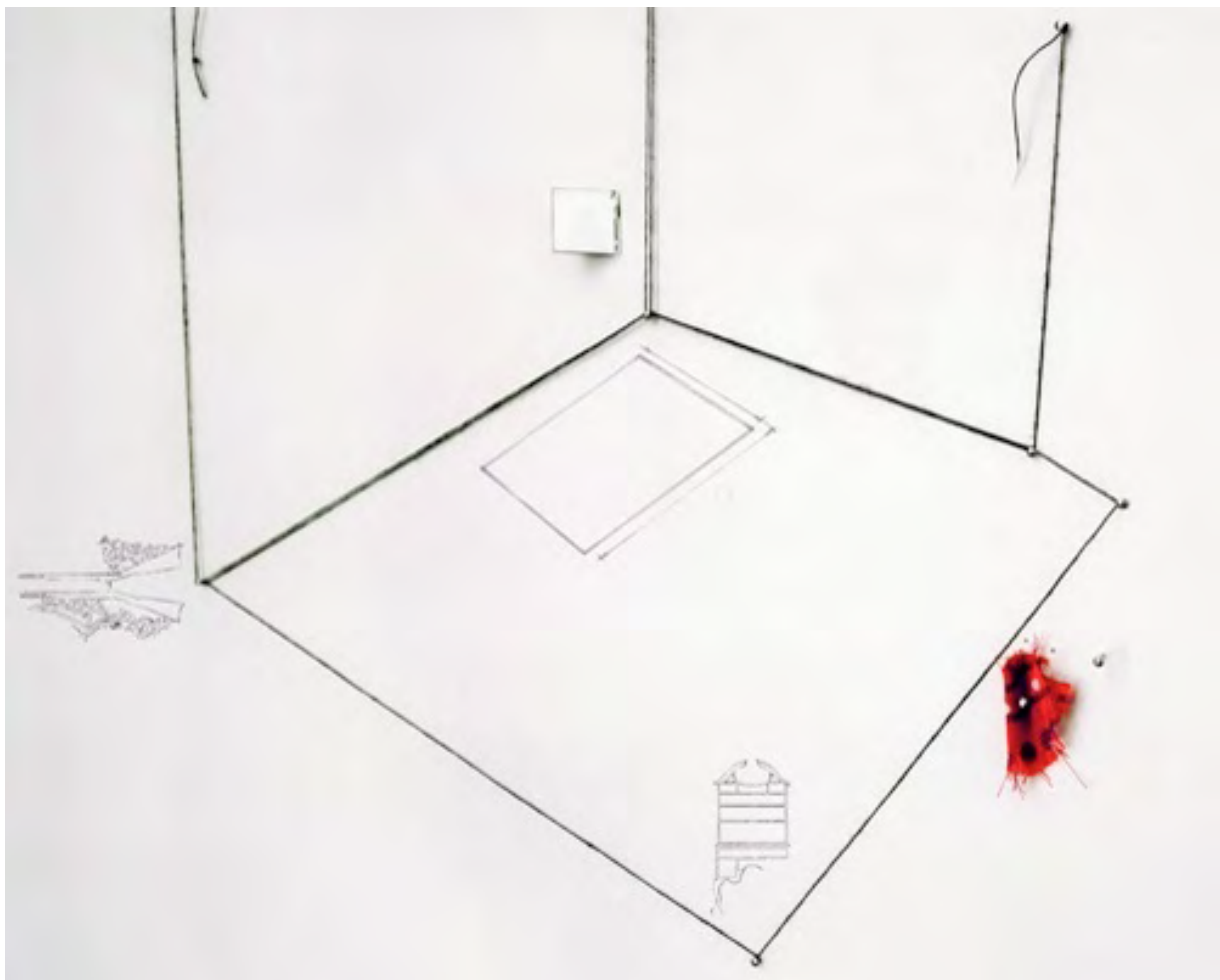


Thomas Erben Gallery

## Yamini Nayar

*Survey of works*  
2005 - 2024



*Untitled, 2005*  
C-print  
14 x 18 inches



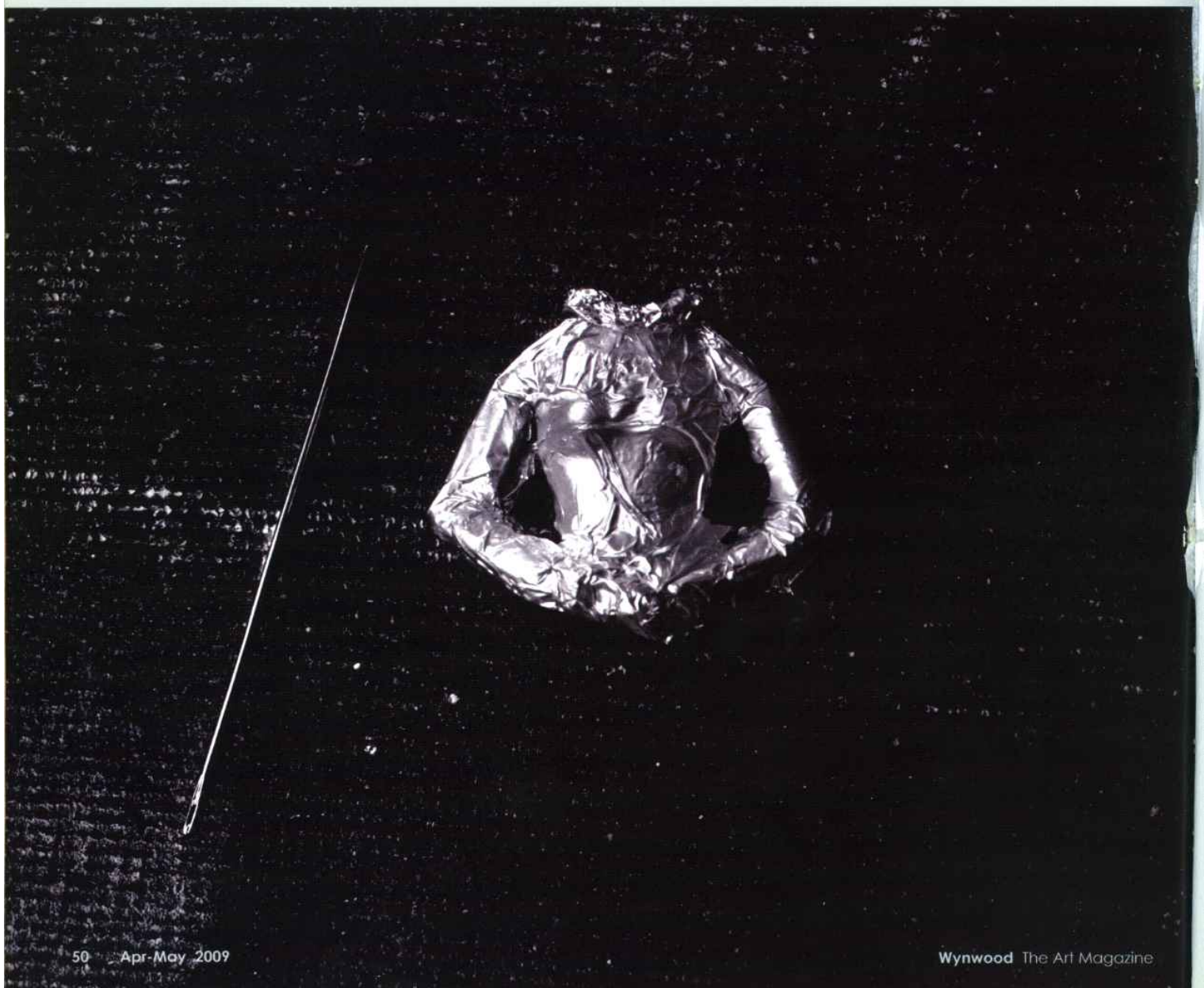
*The Splat was Seen in the In-Between*, 2005  
C-print  
20 x 24 inches

# Yamini Nayar

## Intimate Theater: A Soliloquy of Dislocations

By Sharmistha Ray

All images courtesy of the artist  
and Thomas Erben Gallery







Brooklyn-based visual artist Yamini Nayar creates photographs of constructed interior and exterior environments to reflect upon the location of identity vis-à-vis place in the cultural domain. Each of Nayar's environments starts with a three-dimensional model in the form of an architectural box made out of cardboard in which the artist places both handcrafted and found objects as well as images sourced from photographic archives and mass media. The items are disposable and made from tin foil, wire, plaster and wood, and once she photographs the setup (which she does with a large-format camera), she discards the box and its contents. The photographic image becomes a stand-in for reality and is the only evidence left of the original.

Nayar sets up complex situations that reveal a psychologically, multivalent condition. However, unlike the images of Thomas Demand (whose use of constructed models has been an influence on Nayar), Nayar's images never allude to real, existing spaces. Alternatively, they remain firmly planted within the vernacular of the imaginary. Whereas Demand recreates real spaces of cultural and political import with painstaking precision in order to reveal the artificiality of the original place, Nayar's models are deliberately shabby to deflect attention away from the specific nature of the thing. The edges and corners of her constructed rooms are left unfinished, the creases of the bent cardboard immediately apparent, revealing its true materiality as in *Note to Self* (2005-2006). In this work, a worn blue mattress lies carelessly in the corner of a room, its dejectedness further augmented by a solitary white teacup casting a shadow across the carpeted floor. The location of

the cup next to the mattress also suggests traces of human activity. There's no doubt that someone - most likely the photograph's author as suggested by the title - has passed through the frame. The diagram on the wall is like a secret message waiting to be decoded. Each element is significant, not for its mere presence, nor for its surface values, but for the subjective meanings it engenders.

Objects within the frame are always purposely out of proportion, exaggerated or diminished in relationship to each another in Nayar's setups. In *I Wish, Thank You* (2005-2006) the absurdity of proportion is obvious in the juxtaposition of two objects next to one another: a metallic bust which looks like it was truncated from a suit of armor and a stitching needle which is larger than it. The relationship between the two objects in the frame draws attention to the fact that both are constructed elements and points towards their internal dislocation. Objects are no longer objects; rather, they become points of departure. Be it a mattress, a teacup, its shadow, an old carpet, a drawing on the wall, a stitching needle or a suit of armor, every object and its placement in the frame becomes a signifier. Their surface imperfections belie an underlying network of meanings and allusions. Viewed in isolation, these objects are incomplete, even pathetic. Together, they form the bones of a narrative.

Nayar keeps the narrative loose and open-ended. In *Being There* (2005-2006), the room looks like the storage room of a rock concert. Two white pedestals stand in the back of the room joined together by a rack with hangers between them. Behind one pedestal, the head of a guitar peeks out





Note to Self (2005-2006)

and is partially obscured by a ceramic pot. A strange ornamental object hangs in the space. The walls are streaked and are punctured with nail holes. An entire wall is made up of mirrored fragments, reflecting the space and creating a kind of theatrical double. In a similar work, *What's Essential* (2005-2006), an odd mismatch of objects inhabits a square-tiled room with wood-board walls. This time, it looks like someone's living space. A densely patterned bench juts into the space atop of which rests an assortment of random sculptural objects. Next to the bench, on the ground, sits a blue (African?) sculptural head. Behind it, a blow-up, sepia-toned photograph of a parachutist and next to it, another gold ornamental object. A bronze bowl-shaped ornament hangs on the wall. The objects confound in their selection and placement. They suggest anomalous cultural roots, none of which are easily definitive or readily identifiable. A small blue African mask is out of sorts with a tall white abstract sculpture that is at odds with a faded war archive photograph of a parachutist, etc. The simultaneous disjuncture(s) projects a fragmented state of mind and invites subjective forms of introspection about identity.

Nayar's contexts are always bereft of people. Like a metteur-en-scène, she carefully positions props in a theater of

her own making. In *Speaking Room* (2005-2006), a block of wood acts as a conference table on top of which stands a lone microphone. Strewn around the room are an assortment of random objects like a cardboard box with a tin cup and saucer atop it. The walls are cracked, damaged and falling apart. One narrative possibility suggests that the room has been emptied of people post-conference. The reason for and outcome of the conference are purposely concealed, but there's an overt impression of decay. The aura of absence pervades the room. Was it a political conference? Where have all the people gone? The abstract element of time enters the frame. The real subjects of the photograph are those who are absent: the speechmakers and the listeners. Time stretches out, lapses and engulfs. Opposites meet and overlap. The image becomes a document of a stationary pause, the compressed space between presence and the lack of it. These spatial constructions lament the past, while lying in wait for the future. They are essentially spaces in transition.

In *Luck is the Residue of Design* (2007), Nayar breaks the linear dimensions of the room and creates a geometric abstraction to contain her objects. Tin foil cups, a low wooden table and electrical wires are strewn across the





Above: Speaking Room (2005-2006)

Left: What's Essential (2005-2006)







Underfoot and Overhead (2008)

marble-tiled floor. The walls are disintegrating and on the left wall close to the floor is what looks like a defunct electrical socket. The metaphor of space as a container for meaning rather than a physical entity is embodied here. Perspective is manipulated and foreshortening exaggerated to create a dynamic spatial condition. The eye is led to an open window at the end of the room that opens out, not to an exterior view, but to another wall. Nayar constructs like a deft storyteller, embellishing with details, but never superfluous. In this work more than any other, the formal and narrative elements synergize to create a psychologically dense situation that is utterly claustrophobic. In doing this, Nayar shuts down meaning. The objects cease to be even signifiers. The possibility for meaning is erased, and the viewer is left with just the boundaries of the room to contemplate. In a more recent work *Underfoot and Overhead* (2008), she breaks this space one step further. Taking its title from a Rudyard Kipling poem, this work is located in an external environment suggested only by a skinny branch with leaves that adorns the side of a rickety wooden staircase leading into a darkened, unknown room.

