle rickshaw, the subject's replacement, is visible in the background. Perhaps a title like 'Disappearing *sights* from Urban India' would have done greater justice to the breadth of Arni's work.



Clare Arni. *AVM Studios (Est. 1948)*. Digital print on canvas. 24" x 36". 2008.