

For Immediate Release

KASHMIR

Photographs by Amit Mehra

Opening reception on Saturday 3rd November, 2012.

On view until 12th January, 2013.

Gallery hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 11 AM – 7 PM. Closed on national holidays.

Photoink is pleased to present the exhibition, *Kashmir*, a series of photographs by Amit Mehra. Between 2006 and 2011, Amit Mehra visited Kashmir twenty-five times and only photographs from the last two years of that period were selected for this exhibition. For any photographer in Kashmir, it is hard to ignore the complex political narratives of the separatist movement and the insurgency that followed. Most of the images we've seen in the past two decades were made to service the written word, which demanded images of protest, trauma, death, funerals and evidence of state oppression. For Amit Mehra, this was both a dilemma and a trap. Was it possible to make a different kind of photograph, which was introspective and not illustrative? Could the anguish and pain of two decades, and perhaps more, be expressed without repeating what had been seen before? Was it possible to represent Kashmir without photographing the presence of the security forces and yet be able to suggest what it was like to live under constant surveillance? These were some of the questions, which preoccupied Amit Mehra during his travels in Kashmir.

This exhibition of photographs of contemporary life in Kashmir is vastly different from the expected. The streetscapes and landscapes are devoid of drama and imbued with stillness and silence. Very often, it's a disconcerting silence. The pace of the passersby on the streets is hurried and people are engrossed in their thoughts. Amit Mehra rarely uses the confrontational approach to make portraits and instead obscures one's view of people by photographing through windowpanes, cars etc. It is hard to ignore the distance he creates between himself and the people he photographs. Perhaps the diffidence he felt as an outsider was a way to shelter his subjects from sharper scrutiny. Or perhaps this was one way of presenting the emasculated individual caught in the battle between the state machinery and the insurgency.

Another notable aspect of this series is the unobtrusive presence of the photographer. He wandered through many streets and localities, which had witnessed extraordinary tumult and loss and the photographs are evocative of the fragile peace he discovered. Photographing in militarized zones as a street photographer is not common practice and being an outsider without spoken allegiances was therefore fraught with challenging situations. Yet Amit Mehra manages to invest in his photographs a quiet purpose which when viewed collectively have restraint and a touch a melancholy. One wonders then, how much the troubled conscience of the photographer comes to bear on the making of these photographs.

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BIOGRAPHY

Amit Mehra (b. 1967) has been photographing for over twenty years. In addition to editorial and advertising work, Amit Mehra has specialized in architectural photography. In 2003 came the landmark opportunity to photograph *Rashtrapati Bhawan* for the book, *Dome Over India*. Recipient of the award, *Best Photographer of the Year – Asia* in 2009 by the Sagamihara Museum, Japan for his book, *India, A Timeless Celebration*, Mehra has time and again demonstrated the ease with which he traverses different genres of photography. Photographs from this series are part of the collection of the Gabbaron Foundation, Spain and the Sagamihara Museum in Japan. Forthcoming in December 2012 is a publication of the book, *Kashmir* by Penguin. Amit Mehra is currently working on his next book project, *Sufis: Messengers of Peace*. He lives in New Delhi.

For high-resolution press images, please email Shweta Wahi at - contact@photoink.net

The exhibition photographs can be viewed on – www.photoink.net (November 3rd onwards).