Nayar's preoccupation with identity and place can be located in her own personal history. Of Indian parentage, she was born and raised in the United States and she moved with her

family to Detroit when she was five years old. Her family retained their ties to India and as a result Nayar traveled frequently to Kerala and New Delhi to visit relatives. This early exposure to culturally diagrammatic worlds informed Nayar's viewpoint about cultural idioms, as well as her own ambivalence in the face of them. Her setups are like riddles. Objects are drawn from a variety of sources that are local and global, personal and public, to demarcate spaces that are entirely hybrid in nature. Nayar encourages viewers to step inside these frames, using signifiers as entry points, to create their own narratives, stories and journeys. She never gives away the plot. (Nayar, who holds a B.F.A. from the Rhode Island School of Design and followed this with an M.F.A. from the School of Visual Arts in New York, had a strong grounding in a narrative approach to photography at the Rhode Island School of Design. Later on, at the School of Visual Arts, Nayar learned to contextualize this self-reflexive approach into a wider cultural landscape).

The subtext of absence and presence to locate self and place is a trope used commonly by artists and writers of the *diaspora* to explore bivalent and multivalent positions. Writers like Salman Rushdie, VS Naipaul and Jhumpa Lahiri have carved out a literary tradition in the western





Quiet Executions, Loud Bombs (2007)

world, using language to locate complex identities that are forever shifting, morphing and changing. In the visual arts, artists like Shirin Neshat, Zarina Hashmi and Shahzia Sikander have used a variety of media and means to juxtapose opposing cultural images and dialogues to reflect a binary condition of the in-between. Nayar treads in a similar tradition, although her generation has had an even more complex model to unravel in a rapidly globalizing world. The location of self is a near impossible probability in the age of uploading that makes available non-stop information from all over the world. Cultural particularities can be traded on-line, flattened out and re-formed in other ways. Nayar's work contextualizes itself in this polemic (and dilemma) of cultural pluralism in the present day. Opponents of globalization, for example, ideate that cultural hegemony, at its worst, fuels the negative forces of terrorism. Nowhere is this addressed more plainly than in *Quiet Executions, Loud Bombs* (2007) which references a politically volatile situation that has claimed urban sites from New York to Mumbai, from Madrid to Baghdad. The interior of the room has a chandelier swinging to the side with a human arm hanging from it. On the right wall is a strip of cutouts from an instructional poster for bathers

from Victorian time. A densely patterned wallpaper in primary colors forms part of the back wall that has partially been erased and dissolves in a smoky hue. The chandelier casts its shadow on the wall. Another dark ominous shape looms, and bric-a-brac like debris litters the floor. While Nayar is careful to avoid any kind of political rhetoric, her work lies in the grey-scale, that in-between place where the relevant questions are asked. ❖

Sharmistha Ray received her BA from Williams College and followed this with a dual degree MS/MFA from Pratt Institute in Art History and Painting. She writes for Indian and foreign magazines and journals on art and continues her own painting practice. She is currently Director of Bodhi Art, a leading gallery for Contemporary Indian art in Mumbai and is considered a leading expert in the field. She has been interviewed by The Financial Times, NZZ and other radio and TV media in India and abroad.



# Thomas Erben Gallery

*Press Release*

Arrested Views

## **Sheela Gowda - Yamini Nayar**

April 7 – May 9, 2009

Opening: Tuesday, April 7, 6-8:30 pm

Thomas Erben is pleased to present a two-person exhibition, which juxtaposes new photoworks by Yamini Nayar with *Private Gallery*, a 1999 sculptural installation by Sheela Gowda, which was part of *How Latitudes Become Forms*, a seminal show at the Walker Art Center in 2003.

Both artists involve extensive research in their process, with Gowda condensing content through the formal outcome and Nayar articulating a territorialized space wherein fragments recombine, engendering multiple, parallel readings.



Sheela Gowda. *Private Gallery*, 1999. 2 panels with set of nine watercolor paintings. Lamination sheet, cow dung, watercolor on paper and plywood. 78 x 42 x 1.5 in., each panel.

**Sheela Gowda's** *Private Gallery* presents us with a large, rectangular structure of two Formica "faux marble" sheets, set into a corner to allow on each side a narrow passage. In the interior, the viewer is confronted with painted references to canonized genres: vistas seen from the artist's car, a still life, portraits of domestic workers, migrants from other regions of India to the city and some part of the artist's household. The conscious positioning of the artist within the work's articulation is echoed in the way she constructs the viewing situation to physically engage the visitor. With a similar aim, she evokes conflicting reactions through the proximity of thumb-sized pads of cow dung wallpapered on the inside of the structure. For Gowda, the nod to minimalism, as well as her conceptual use of materials, are key aspects in this work and of her practice.

Continued over...

Thomas Erben Gallery  
526 West 26<sup>th</sup> Street, 4<sup>th</sup> floor  
New York, NY 10001  
212-645-8701  
info@thomaserben.com

Considered one of the most important Indian artists of her generation, Sheela Gowda was born 1957 in Bhadravati and currently works and lives in Bangalore. The gallery first included her work in *Contemporary Art from India* in 2004; Gowda's exhibition history of some 30 years testifies to her increasing international recognition with inclusion in such notable exhibitions as: *Venice Biennale*, 2009 (forthcoming); *Sharjah Biennial*, UAE, 2009 (currently); *Lyon Biennale*, France, 2007; *Documenta 12*, Kassel, Germany, 2007; *Indian Summer*, Paris, 2005; *How Latitudes become Form*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 2003; *Traditions/Tensions*, 27 *South Asian Artists*, Asia Society/Queens Museum, New York, 1996; *Africus*, *South African Biennale*, Johannesburg, 1995.



Yamini Nayar. *Cleo*, 2009. C-print, 30 x 40 in., ed. of 5 (+2 AP).


For her photoworks, **Yamini Nayar** wryly builds transitional objects and architectural spaces out of found and raw materials. Therein, through process and image fragments, she combines references from early to mid 20th century historical sources exploring themes of cultural ambiguity. The exhibited photographs articulate a formal language within states of flux. They are carefully structured, yet open ended, engaging levels of recognition as a device to hold the image. Truth and meaning are historically linked to both the history of photography and vision itself. We have learned that photography's "truth" is malleable; however, can we suppress assigning meaning? Without the need to arrest it, Nayar works within exactly this dichotomy.

Yamini Nayar, born 1975, grew up in Detroit, MI; after a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design, she received her MFA in 2005 from the School of Visual Arts in New York where she lives and works. Most notably, Nayar's work will be included in *The Empire Strikes Back*, Saatchi Museum, London in 2009 and *Vogue India's* December '08 issue listed her as one of *India's Ten Hottest Young Artists*. The gallery first showed her photoworks in *First Left, Second Right* in 2007/08. Other exhibitions include: *My Little India*, Marella Gallery, Beijing, 2009; *Sultana's Dream*, Exit Art, New York, 2007; *Yamini Nayar and Sreshta Rit Premnath*, BosePacia, New York, 2006; *Fatal Love*, Queens Museum of Art, NY, 2005. Reviews in TimeOut, The New York Times, Asian Art News, Art Asia Pacific and Flash Art have all critically appraised her work. An essay by Sharmistha Ray is forthcoming in Wynwood Magazine.

*Gallery hours: Tuesday - Saturday, 10-6*

*For further information and visuals, please visit our website [www.thomaserben.com](http://www.thomaserben.com) or contact the gallery at 212-645.8701*



**THE NEW YORKER**

MAY 4, 2009

**GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN**

| S | M | T | W  | T  | F | S |
|---|---|---|----|----|---|---|
| 3 | 4 | 5 | 29 | 30 | 1 | 2 |

**YAMINI NAYAR**  
 This young, New York-based artist makes large color photographs of interiors that look like their architects abandoned them, unfinished, and decided to invite the vandals in. The room in one diptych is papered in a fleur-de-lis pattern, but all sense of domestic refinement stops there; under an armature of shredded draperies, a twisted totem, black as tar, snakes toward the ceiling. In another room, broken black floorboards appear to drop off into a blank void pierced only by a wide-open eye. Nayar constructs these odd, ruined sites on tabletops and photographs them so that all sense of scale is lost and only the uneasy feeling that we've been here before—perhaps in a dream—remains. Through May 9. (Erben, 526 W. 26th St. 212-645-8701.)

