

NICKNAME AMBY

JOURNEYS THROUGH PAST, POWER, AND CLIMATE



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The project *Nickname Amby: Journeys Through Past, Power, and Climate* explores the history and symbolic meaning of the Hindustan Ambassador as a reflection of India's social, political, and ecological transformations. The project begins in Uttarpara near Kolkata, where the car was produced by Hindustan Motors from 1948 onward. As India's first integrated automobile factory, it embodied the industrial optimism of the early post-independence era. Its closure in 2014 and the planned redevelopment of the site in 2025 mark, at the same time, the failure of long-term technological renewal.

The Ambassador itself is a postcolonial hybrid. Technically derived from the British Morris Oxford, it was renamed Ambassador after independence — a title resonating with power, representation, and national confidence. The name, with its subtly ironic tone, acts as symbolic re-coding: a colonial inheritance transformed into a vehicle of postcolonial sovereignty.

For decades, the car was ubiquitous in India — as a government vehicle, middle-class family car, and most iconically as the yellow taxi navigating Kolkata's dense traffic. These taxis shaped the city's image, soundscape, and atmosphere.

Today, Kolkata ranks among India's most congested and polluted metropolises. Old, emission-heavy vehicles are being phased out and entire taxi fleets replaced. In this process, the Ambassador vanishes from the streets even as it attains cult status.

Hopes for a return as an electric car remain speculative; for now, it is being phased out of the streets. At the same time, Amby endures in memory, is photographed, recounted, and recreated — in my work, for instance, through a recreated model Amby, photographs of the last surviving taxis, and staged interventions in public spaces. In this way, the Ambassador becomes a symbol of a past that lingers in collective memory even as it disappears from everyday life — a representation of India, West Bengal, Kolkata, its people, and the traces of a life in transition.