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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