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, MAY 8, 2009

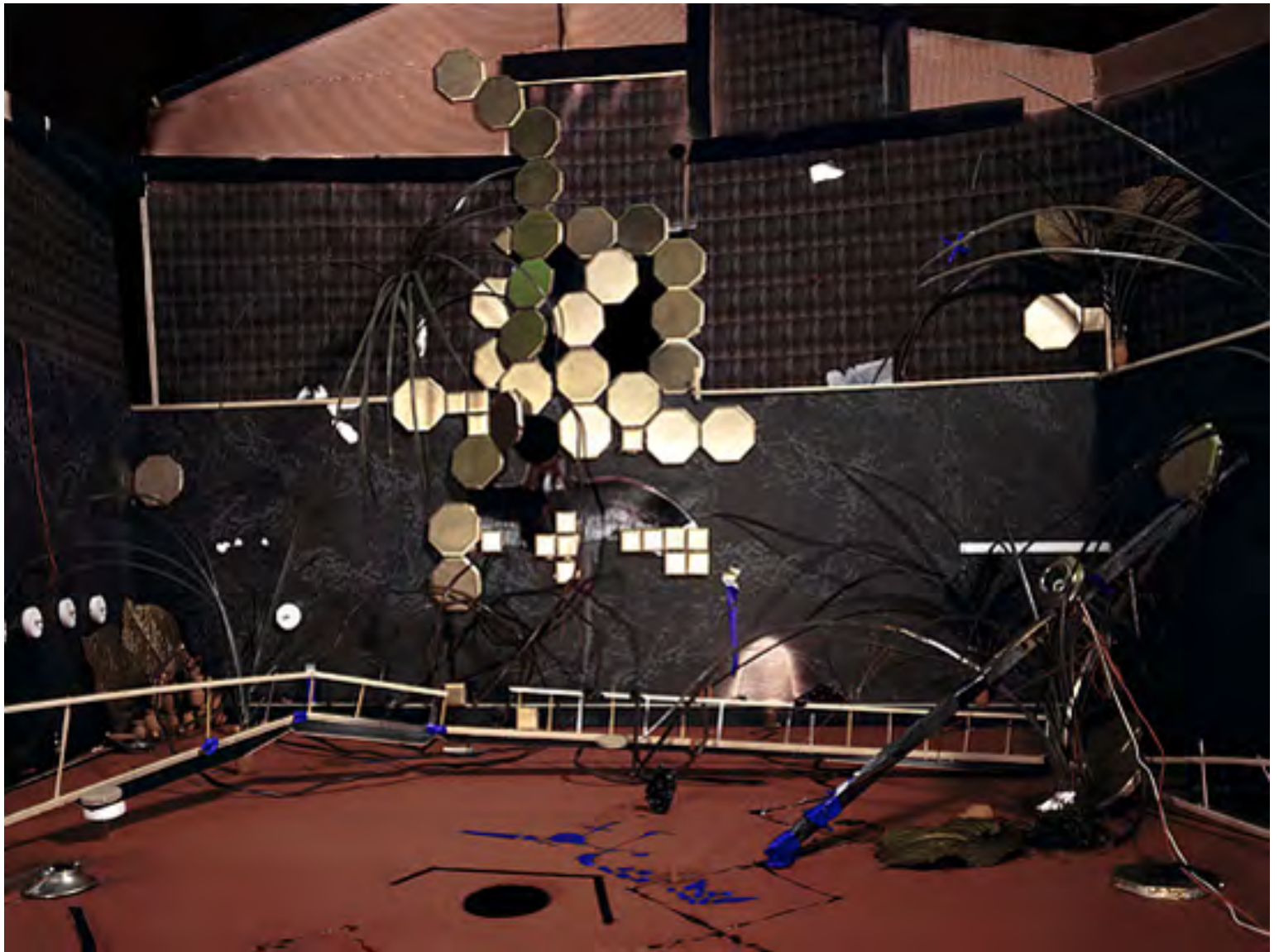
**THE Listings** May 8 - May 14

---

**Last Chance**

---

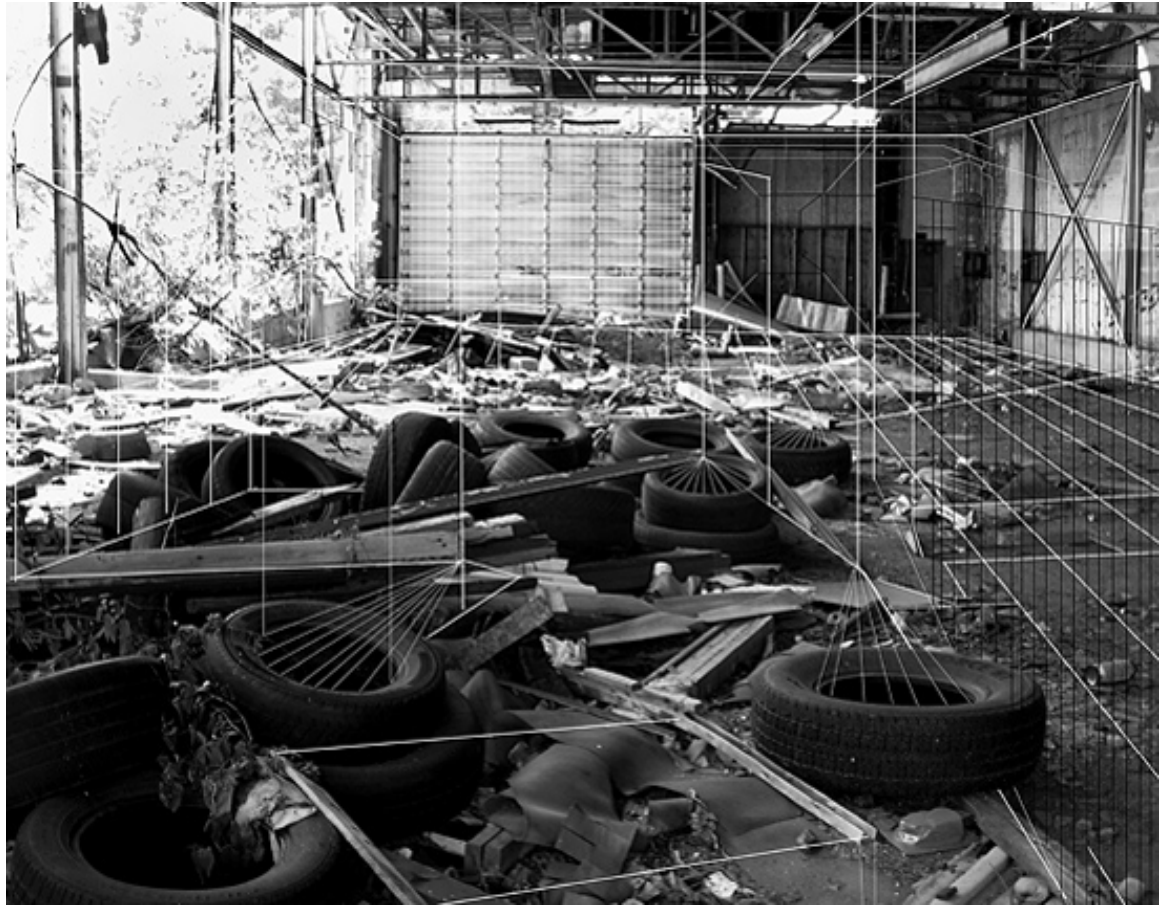
**SHEELA GOWDA AND YAMINI NAYAR;** closes on Saturday. The better-known figure in this two-woman exhibition is the Indian artist Sheela Gowda, whose 1999 installation "Private Gallery" offers a subtle and unlikely blend of architecture and watercolor painting and a show-within-the-show. She is paired with the young American artist Yamini Nayar, who also works with installation, but translated into photographs: fantastic interiors that look both ruined and ethereal, as if winds, floods and fires had blown through them. Thomas Erben Gallery is taking important steps to introduce contemporary South Asian artists to the city. You can check out pieces by Sreshta Rit Premnath and Chitra Ganesh in a side room. Thomas Erben Gallery, 526 West 26th Street, fourth floor, Chelsea, (212) 645-8701, thomaserben.com. (Cotter)



*Under a Night Sky*, 2009  
C-print  
36 x 48 inches



*Study 1, 2008*  
C-print  
10.5 x 13.5 inches



*Study 2, 2008*  
C-print  
10.5 x 13.5 inches





CityBeat    cincinnati ✿ art museum

# PHOTO PAGES

Volume 1 Issue 3

On following page:

(top) Philip-Lorca diCorcia (b.1951), *Todd M. Brooks; 22 years old: Denver, Colorado: \$40*, 1990-92. Fujicolor crystal archive print, 30 x 40 inches. (bottom) Yamini Nayar (b.1975), *Cleo*, 2009. C-print. 30 x 40 inches.







# Yamini Nayar

LIGHTBORNE VISITING ARTIST  
AND LECTURE SERIES

In association with the Art Academy of Cincinnati, twice each year, the Cincinnati Art Museum hosts two visiting-artist-based contemporary artists as part of the Lightborne Visiting Artist and Lecture series. Most recently, we hosted artist Yamini Nayar, with her lecture on October 6th and an exhibition at the Conover Gallery that was on view from September 10 to October 8, 2010.

Yamini Nayar creates images that merge sculpture and photography and that explore issues of migration, fragmentation and place. Her work combines materials from various sources such as historical archives, architectural designs, cultural artifacts and personal narrative. Photo Page is pleased to present some of Nayar's most recent images. Please stay tuned for more information about the next Lightborne visiting artist, renowned photographer, Felipe-Louis deCockis.

©2010 Yamini Nayar, United States, One of These Days, 2008, C-print, 36 x 48 inches. Copyright Yamini Nayar, 2008. All rights reserved. Courtesy of Thomasoben Gallery, New York and the artist.  
Bottom right: Yamini Nayar, United States, The Pursuit, 2011, C-print, 30 x 40 inches. Copyright Yamini Nayar, 2010. All rights reserved. Courtesy of Thomasoben Gallery, New York and the artist.

*One of These Days*, 2008  
C-print  
36 x 48 inches



*Pursuit*, 2011  
C-print  
30 x 40 inches

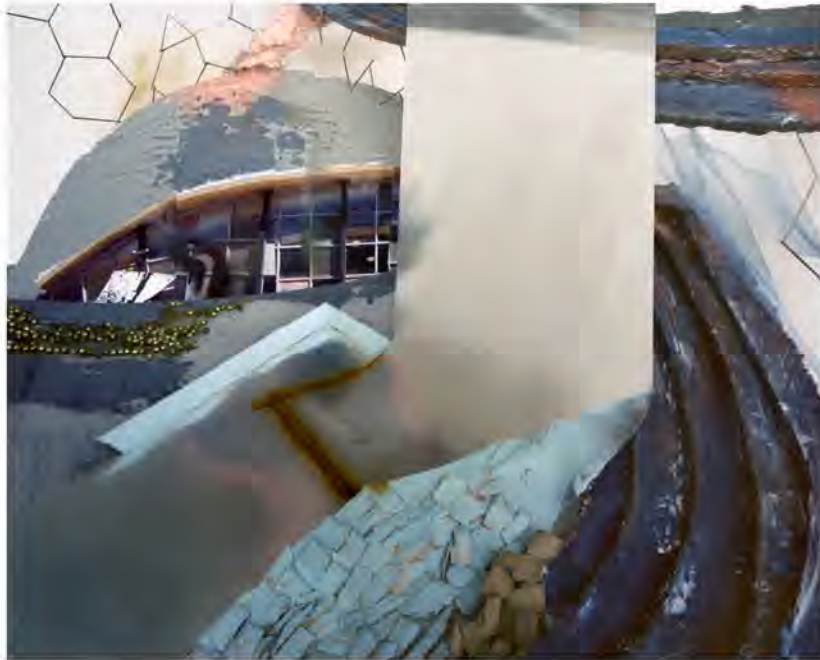


THE  
EMPIRE  
STRIKES  
BACK



# Thomas Erben Gallery

Press Release



*Cascading Attica*, 2011. C-print, 48 x 60 inches, edition of 5 (+2 AP).

## Yamini Nayar

### *Head Space*

October 27 – December 3, 2011

*Opening Reception: Thursday, October 27, 6-8:30 pm*

Thomas Erben is pleased to present *Head Space*, **Yamini Nayar's** first solo exhibition with the gallery, following the critically acclaimed two-person show *Arrested Views* (with Sheela Gowda) in 2009.

In this new body of work, Nayar enables us – through an increase in scale - to more directly inhabit her photographs, documents of temporarily fashioned tabletop sculptures and environments. A slow-down of the photographic moment is effected through the entirely hand-made nature of her assemblages, which are additionally inscribed with time through a process of continuous reworking. The textures of raw, often discarded materials (plaster, Styrofoam, plastics, fabric, etc.) complemented with the flattening and distancing qualities of photography result in works that are structured, yet highly visceral. In her constructions, Nayar often uses historical imagery as a point of departure and employs familiar spatial logic to engage levels of recognition, while simultaneously suspending narrative and defying rules of perspective. These tensions, combined with her painterly sense of color and use of light, create an elusive, open-ended quality.

over...

Thomas Erben Gallery  
526 West 26<sup>th</sup> Street, 4<sup>th</sup> floor  
New York, NY 10001  
212-645-8701  
info@thomaserben.com  
www.thomaserben.com



Over the past five years, Nayar's work has been shifting from literal into abstract space, which still serves as a repository for memory and imagination. Her core concerns remain psychological, historical, and centered around the fluidity of wider social perspectives. Previous images depicted distinctly room-like settings, however unstable these may have seemed, whereas her current work, informed by a deepened research into modernist architecture, continues towards the edge of im/possibility. *Cascading Attica*, for example, presents us with an architectural image fragment, extending into a swirl of unidentifiable matter which wraps around a field seeming simultaneously solid, vaporous, reflective and transparent. Perspective is dislodged – not quite defying gravity, but not on firm ground either – and the exquisitely toxic coloration adds an element of ominence. "Attica" - referring to the Classical Greek region projecting into the Aegean Sea, the 1971 prison riot in upstate New York, and a waterfall in Wyoming – exemplifies Nayar's interest in the shifting nature of meaning. On a formal level, she often intersperses three-dimensionality with decidedly shallow space making both conditions, though factually unfeasible and irresolvable, appear entirely believable. It is as if, rather than working toward compromise, she folds spectrums in half, bringing polarities to a place of coexistence.

Yamini Nayar (b. 1975, Detroit, MI) received her MFA from the **School of Visual Arts**, New York, in 2005 and her BFA from the **Rhode Island School of Design**, 1999. Thomas Erben Gallery first showed her photo works in *First Left, Second Right* in 2007/08. Other exhibitions include: *Always the Young Strangers*, **Higher Pictures**, NY; *The Influentials*, **School of Visual Arts**, NY, both 2011; *The Empire Strikes Back*, **Saatchi Museum**, London; *Tough Pictures*, **Cincinnati Art Museum**, OH, both 2010; *We would like to thank (again) the curators, who wish to remain anonymous*, **Galerie Anne Barrault**, Paris; *Marella Gallery*, Beijing, both 2009; *Sultana's Dream*, **Exit Art**, New York, 2007; *Yamini Nayar and Sreshtha Rit Premnath*, **BosePacia**, New York, 2006; *Fatal Love*, **Queens Museum of Art**, 2005.

In 2010, Nayar gave the **Lightborne Lecture** at the Cincinnati Art Museum and held residencies at the **Art Academy of Cincinnati** and the **Center for Photography**, Woodstock. In May of 2011, she was one of seven contributors to *Manual for Treason*, editor Murtaza Vali, **Sharjah Biennial**. She is currently an artist-in-residence at the **Lower Manhattan Cultural Council** and a Visiting Artist Scholar at New York University, Steinhardt School of Art, 2011-12. Upcoming publications include an *Artist to Watch* profile in **Art Economist Magazine**, December 2011, and a feature in the book *UNFIXED: Photography and Postcolonial Perspectives in Contemporary Art*, **Unfixed Productions**, January 2012. Nayar lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

*Gallery hours: Tue - Sat, 10-6.*

*For further information and visuals, please visit [www.thomaserben.com](http://www.thomaserben.com) or contact the gallery at 212-645.8701.*

Thomas Erben Gallery  
526 West 26<sup>th</sup> Street, 4<sup>th</sup> floor  
New York, NY 10001  
212-645-8701  
[info@thomaserben.com](mailto:info@thomaserben.com)  
[www.thomaserben.com](http://www.thomaserben.com)



*Head Space*, 2011. Installation view, west and north walls.

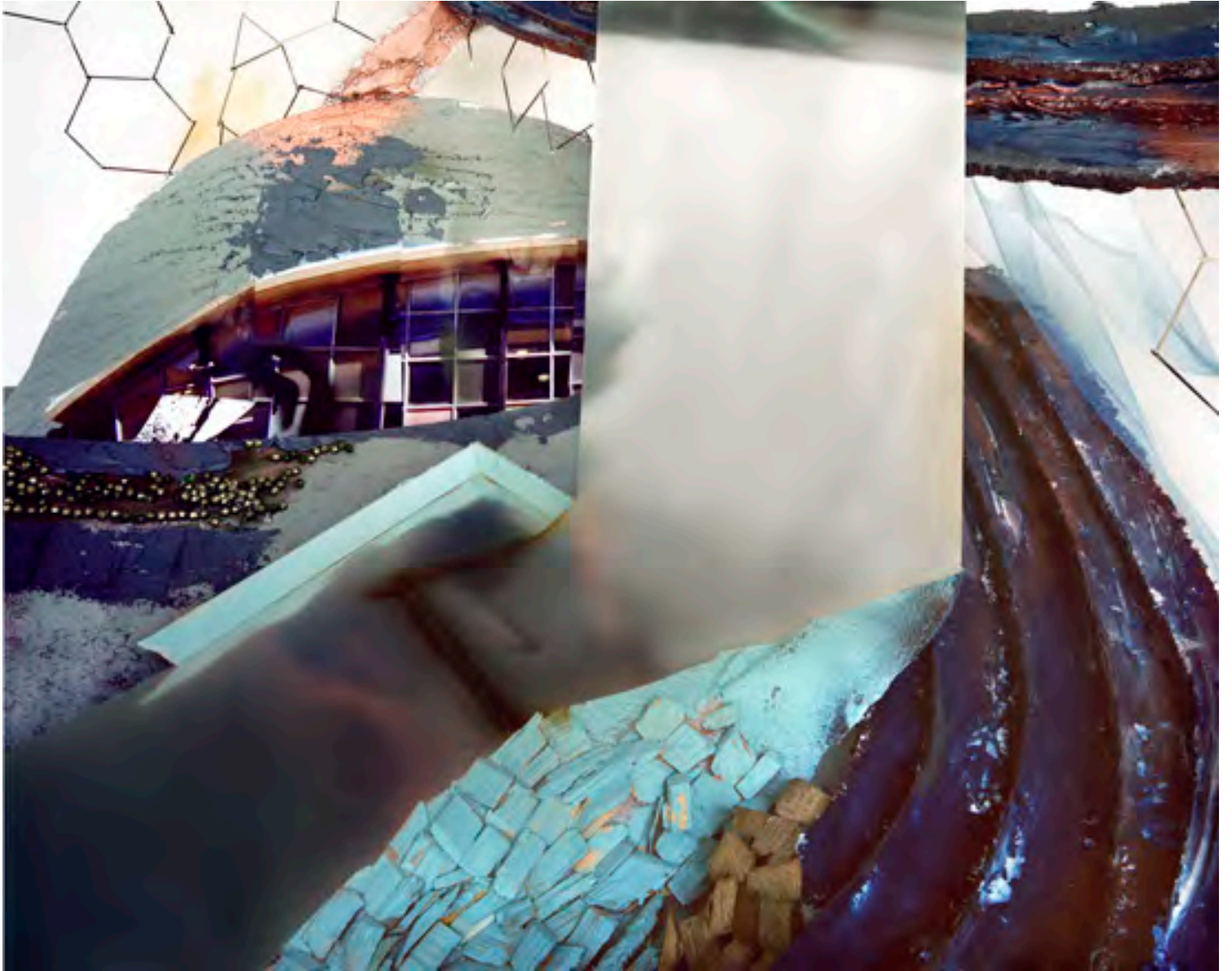


*Memorious*, 2011  
C-print  
48 x 60 inches



*Untitled*, from series  
*Housing Studies*,  
2011.  
C-print  
8 x 10 inches





*Cascading Attica*, 2011  
C-print  
40 x 50 inches





*Head Space*, 2011. Installation view, east and south walls.



