

In the city, a library

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PRESS NOTE

The question:

What is a library? Is it a collection of books? Is it a collection of readers? Is it an interaction between books and readers? Is it that interaction posited against time?

It is now a commonplace to say that time is a thief. But its depredations leave books marked in many beautiful and uncommon ways. This is a photographic attempt to look into the heart of a library and to see how time ages that heart, how it works a certain elegiac magic on the pages of the book.

Stop for a moment then and look at the book. The book has a certain place in our civilisation. But no book is more than its contents, whether it's scripture or it's the Voynich manuscript that has resisted all attempts at breaking it.

But a rare book is much more than its words; it may never be read; it may never be opened even so as not to damage its spine. It may turn from book to fetish object and its fetishisation is an index, not of its cultural value, but its economic worth.

How then does one look at an old book?

How then does one look at an old library?

Chirodeep Chaudhuri and Jerry Pinto have collaborated on a show that looks at how time interacts with the book, how books respond to use. Can one divine the way a book has lived simply from looking at its pages, looking closely, looking respectfully?

And what are the questions that you have for libraries, for books, for the fate of the book and the fate of the library?

THE COLLABORATORS

Chirodeep Chaudhuri is the author of the critically acclaimed book *'A Village In Bengal: Photographs and an Essay'*, a result of his 13-year long-engagement with his ancestral village in West Bengal; India and his family's nearly two century old tradition of the Durga Puja. His most recent book *"With Great Truth & Regard: The Story of the Typewriter in India"* documents the history of the manual typewriter in India.

Often referred to as *the* 'chronicler of Bombay', Chirodeep's work documents the urban landscape. During his more than two-decade-long career he has produced diverse documents of his home city – Bombay – in a range of projects like *'Bombay Clocks'*, *'The One-Rupee Entrepreneur'* and *'The Commuters'* among others. His work has been featured in some of the most important publications about Bombay. He lives in Bombay dividing his time between a deepening engagement with image making and teaching assignments.

Jerry Pinto is a writer who lives and works in Mumbai. He is the author of *Em and the Big Hoom*, which won the Hindu Lit for Life Award, the Crossword Prize for Fiction, The Windham-Campbell Award administered by the Beinicke Library of Yale University, USA and the Sahitya Akademi award for a novel in English. He teaches journalism at SCM Sophia and serves on the boards of several organisations.