*How Many Men, 2011*  
C-print  
48 x 60 inches





*Pillar*, 2011  
C-print  
50 x 40 inches



*Head Space*, 2011. Installation view, project space.





**SCULPTURE** IS EVERYTHING





Above  
**Yamini Nayar**  
 United States b.1975  
*Pillar* 2011  
 Lightjet print on paper, ed. 2/5  
 135.9 x 110.5cm  
 Purchased 2012 with funds from  
 Tim Fairfax, *MP*, through the Queensland  
 Art Gallery Foundation

Below  
**Yamini Nayar**  
*Cascading Attica* 2011  
 Lightjet print on paper, ed. 2/5  
 110.5 x 135.9cm  
 Purchased 2012 with funds from  
 Tim Fairfax, *MP*, through the Queensland  
 Art Gallery Foundation



Opposite  
**Thomas Demand**  
 Germany b.1964  
*Landing* 2006  
 Chromogenic colour print on paper  
 with Diasec (acrylic sheet), ed. 1/6  
 180 x 296cm  
 Purchased 2008, The Queensland  
 Government's Gallery of Modern Art  
 Acquisitions Fund



## Yamini Nayar

THOMAS ERBEN

The overwhelming experience of looking at Yamini Nayar's photographs is that of mystification: One can look and look and still be puzzled. The photographs invite us to view them as representations of three-dimensional space, but they complicate or even do away with the tools we use, largely without realizing it, for interpreting volume: perspective, vanishing point, background, and foreground. It is difficult to describe, much less understand, what one sees.

To create these beguiling images, Nayar built ephemeral sculptural tableaux from little bits of this and that, paper, foil, and string, and other kinds of detritus less easy to identify, and photographed them from different angles, and in slightly different configurations. In *Cascading Attica* (all works 2011), a panel, mostly rectangular, of smoky gray interrupts swaths of rich blue that swirl down from collaged photographs of windows. The blue regions are clearly composed of three-dimensional materials: aqua pieces of broken-up something (wood, chalk, or clay) and painted and modeled ridges of a deeper blue. The gray panel, by contrast, looks flat—it is a semitranslucent, reflective foil—though one area interposes itself in front of the blue and else-

where disappears behind it. Imagining what this might have looked like on a tabletop is nearly impossible.

A small untitled work, from a series called "Housing Studies," dislocates our sense of space by placing an encrusted grid in front of some pink and gold bits. This grid—like a rational system, imposed on chaos, that has subsequently broken down—both flattens the space behind it and renders it more mysterious. *Memorious*, the only work in this exhibition to use actual col-

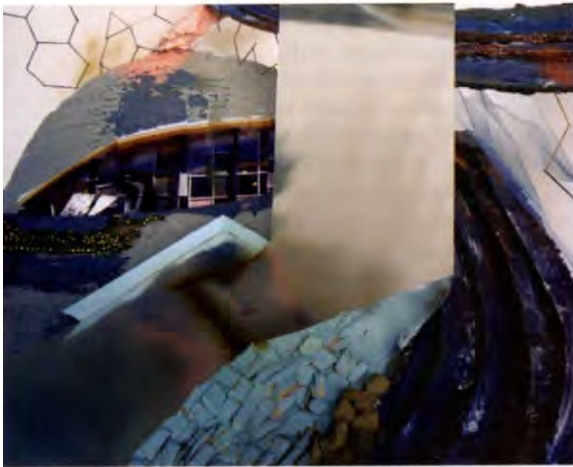
lage, has the additional effect of dislocating us in time. Here, two slices from a photograph are placed atop a photo of a cement-lined pit littered with scraps of string and ribbon. The slices are taken from images of the same pit in different incarnations, revealing a stake stuck in the pit's floor and an orange ball perched at its lip. The superimposition of these various moments suggests either memory or prediction and tugs us back and forth between the possibilities.

These images conjure a feeling of push and pull: an invitation into spaces that are impossible to enter, both imaginatively and literally. Even Nayar's method—the tableaux created only for photographing, the confounded dimensions that suggest deft work with Photoshop but are in fact made entirely by hand—indicates these oppositions, and further evokes a sort of interstitial space between dimensions where such nonspaces might exist.

Many elements suggest the architectural: Fragments of what might be the dilapidated frame of a geodesic dome (but is probably chicken wire) appear in a number of works, and the collaged windows in *Cascading Attica* have a modernist look—the title as well as the insistent blue bring to mind Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater. But the works are painterly too: The areas of color are like brushstrokes, and the perspective is multiplied in a faintly Cubist manner. A series of pictures clipped from various sources depict modernist interiors, walls, light broken up

by windowpanes, and buildings mid-demolition, further supporting these associative points of departure. In *Pillar*, a tentlike space, with Styrofoam circles, foil, and crumpled paper, recalls the Great Workroom of Frank Lloyd Wright's S. C. Johnson Administration Building, with string taking the place of the famous columns. The image thoroughly punctures the "greatness" of the room, offering another enlivening collision of opposites: the monumentality of modernist architecture made light and destructible.

—Emily Hall



Yamini Nayar, *Cascading Attica*, 2011, color photograph, 40 x 50".



# Art in America

INTERNATIONAL • REVIEW

FEBRUARY '12

## YAMINI NAYAR THOMAS ERBEN

Like many of her contemporaries, Brooklyn-based photographer Yamini Nayar (b. 1975) blurs the line between photography and other mediums—



Yamini Nayar: *Pillar*, 2011, C-print, 50 by 40 inches; at Thomas Erben.

in her case, sculpture, collage and painting. Nayar's representations of architectonic spaces begin as tabletop assemblages cobbled together from found objects and pictures as well as scraps of wood, cardboard, fabric and other detritus. Once they are documented, these constructions are destroyed, leaving only a flat image.

In earlier works, Nayar's setups take the form of dioramalike views of recognizable, if distorted, interiors. Dislocated in time and space, depopulated, and often shabby, cracked or decaying, these imagined spaces seem transitional places between past and future, reflecting the artist's interest in the continuously negotiated present of the immigrant. (Nayar, who was born and raised in the U.S., is of Indian descent.)

Over the past several years, Nayar's photographs have become less overtly narrative and more open-ended. For her first one-person show at Thomas Erben, she produced a group of pictures that are larger (some around 48 by 60 inches) as well as more diffuse and formally elegant than her previous works. At the same time, they directly reference real-life architecture—specifically, midcentury modernist buildings—as was evident from a display of images, including magazine clippings, tiny collages and snapshots, related to the pieces in the exhibition.

Whether straight photos or photo-collages built up from several color prints, the new pieces are vested with a rambunctious materiality. Although the

components of the studio constructions are generally identifiable—a scattering of gold beads, a spray-painted piece of Styrofoam or a twist of paper—they coalesce into fractured vistas in which flatness interacts with dimensionality in disorienting ways. Soaring verticals and low, boxy forms convey built structures, while jumbles of shapes and lumpy, impastoed grounds suggest that those structures might be under either construction or demolition.

Certainly they are upended and transformed. The 50-by-40-inch *Pillar* (2011), for example, was clearly drawn from the Great Workroom in Frank Lloyd Wright's Johnson Wax Building. But one of the room's "lily pad" columns has been turned into a tornadolike vortex of black and red, and the others have become as insubstantial as jellyfish, hovering near the top of the picture like strange balloons. *How Many Men* (2011) reimagines a sleek living room with freestanding fireplace and round coffee table as a space-age fantasy starring a troupe of spectral figures dressed in sarongs. And the geometric void in the center of *Cascading Attica* (2011), which could be from a photo of a collapsing building or a waterfall, evokes a reclaiming of culture by nature.

In her reinvigoration of modernist architecture, Nayar invests its idealized space with fluid and expansive life. Her new works, ruined International Style memory palaces, seem, if scarcely utopian, optimistic, and if not modernistic, distinctly modern.

—Anne Doran



*UNFIXED* examines photography in postcolonial perspective through the diverse critical positions of an international group of writers, artists and scholars working within contemporary art, photography and cultural analysis. This publication is the finishing work of a multiplatform project that included an artist residency, exhibition, workshop and symposium. As a whole, *UNFIXED* engaged topics of cultural identity and history together with strategies of artistic research, photo theory and contemporary practices around making, using, studying and writing about photographs.

Produced especially for this publication, *UNFIXED* presents new voices and visions in the form of nine visual and textual essays. These essays take unique stands towards photography and its history through an unconventional range of approaches and styles. Together with documentation of the different stages of the project, the essays explore topics such as the migration and circulation of photography, vernacular photography, archives, memory, diaspora, self-representation, appropriation, visual sovereignty, exoticism and cultural protocol.

Investigating how photography can be 'unfixed' through contemporary conceptual, theoretical and visual approaches, *UNFIXED* presents new critical perspectives on photography in relation to the cultural conditions of postcolonialism.

#### Contributors

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| Charif Benhelma (BE)      | Pamela Pattynama (NL)                   |
| Lizza May David (DE)      | Keith Piper (UK)                        |
| Quinsy Gario (CU/SM)      | Habiba Rashid (UK)                      |
| Kadidu Wasswa John (UG)   | Natalie Robertson (NZ)                  |
| Arthur Conrad Kisitu (UG) | Naro Snackey (NL)                       |
| Terry Kurgan (ZA)         | Andrea Stultiens (NL)                   |
| Yamini Nayar (US)         | Hank Willis Thomas (US)                 |
| Otobong Nkanga (NG/FR)    | Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie (Diné Nation/US) |
| Sardim Mendes (NL)        | Murtaza Vahi (IN)                       |
| Kobena Mercer (UK)        | Rattana Vandy (KH)                      |

# UNFIXED

# UNFIXED

PHOTOGRAPHY AND  
POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES  
IN CONTEMPORARY ART

Edited by Sara Blokland and Asmara Pelupessy



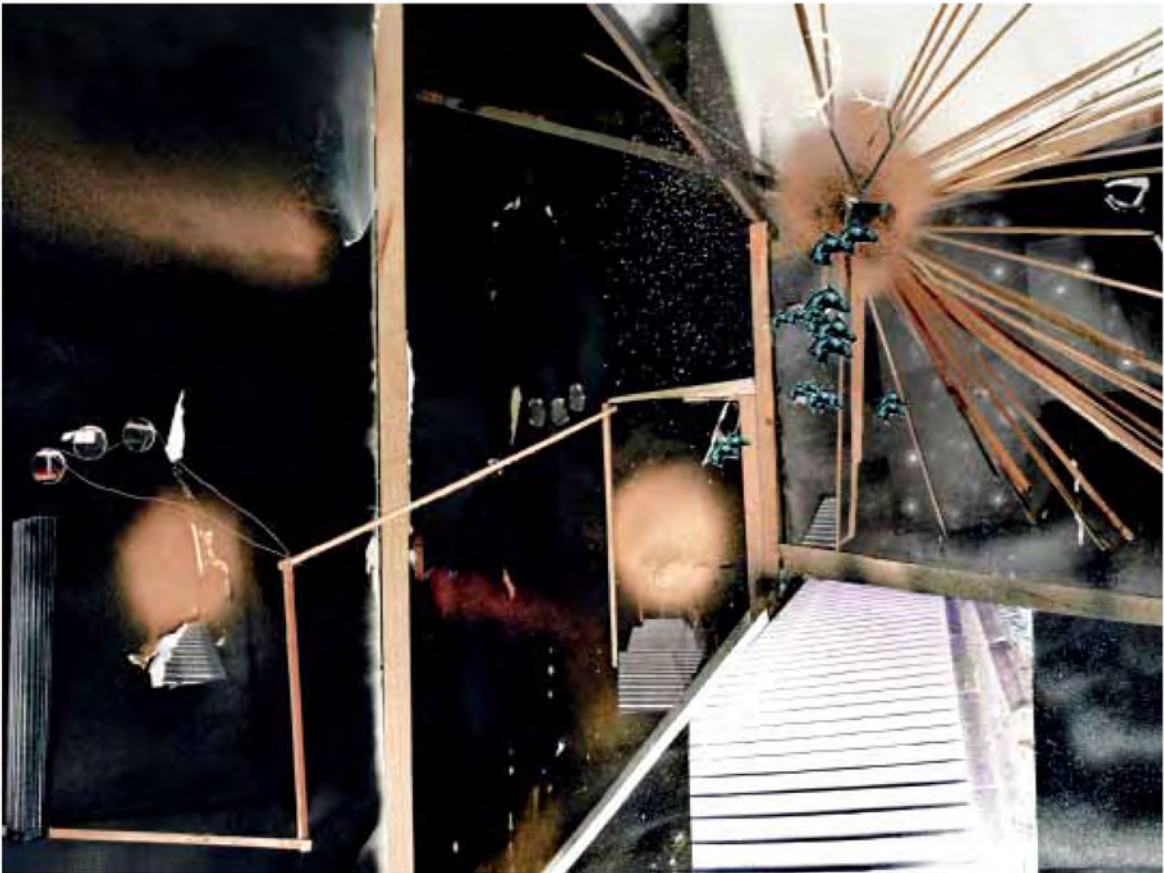
JAPSAM  
BOOKS

UNFIXED Projects

*Under a Night Sky*, 2009  
C-type print  
914 x 1219 cm









**This interview is excerpted from an ongoing dialogue between Nayar and Vali, conducted both in-person and over email chats through Fall 2010 and Spring 2011, and often stimulated by cups of strong milky tea.**

MURTAZA VALI: Can you describe your working process?

YAMINI NAYAR: I create large, colour photographs of sculptures I build on tabletops in my studio. Of varying scales, the sculptures are constructed from residual materials – scraps of Styrofoam, wood, paper, plaster, etc. – that I find rummaging through the excess and castoffs of businesses located around my studio.

I also incorporate fragments of found images. In fact, my overall process usually begins with an idea or thought connected to something I've seen, a text or a found image. I regularly research digital archives and collections of photographs for interesting images. Once I settle on an image, I print it out, paste it on my studio wall and begin sketching, to figure out the form and determine a starting point. I then create a sculpture from the image.

At this stage I think and work like a sculptor more than a photographer. The found photographs are my anchors, the reference I keep returning to as the piece grows. Each image develops over time, accrues its own narrative, logic and sculptural process. Cycles of construction, erasure and reconstruction lead in unexpected directions, fragments of other elements and sources creep in. Each piece creates its own collection of residues and castoffs – materials and images – that are eventually incorporated. The original image is just a point of departure, a reference point, a map of a moment from the past, a fixed memory. The final photograph documents the erasures and traces of process.

I think of the sculptures as constructed moments. They are never intended to function as autonomous physical objects but are built, specifically, to be viewed through the lens.

MV: The lens establishes a perspective.

YN: Precisely. I am very interested in how perspective and scale might be manipulated to orient and disorient the viewer. The three-dimensionality of the sculpture is translated into a two-dimensional image; perspective shifts and space is flattened. The particular entry point into the scene the lens provides is what holds it all together, what ties up the loose ends. In this sense, my camera is a kind of collaborator – it alters what it looks at. The relationships that emerge in the photograph are specific to the image.

MV: The photograph also seems to seal the sculpture into a particular arrangement.

YN: Definitely. The sculptures are quite fragile. Propped up and held together by thread and

bits of tape they are impossible to move and are discarded after photographing. The photograph is both an entry point into the construction, held together by the lens, as well as a document of a destroyed object.

MV: How do you determine the size of your final prints? How does it relate to the miniature scale of the sculptures?

YN: The size of the photograph really depends on the sculpture, and what it needs to be clearly articulated. By this, I mean subject matter and level of detail. However, I am always aware that the final object is the photograph and not the sculpture. So the photograph needs to be a size that allows it to stand on its own and maintains a scale that allows the viewer to enter the space. There is no real formula. More intimate spaces tend to be smaller, quieter. Others that allude to a public or collective use may be larger, to confront the viewer in a different way.

MV: Scale shifts at numerous points in your process. The miniature, the ad hoc, the recycled are all monumentalized. Is magnification something you are interested in?

YN: Magnification is key, specifically the ability of scale to create a world that can be both inhabitable and displaced.

MV: The final photograph serves as an endpoint. It controls the chaos of process, collapsing the duration of sculptural process into a single indexical image.

YN: My photographs are endpoints but also beginnings.

MV: In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes'

suggests that death haunts all photography. Your photographs monumentalize and memorialize the fragility and decay of the sculptures, preserve the humble experiences and detritus of everyday life from which they are constructed. But preservation is also always marked by death; for example, the way museums mummify the objects they collect, which become firmly of the past. Why does a dynamic and durational sculptural process have to end in a single static arrangement? Seriality might allow this dynamism and duration to remain legible.

YN: I think I allow a level of transparency. But I am primarily interested in photography's ability to create a monumental moment, one worth remembering. I am interested in the presence and processes of memory. Walter Benjamin's writings on the dialectical image and the ruin are more influential than Barthes. The sculptures are sites of ruin, tension and dialectics.

MV: While you construct ruins, they are remnants not of structures and spaces of the past, but of those that have not yet come to be. They embody the future anterior.

YN: I understand Benjamin's dialectical image as an image that describes a space that contains strong enough versions of future and past to startle us in some way to the present. It encapsulates and conflates desire and nostalgia.

MV: This simultaneity of past and future is palpable in your images. It might be why they feel somewhat off kilter, uncanny. Is the uncanny (unheimlich or unheimely) something that interests you?

YN: Yes. [...]

Pursuit, 2010  
C-type print  
91.4 x 121.9 cm





MV: Theories of the uncanny are strongly linked to the body, to the inanimate body coming to life. How do you translate this idea to spaces without bodies?

YN: Space can contain presence through the filtering of absence, through architectonics and the traces of activity. The methods of construction are just as important as the content. The way something is said is just as significant as what is being said.

MV: The spaces you construct are clearly imagined, they are dreamworlds in a sense.

YN: Yes, they often draw from utopic visions. For instance, *By a Thread* (2009) emerged from research on the Industrial Revolution; an illustration of the Crystal Palace served as the point of departure. The Crystal Palace is considered a 'beginning' of modernism and housed the 1851 World's Fair and so was a very charged space.

MV: It showcased industrial technology and capitalist efficiency.

YN: And the riches of colonial campaigns. So I re-imagined it as a psychological space filled with desire and nostalgia, while complicating this by introducing an alternative perspective into the conventional narrative of history, one informed by broader cultural narratives that are normally peripheral. The ceiling becomes the floor or, metaphorically, a foundation.

MV: It resembles a spider's web, which the title alludes to.

YN: Yes, the title suggests a sense of fragility.

MV: Your sculptures often contain photographic

fragments: an eye in *Cleo* (2009) a pair of legs in *Pursuit* (2010). What are the sources of these fragments? And do you intend them to be recognizable or function as illegible traces?

YN: Among the numerous archives I research I am often drawn to collections of snapshots, as well as film stills. Snapshots embody the everyday, and our experience of it. They are subjective yet familiar. I like to use film stills, or fragments of stills, because of their potency within collective memory and imagination, and film has a universal reach of sorts. I am not really interested in making them completely recognizable – they function as pivots or anchors in the constructions. They may be fragmented or dislocated, but they, hopefully, act as a point of recognition in the final photograph.

MV: Are they punctums?

YN: Yes, they are often that detail picked up by the camera that holds the gaze.

MV: *Cleo* (2009) is a fascinating image. It mirrors, in a rudimentary, schematic sense, the photographic act. There is an eye at the center of the far wall and the small clear ball in the mid ground serves as a lens. It is unnerving; the image appears to look back.

YN: Yes, that clear sphere holds the image and a reflection of what is behind it.

MV: *Pursuit* reminded me of artist Richard Hamilton's *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing* (1956).

YN: I was thinking about that image, as well as Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture.

MV: And Pop? Richard Hamilton's image is one

of the earliest examples of Pop Art.

YN: Yes, but it is also a work made at a certain point in history and the period element is more important than a reference to one work or a style of art.

MV: Are you influenced by stage and set design? Because your camera functions like a proscenium arch, framing the sculpture, reducing it to one perspective.

YN: Totally. I am obsessed with backgrounds, environments and interiors. I love Constructivist and Bauhaus set design. I do think of my images as sets, in the sense that they are worlds the viewer can inhabit.

MV: Where does your desire to create space, or rather, place, originate?

YN: I find architectural space to be incredibly expressive and have always been entranced by photography's ability to create place. I am fascinated with old family albums and the way a snapshot can stand-in for a reality or place lost or left behind. Most of my family's snapshots were of East Bengal and Kerala. And I clearly remember moving to Detroit and watching our first house being built, literally, from the ground up. First the foundation, then the basement, the wood frame, the walls, and we would periodically visit as it was being constructed. I was left completely aware of its construction and, with it, my family's identity. Space and environment, their architectonics and the objects they enclose, relate strongly to identity.

MV: Your art hovers between fixity and chaos, between location and dislocation. While it evinces a strong desire to construct places – spaces of belonging – this is offset by the sense

that these places remain fragile, temporary and elusive, always unfixed. Does this indeterminacy emerge from your experience as a diasporic subject?

YN: I am interested in a certain kind of dislocation. Not necessarily of a literal place but a dislocation of familiar elements into other histories, collective memories and personal narratives. Hopefully this dislocation complicates photography's indexical relation to the past, to memory.

MV: Are you creating memories?

YN: Both architectural space and its representations are repositories, containers as well as skeletons of sorts. I like that my photographs kind of hover around reality, draw from memories, feel familiar and strange.

MV: Your work is filled with translations: between the mediums of photography and sculpture, between two and three dimensions, and between each distinct stage of a multi-step process.

YN: Translation is central to my work and process. For me, translation is about the broad strokes of an original idea that serves to shift and reconstruct meaning through language. The photographs are sites of translation. The source photograph is reconstructed as a sculptural form but through broad strokes – I like the distillation. The sculptures are more suggestive of a space and moment, rather than a literal articulation. They are spaces in transition or in states of becoming. The final work ends up quite a distance away from its origin and the tension between what is intended and realized lies in this gap.

*By a Thread*, 2009  
C-type print  
30 x 40 cm





# Thomas Erben Gallery

Press Release



*Akhet*, 2013. C-print, edition of 5 (+2 AP), 50 x 40 in.

## Yamini Nayar

*an axe for a wing-bone*

November 7 – December 21, 2013

*Opening reception: Thursday, November 7, 6-8:30 pm*

It is our great pleasure to announce *an axe for a wing-bone*, **Yamini Nayar's** second solo exhibition with Thomas Erben Gallery. This new body of work continues Nayar's process-oriented practice, further highlighting her method of construction and destruction, where the finally selected photographic recording might not be an end result but chosen from a state "in between." This is particularly evident in a series of four black-and-white small-scale studies, different iterations of a makeshift room where common elements take on roles that change from image to image. The timeline is unclear, giving a sense of parallel realities, and the improbable constructions disrupt any sense of spatial logic as they veer towards abstraction.

Process and temporality have always been essential to Nayar's work: tabletop and wall-built models are fashioned from raw industrial materials and studio debris, and continuously reworked while being documented by the camera. The works in *an axe for a wing-bone* seem even more impermanent than

continued...

Thomas Erben Gallery  
526 West 26<sup>th</sup> Street, 4<sup>th</sup> floor  
New York, NY 10001  
212-645-8701  
info@thomaserben.com  
www.thomaserben.com

Over the past five years, Nayar's work has been shifting from literal into abstract space, which still serves as a repository for memory and imagination. Her core concerns remain psychological, historical, and centered around the fluidity of wider social perspectives. Previous images depicted distinctly room-like settings, however unstable these may have seemed, whereas her current work, informed by a deepened research into modernist architecture, continues towards the edge of im/possibility. *Cascading Attica*, for example, presents us with an architectural image fragment, extending into a swirl of unidentifiable matter which wraps around a field seeming simultaneously solid, vaporous, reflective and transparent. Perspective is dislodged – not quite defying gravity, but not on firm ground either – and the exquisitely toxic coloration adds an element of ominence. "Attica" - referring to the Classical Greek region projecting into the Aegean Sea, the 1971 prison riot in upstate New York, and a waterfall in Wyoming – exemplifies Nayar's interest in the shifting nature of meaning. On a formal level, she often intersperses three-dimensionality with decidedly shallow space making both conditions, though factually unfeasible and irresolvable, appear entirely believable. It is as if, rather than working toward compromise, she folds spectrums in half, bringing polarities to a place of coexistence.

Yamini Nayar (b. 1975, Detroit, MI) received her MFA from the **School of Visual Arts**, New York, in 2005 and her BFA from the **Rhode Island School of Design**, 1999. Thomas Erben Gallery first showed her photo works in *First Left, Second Right* in 2007/08. Other exhibitions include: *Always the Young Strangers*, **Higher Pictures**, NY; *The Influentials*, **School of Visual Arts**, NY, both 2011; *The Empire Strikes Back*, **Saatchi Museum**, London; *Tough Pictures*, **Cincinnati Art Museum**, OH, both 2010; *We would like to thank (again) the curators, who wish to remain anonymous*, **Galerie Anne Barrault**, Paris; *Marella Gallery*, Beijing, both 2009; *Sultana's Dream*, **Exit Art**, New York, 2007; *Yamini Nayar and Sreshtha Rit Premnath*, **BosePacia**, New York, 2006; *Fatal Love*, **Queens Museum of Art**, 2005.

In 2010, Nayar gave the **Lightborne Lecture** at the Cincinnati Art Museum and held residencies at the **Art Academy of Cincinnati** and the **Center for Photography**, Woodstock. In May of 2011, she was one of seven contributors to *Manual for Treason*, editor Murtaza Vali, **Sharjah Biennial**. She is currently an artist-in-residence at the **Lower Manhattan Cultural Council** and a Visiting Artist Scholar at New York University, Steinhardt School of Art, 2011-12. Upcoming publications include an *Artist to Watch* profile in **Art Economist Magazine**, December 2011, and a feature in the book *UNFIXED: Photography and Postcolonial Perspectives in Contemporary Art*, **Unfixed Productions**, January 2012. Nayar lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

*Gallery hours: Tue - Sat, 10-6.*

*For further information and visuals, please visit [www.thomaserben.com](http://www.thomaserben.com) or contact the gallery at 212-645.8701.*

Thomas Erben Gallery  
526 West 26<sup>th</sup> Street, 4<sup>th</sup> floor  
New York, NY 10001  
212-645-8701  
[info@thomaserben.com](mailto:info@thomaserben.com)  
[www.thomaserben.com](http://www.thomaserben.com)





*an axe for a wing-bone*, 2013. Installation view, west and north walls.



*Past Present, 2013*  
C-print  
40 x 50 inches





*Chrysalis*, 2013  
C-print, diptych.  
8 x 10 and 50 x 40 inches respectively.



*an axe for a wing-bone*, 2013. Installation view, east and south walls.





*Akhet*, 2013  
C-print  
50 x 40 inches





*Head Over Heels, 2013.*  
C-print  
40 x 50 in.





*an axe for a wing-bone*, 2013. Installation view towards west wall.

# Thomas Erben Gallery

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2013

## Art in Review



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND THOMAS ERBEN GALLERY, NEW YORK

"Akhet," C-print from 2013 by Yamini Nayar in her second solo show, "An Axe for a Wing-bone," at Thomas Erben Gallery.

### Yamini Nayar

'An Axe for a Wing-bone'

Thomas Erben Gallery  
526 West 26th Street,  
fourth floor  
Through Dec. 21

Yamini Nayar's second solo at Thomas Erben builds on and complicates what she has done in the past. And whether she is fundamentally a photographer or a sculptor is still, in a sense, a tough call. Many of the photographs are of assemblages, often vaguely architectural in form, that she puts together in her studio from scrap materials, photographing the work in progress at various stages, and from different angles once it's done. Afterward, she more or less finesses the photographer-or-sculptor question herself: The models are discarded; the pictures remain.

As before, her pictures project us into disorienting interiors. What look like ceilings could be floors; floors could be walls. It's hard to get a footing and an illusion of damage, possibly in progress, is pervasive. In some of her recent vertically oriented photographs, we seem to peer down tight corridors into distant, blasted rooms. The interior in the photograph titled "Akhet" — the ancient Egyptian word for flood season — looks like a river is running through it, stripping off wallpaper as it goes and pooling up as

it surges toward an exit.

This picture has a sense of textural delicacy new to the work, which brings it very close to painting: It's filled with brushy strokes, suggesting yet another identity that this ambitious young artist is playing with, absorbing, making her own.

HOLLAND COTTER

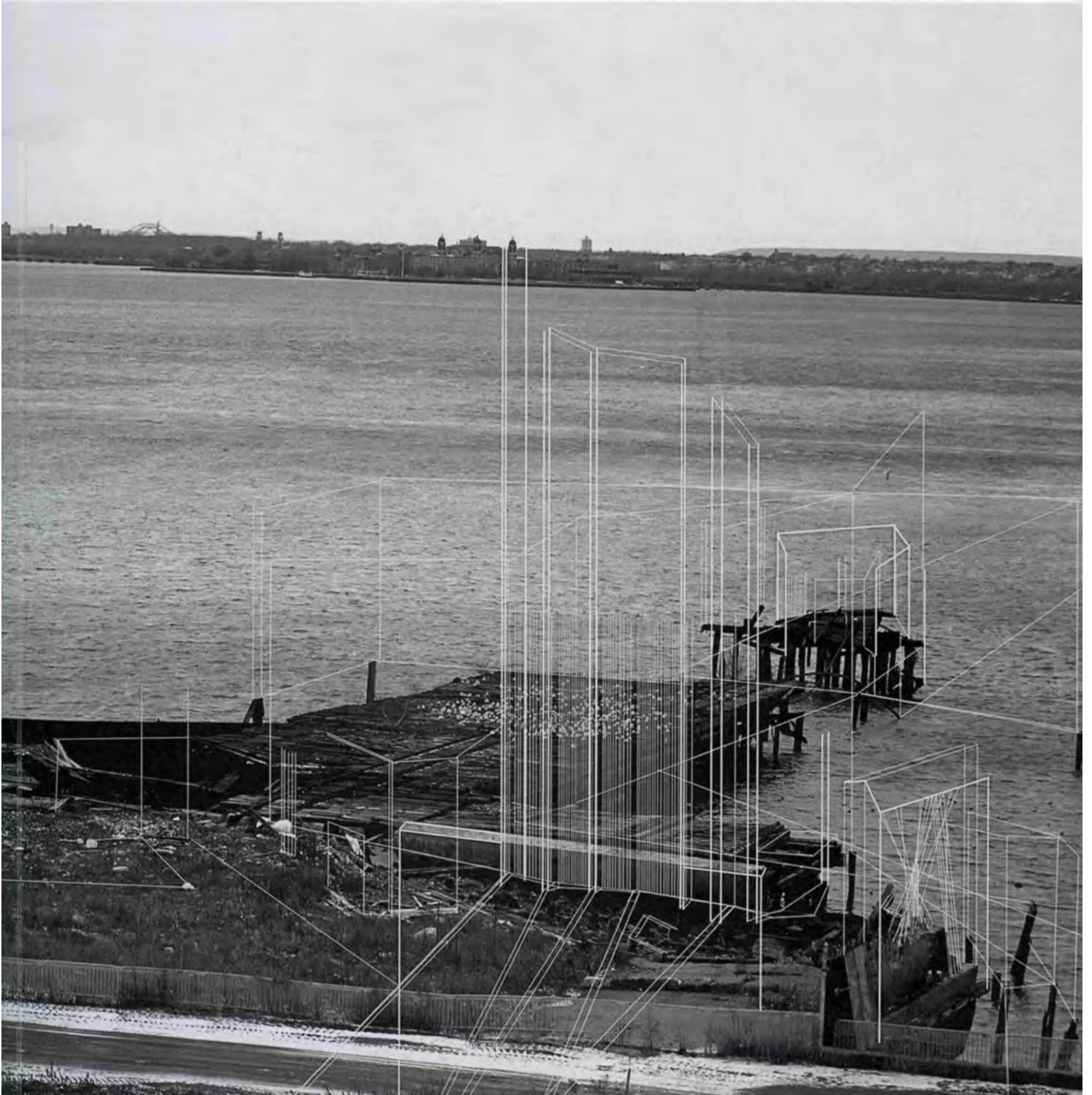
Thomas Erben Gallery Inc.  
526 West 26<sup>th</sup> Street, 4<sup>th</sup> floor  
New York, NY 10001  
212.645.8701  
www.thomaserben.com  
info@thomaserben.com



# ART *India*

THE ART NEWS MAGAZINE OF INDIA

## TRAVELLING ART



# A Heap of Broken Images

Yamini Nayar is an inspired explorer of liminal spaces, observes **Abhay Sardesai**.



Yamini Nayar. Photograph by Kate Cunningham.

Summoning the ardour of a collector and a collagist, Yamini Nayar assembles irregular worlds out of the random debris of everyday life on table-tops in her Brooklyn studio: paper strips, glass shards, wooden panels, segments of thread and lengths of wire lying around in alleyways and street corners are carefully gathered and intuitively arranged to create chaotic sculptural forms. The haphazard constructions look incomplete but strategic – memory and

desire mix in unexpected ways to create spaces that have been pulled together to create worlds that have fallen apart. These painted, glued and ripped constructions, often carrying fragments of found images, are captured by the eye of a large format camera and then, discarded; their process of *being*, which is, in fact, a progressive *staging* of built environments, approximates a performance that Nayar frames in her photographs.

Born to a Bengali mother and a Malayali father in New York in 1975, Nayar grew up in Detroit before studying photography and related media at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), Providence, and the School of Visual Arts, New York. The family moved to Detroit from the East Coast in the late '70s, where her father began work as a manufacturing consultant in the auto industry and her mother began studying towards becoming a psychoanalyst. Nayar remembers wanting to be a poet – she even studied literature and writing at Eugene Lang College in New York.

An archive of fragments, most of Nayar's photographs index an anarchitectural trove of traces, preserving a record of a diorama that has been demolished, a model that has vanished, a display that has been abandoned. The act of documentation here becomes an inquiry into the multi-angular enthusiasms of the act of representation. What stands between detritus and its afterlife *as* detritus is the photograph. Not only does it arrest the ephemeral moment of status transformation as far as the abject material is concerned but it also memorializes the anti-monumental in a non-ironic manner. Nayar's images are evidential – they authenticate the obvious, yes, but at the more metaphorical level, they draw you into a Barthesian landscape of loss although without the attendant lament.

How does a flat, two-dimensional image, in this case, a photograph, accommodate the assortment of aspects that an object,



assemblage or installation possesses? What are its sins of omission? This line of interrogation, initiated by Cubism a 100 years back, is extended by Nayar to *record* difficult environments that she fabricates – as the scales clash, the dimensions collapse and the shapes speak to each other in asymmetric accents, entering her photographs becomes a challenging task. The best of them come across as unnavigable. A sense of damage

hangs heavy in the spaces. There is mystery as well but it is neatly bereft of any ardency – you won't find the ruin being romanced here.

If one looks at the better works from her second solo at Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai, *Harpoon*, in 2012, one detects a commitment to exploring the brutal visuality of disharmonious zones<sup>1</sup>. *Ethos*, for instance, is an image of what looks like a

whitewashed Styrofoam box with windows framing crusty black beehive-like masses that loom large over a vacant parking lot. Not only does this devastated complex, supported by a scabrous concrete block, bring to mind sites that have been bombed out of their equanimity and buildings with corporate offices that have collapsed but also

Yamini Nayar. *Ethos*. C-print.  
101.6 cms x 127 cms. 2012.





## PROFILE

public religious festivals, especially in South Asian cities, and their after-effects – the disrespectfully dismantled pandals and their ill-fated Plaster-of-Paris friezes. *In Waiting* shows a maquette for an ill-fated stadium or suburban aerodrome against a cratered road with a sharply defined kerb. The image looks like it is solarizing slowly from the left. Bursts of orange light seem to brighten up Escherian stairways in *Happen*. Some strips of wood try to contain the black galactic landscape in incomplete frames even as some others fan out of one of the suns – from where, incidentally, proliferates an array of horse-head stickers.

As you stand before Nayar's more challenging images, it is not the complex orchestra-

tion of the rubble that casts a spell; it is the absence of obvious points of entry into the photographs that makes them enigmatic. They often test the critic's skills of description and his talent for making the descriptions comprehensible. Often, there are no narrational toe-holds; the edifices have an ambiguous status and the violence they have suffered seems unaccountable and startlingly generic.

Interestingly, Nayar begins her work with a meditation on "utopian visions". Moments from the grand narrative of Modernism often offer her the initial inspiration. A few of her photographs are strewn with art historical clues – the eye on the wall staring at you across a torn floor in *Cleo* is

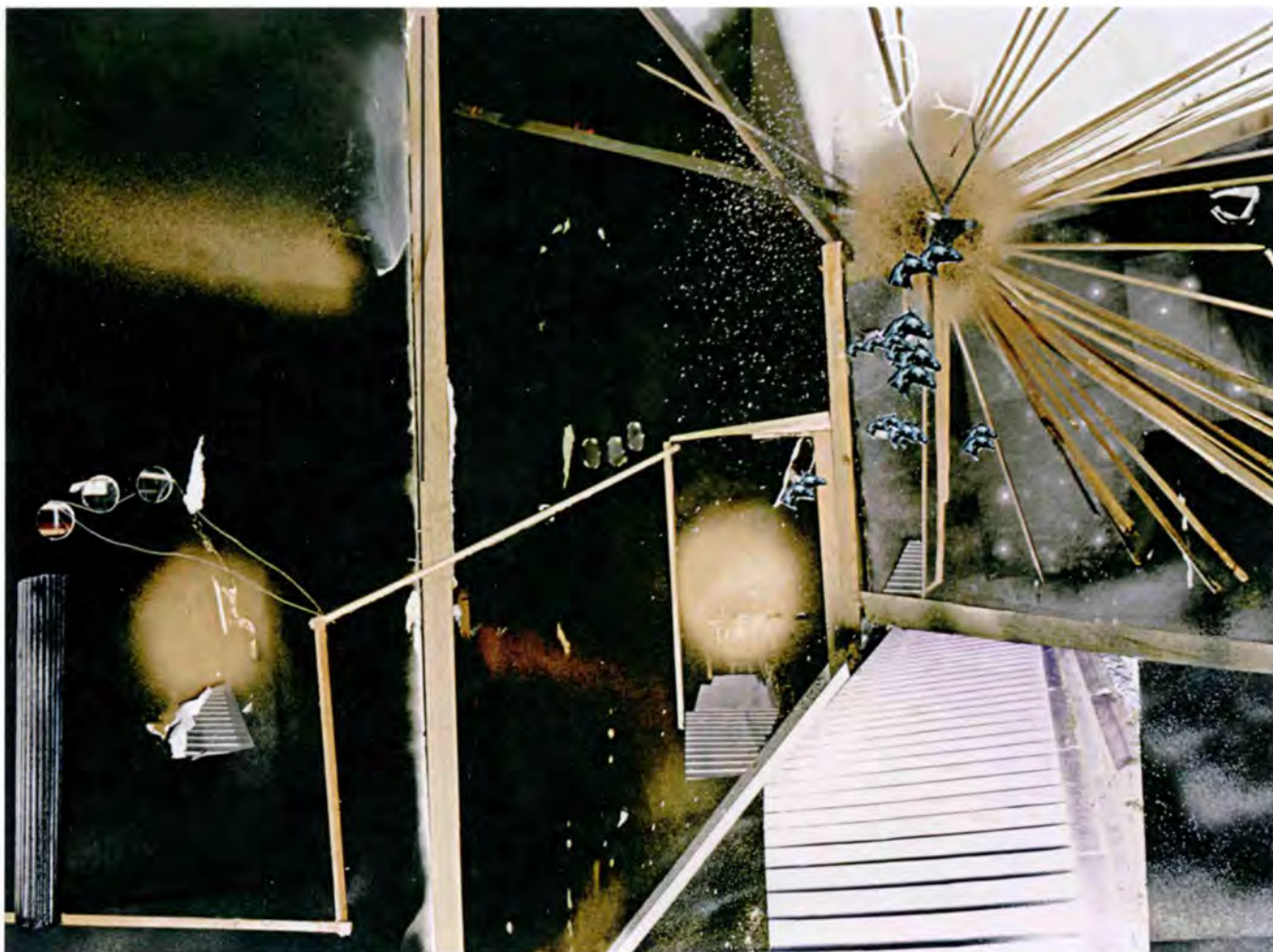
a wink at Surrealism, the muscular legs in the cheerfully composed *Pursuit* is a nod in Richard Hamilton's direction. However, it is modernist architecture with its contents and discontents that Nayar has obsessively mined and drawn from. In fact, Nayar remembers taking a class at RISD in the Department of Architecture where she studied opera houses exhaustively.

How does a building occupy space and what is the to-and-fro of the conversation that its interiors have with the exteriors? How is history *housed* and how is its evacuation a function of time? Though most of

Yamini Nayar. *In Waiting*.  
C-print.  
101.6 cms x 76.2 cms. 2012.







Yamini Nayar. *Happen*. C-print. 76.2 cms x 101.6 cms. 2009. Images courtesy the artist and Jhaveri Contemporary.

the structures in Nayar's better works look anonymous, a work like *Cascading Attica*, for instance, with its frozen sheet of water against a makeshift building with square windows and a dome comes across as a quirky tribute to Frank Lloyd Wright's Falling Water House in Pennsylvania. "I've been influenced by the architectural photographs of Julius Shulman and Ezra Stoller", says Nayar. "What drew me to their images originally was an awareness of their reach in creating a language of architecture and modernism that conflicts or exists separately from its realities", she adds. Neat and ruled, white spectral lines are traced out of a pier on the verge of complete disintegration in *Study 7*, for instance. Here as well as in other such works like *Untitled Study 1*, the diagrammatic grid, often part of the planner's drawing board, affords Nayar the opportunity to launch into a critique of industrial modernity. Having fallen from grace as a thriving automobile town

in recession-hit USA, Detroit is a ghostly presence in Nayar's work; spaces like riverside quays and warehouses anchor her memories and their contaminations.

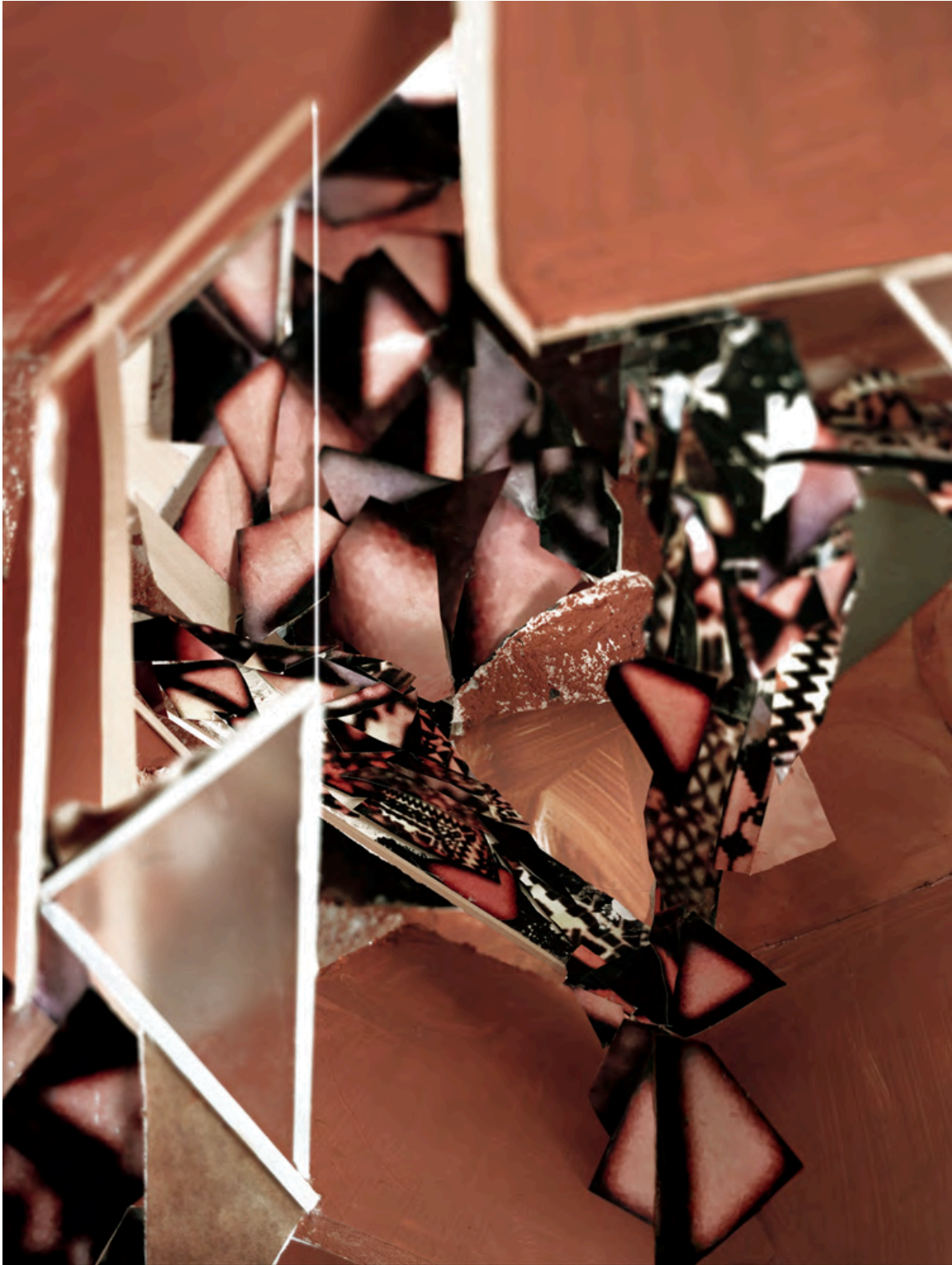
Even those of Nayar's works that do not show crumbling spaces have a disquieting quality to them. In photographs like *What's Essential* or *Salute* featuring domestic objects, there is a stillness that comes across as clinical and ominous.

There is something liminal about most of the spaces that Nayar presents before us in her new works – they are abrupt, transitional and apocalyptic. The debris in these spaces strikes uncertain poses – one imagines it mounted somewhere on the threshold between the global slum and the global mall. One is quite convinced about where Nayar stands though: in the middle of tedious chromatic equations and the dated play of half-forms and quarter-forms of other practitioners, she is among the few who are developing new approaches to abstraction as an art genre.

#### END-NOTE

1. In her first show at Thomas Erben in New York (2009), Nayar shared space with the brilliant Sheela Gowda. Her second show was at Thomas Erben in New York (2011).





*Gion*, 2014  
C-print  
40 x 30 inches





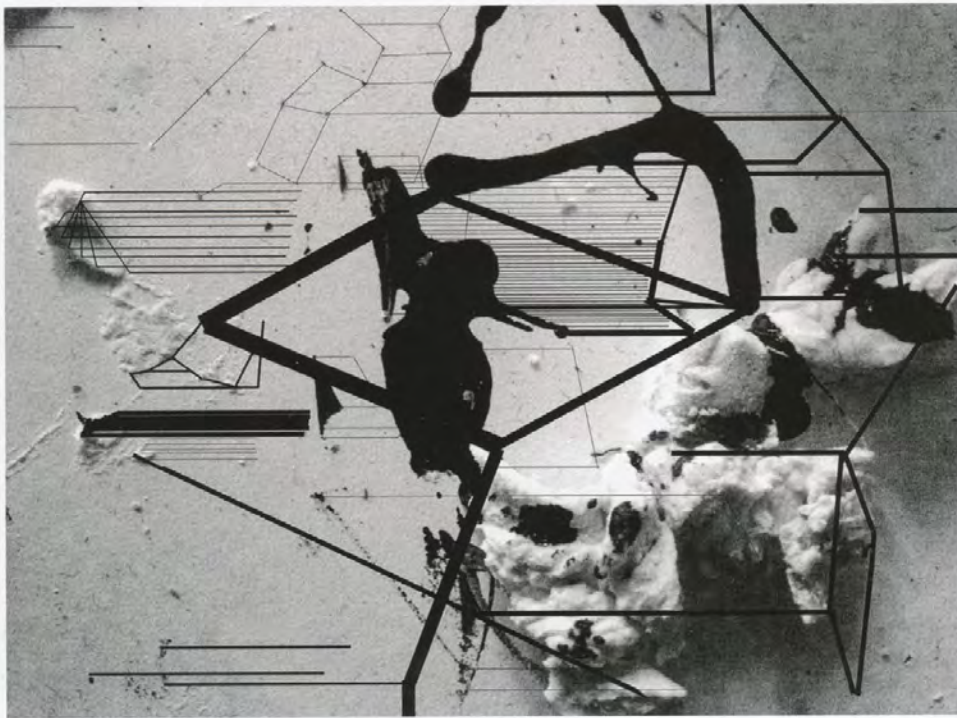
*Untitled (Bodies)*, 2014  
C-print  
18 x 12 inches



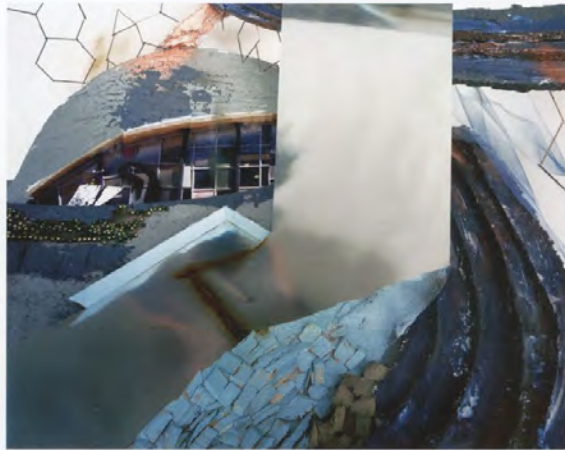
## Yamini Nayar







Aus der Arbeit From the work *On Form and Growth*, 2013.  
je each 20,3 x 25,4 cm



*Past Present*, 2013, 101.6 × 127 cm  
*Cascading Attica*, 2011, 101.6 × 127 cm





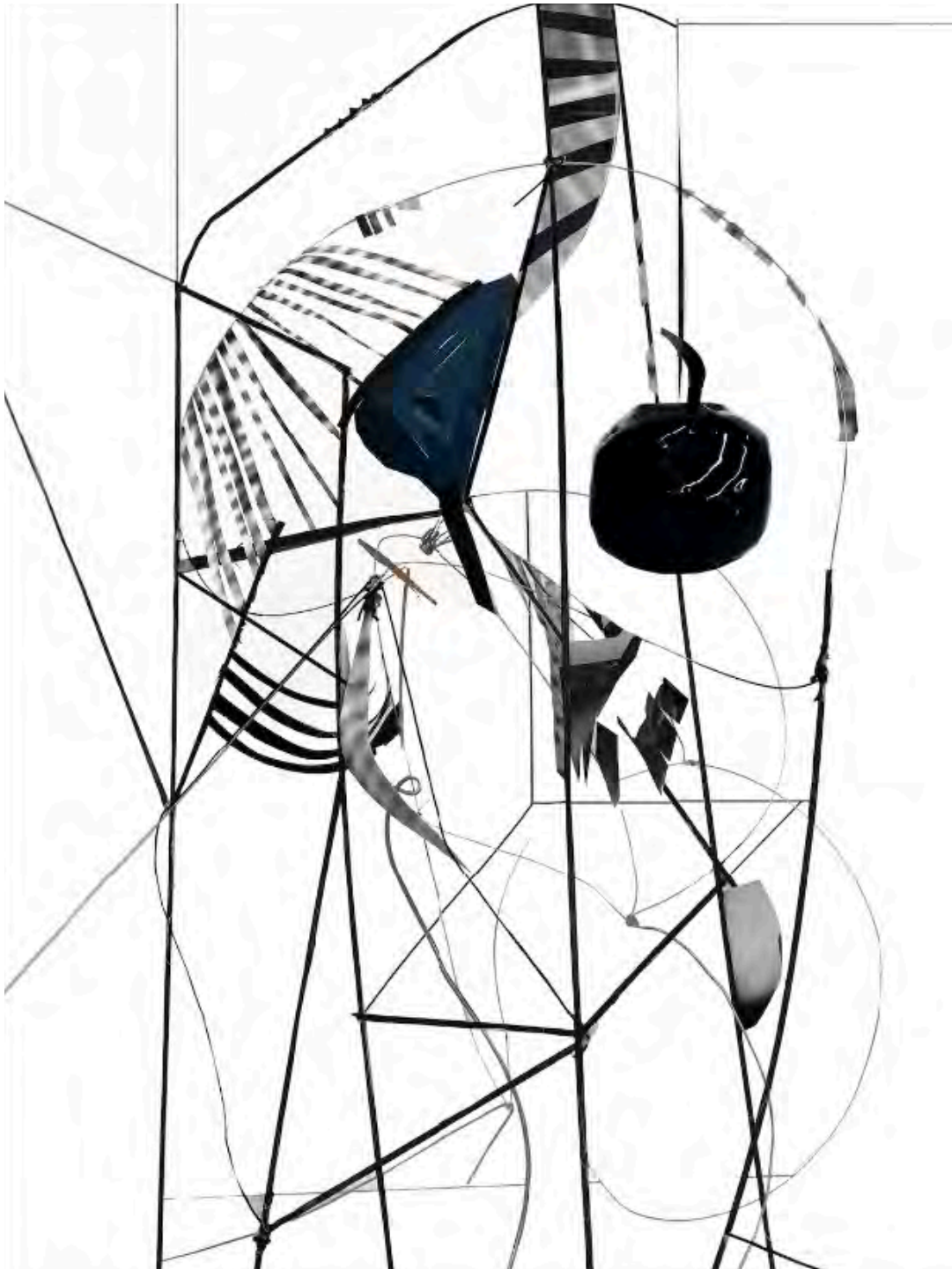


Installation view: Yamini Nayar at Art Cologne 2016.



*Garden for Laborers*, 2015  
C-print  
42 x 36 inches





*Wing-Bone*, 2018  
Hahnemühle Bartya Pigment Print  
40 x 30 inches

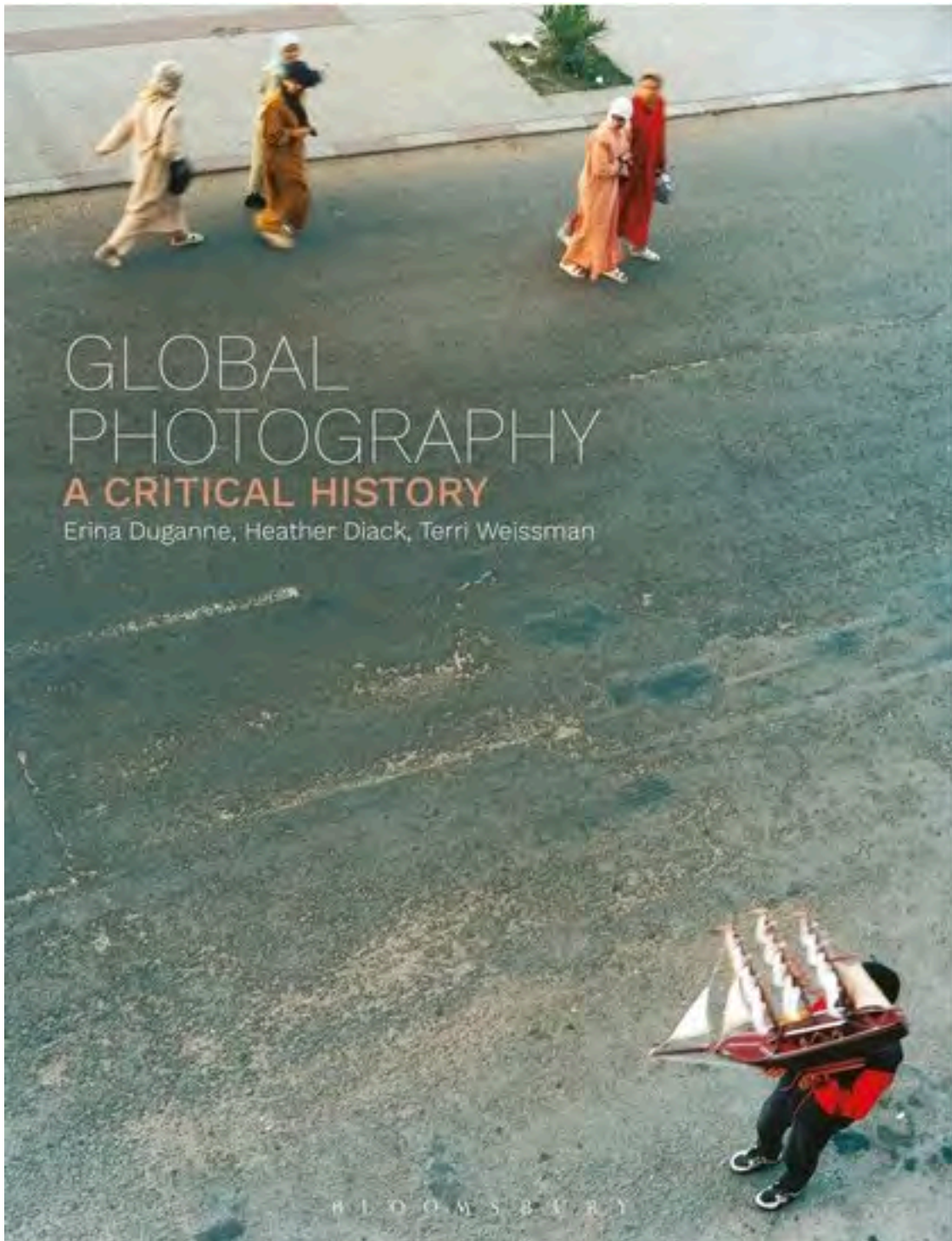


*Machine Living*, 2018  
Hahnemühle Bartya Pigment Print  
24 x 46 in





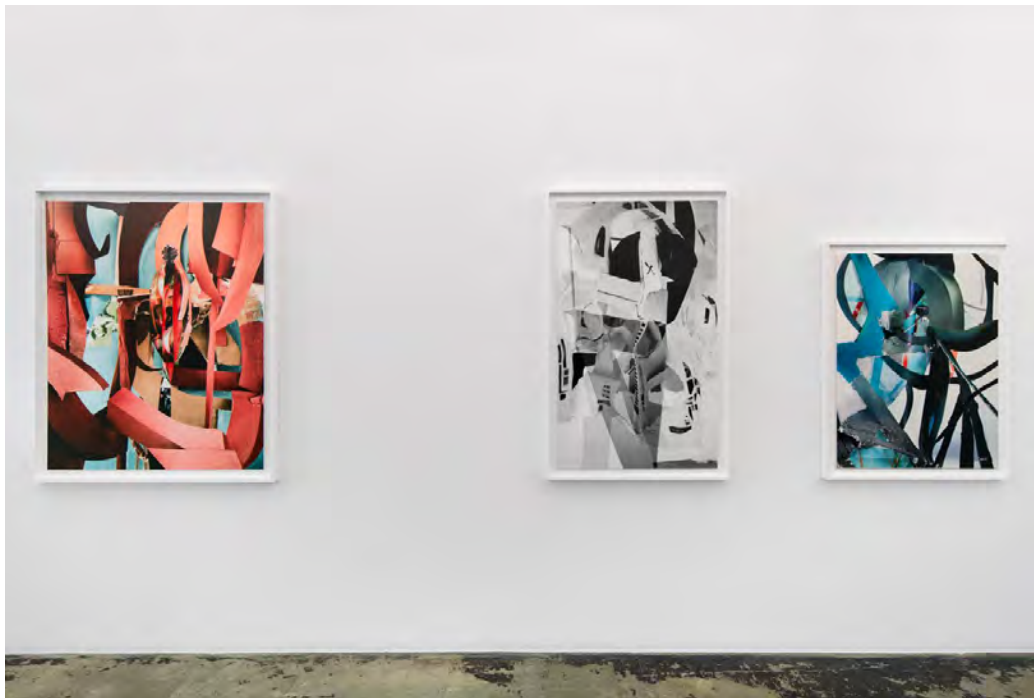
*Alterns in the Overgrowth, 2017*  
C-print  
60 x 40 inches



Yamini Nayar's work will be included in this forthcoming publication (2020).



# Thomas Erben Gallery



Installation view, east wall (photo credit: Fernando Sandoval/MW).

## Yamini Nayar *Ouroboros*

May 2 - June 13, 2024

Opens Thursday, May 2, 6 - 8:30pm

Thomas Erben is thrilled to present *Ouroboros*, Yamini Nayar's eighth exhibition with the gallery dating back to the artist's first show in 2009 (with Sheela Gowda) and including solo presentations at NADA, Art Cologne and the India Art Fair. This exhibition is presented conjointly with Jhaveri Contemporary in Mumbai.

Nayar chooses the image of the ouroboros - a snake biting its own tail, which symbolizes the cyclical renewal of life, death and rebirth - as a metaphor for her own creative process. Guided by the knowledge of her "hand", the artist builds materially-invested, often life-size assemblages using ubiquitously available materials such as paper, plaster, studio detritus and printed ephemera. During this cumulative process of building, taking apart, "risking ruin" and burrowing into, ideas emerge intuitively, often springing from the subconscious. Once recognized, Nayar then clarifies and enriches what is coming to the fore, tapping into her own bodies of research such as Alchemy and Myth. These assemblages are built for the camera apparatus, which not only gives permanence to their continuously shifting gestalt, but also serves as the photographic "eye".

Departing from Nayar's previous concerns with modernist architecture's singularity and its preoccupation with "the line", as exemplified in such works as *Akhet* (2013), this new body of work privileges organic, more natural forms to suggest the feminine, the ornamental, the body and Eros. Completely built by hand, Nayar's work questions the fundamental shift in our relationship to the environment as it emerged in the Renaissance when architectural drawing became the primary site of exploration, distancing concept from execution, thus putting into play our extractive relationship to the environment.

In *Feeding the Silkworm* (2024), for example, shapes are cut from board and individually painted in hues of mainly brown and green, with an orange surface placed more centrally. Differently sized and collaged over time, these shapes are individually active but together form a dynamic thrust which, combined with their rough materiality, create a tension with the camera's compression and stilling. It is in this friction that a reference to Alchemy and Myth emerges.

Included in the exhibition are source materials resonating with Nayar's ongoing training as a Jungian psychoanalyst, Bengali and Keralite background, as well as interest in psyche, matter and the archetypal field.

**Yamini Nayar** (b. 1975) received her MFA from the School of Visual Arts, 2005, and her BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design, 1999. Currently, she is an analyst-in-training at the CG Jung Institute, NY.

Most recently her work was included in Phaidon's *Vitamin C+: Collage in Contemporary Art* and reviews have appeared in major publications such as *Artforum*, *The New York Times*, *Art India*, *Asian Art Newspaper*, *Vogue India*, *Art in America*, *The New Yorker* and *Whitewall Magazine*. Over the years, Nayar's work has been exhibited widely. Major survey shows include: *Ray Photo Triennale*, **Museum für Moderne Kunst**, Frankfurt; *Constructs/Constructions*, **Kiran Nadar Museum of Art**, New Delhi (both 2015); *Sculpture is Everything*, **Queensland Art Gallery**, South Brisbane (2012); *Manual for Treason*, **Sharjah Biennial**, UAE (2011); *The Empire Strikes Back*, **Saatchi Museum**, London (2010); and *Fatal Love*, **Queens Museum of Art**, (2005). Nayar has also shown with **Jhaveri Contemporary**, Mumbai (since 2012); **Wendi Norris**, San Francisco (2019) and **BosePacia** (2006). Public collections include the **Art Institute of Chicago**, **Guggenheim Museum**, **Queensland Art Gallery**, **Kiran Nadar Museum**, **deCordova Museum** and **Cincinnati Art Museum**.





*Full Circle, 2022*  
Archival inkjet print  
50 x 40 inches  
Edition 5/5 (+ 1 AP)

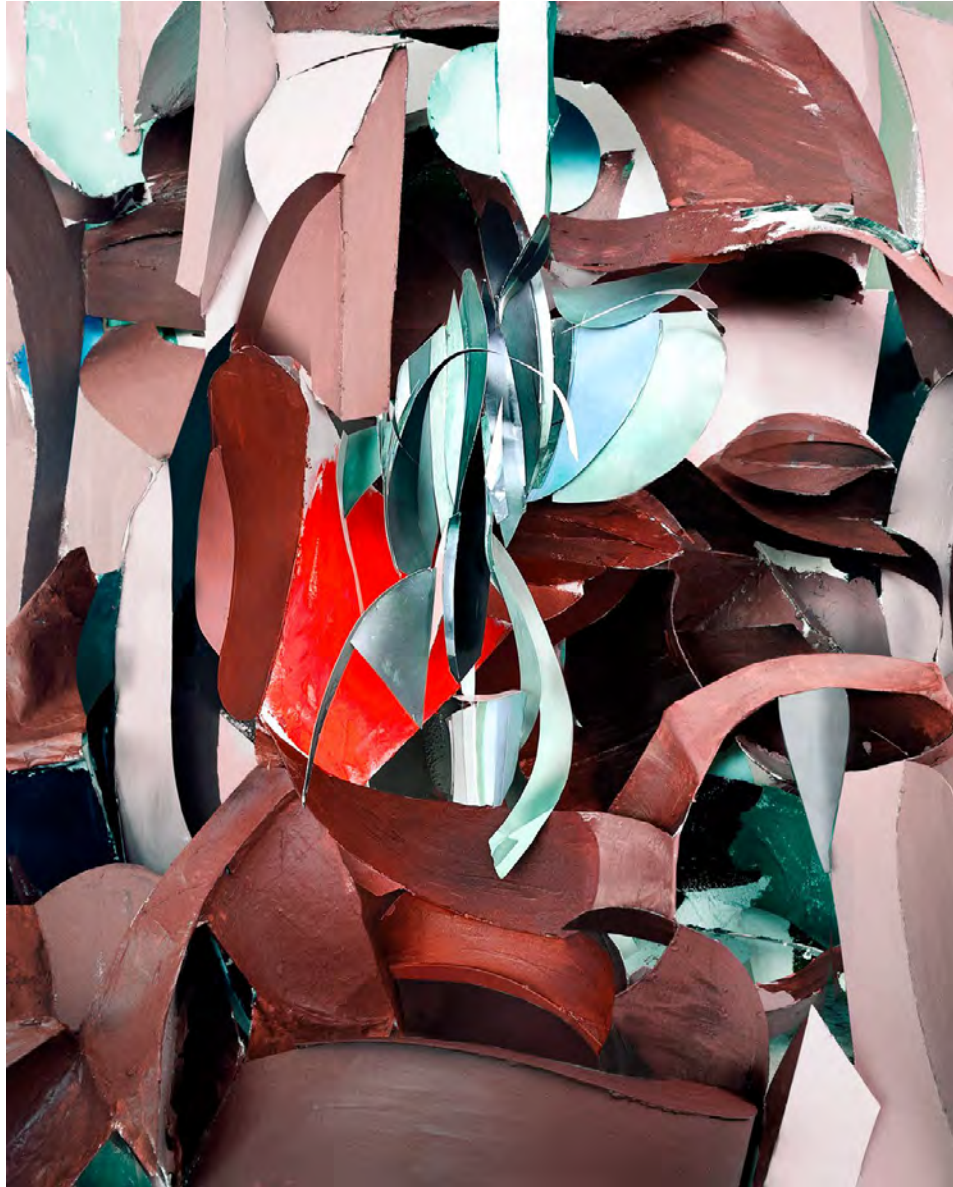


*Animism, 2024*  
Silver gelatin print  
50 x 30 inches  
Edition of 5 (+ 2 AP)





*Only the Dance, 2024*  
Archival inkjet print  
40 x 30 inches  
Edition of 5 (+ 2 AP)



*Feeding the Silkworm, 2024*  
Archival inkjet print  
50 x 40 inches  
Edition of 5 (+ 2 AP)





Installation view, north/west walls (photo credit: Fernando Sandoval/MW).



*Echo and Eros, 2024*  
Archival inkjet print  
45.5 x 34 inches  
Edition of 5 (+ 2 AP)