



Yamini Nayar, *Cascading Attica* (2011), courtesy of Thomas Erben Gallery.

FULLSCREEN

YAMINI NAYAR: HEAD SPACE

If there could be an ideal negotiation and interaction between spaces constructed in photography and the space of its contextualization it is temporarily rendered so through "Head Space," the recent solo show of artist Yamini Nayar at Thomas Erben Gallery last month. Usually one looks for a dialogue purely between the works installed, and the gallery space is often times regarded as a space lacking, neutral, and one that requires to be in a state of meaningless absence because the works hold that lofty responsibility of being negotiated by the viewer. In Nayar's process and practice there's an interesting reconciliation between these polarities.

The artist's work through the years has been a means of building and creating structures from found objects, photographing them and then discarding the physical installation. We never get to see the actual constructions, although in "Head Space" photographic documentation of source material is installed. It serves as a visual map of sorts - a legend - trying to fix on important points within Nayar's process. In early works like *Cleo* (2009) and *Between the Lines* (2009) we see these surreal structures or renderings of fantasy like spaces. They seem impermanent, fluid but they are still recognizable from within the spectrum of reality. In *Cleo*, for instance, one can discern some kind of indoor space with its floorboards and walls violently smashed through. But the odd pinhole, through which an eye peeks in, displaces one's sense of spatial footing in reality. It's this displacement that comes to fruit in the body of works in "Head Space." Now space has literally and metaphorically been sculpted, by deliberating through historical references within architecture and the shifting meanings of our experiences with these man-made edifices. Nayar explains, "I begin with a 2D image, which acts as a quote in a longer process." References in the works include well-known buildings like Frank Lloyd Wright's Johnson Wax building, referred to as the Great Workroom, to generic spaces like a mid-century living room. None of these are immediately recognizable now, not in the way one could navigate Nayar's early works. Now these constructions that we engage our motions through have been magnified, broken down, and re-stitched so that standing in front of them in a gallery space, thrusts you into polar states of physical and semantic experiences. Says Nayar, "My concerns lean towards subjectivity and memory - and thus my photographs are less tied to being read as 'real.' I'm much more interested in process, and how we shape memory, how it shapes us." *Memorious* (2011) navigates through such a space. Within the 4 x 5 foot format that Nayar predominantly works in, you are privy in some way to the process even while looking at the finished piece. This is so because the final print was arrived at by the layering of fragments of previous photographs made in the same space that were documented at different times, throwing glimpses of various interventions that had taken place there and now no longer exist. "I think of it as physically adding or slicing parts of the structure back into the photographic document. A physical expansion of what is seen and remembered, but also a kind of rupture in time. The piece is called 'Memorious,' which means to have good memory," explains the artist.

In *Cascading Attica* (2011), the image is sharper and more constructed rather than fluid motions reminiscent of some of the photography from around 2008. Here, you start to understand how scale is an important aspect within Nayar's work. Drenched in cool hues of blue and white, the space fluctuates on the surface throwing shadows, sometimes flat and at other times deep. Movement is abrupt and sharp, and you are left to your own devices to discern this spatial construction. You aren't given a fantastical narrative, even if you are given the key. You know the references - "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" reads the press release. And the legend on the wall (the source material) gives you glimpses of memory from which these collages might be understood. However, every work is present as something unto its own. It relates to the built environment in which you stand, and from within which you look directly at it, be it up close or from afar. In a sense you become one of the elements within Nayar's temporary constructions. You are moving and understanding your body as it relates to these spaces on a much more profound way than in earlier works where, as the viewer you were still outside of those constructions. You remained in a kind of peripheral space to the one Nayar's photographs presented. But in "Head Space" this changes. "The play with scale has always been an element in my practice. It is disorienting, it is how we understand our surroundings. Shifted scale invites the viewer to inhabit a photographic space, to spend time there."

ZIGS: Thomas Erben Gallery, Yamini Nayar

By MEENAKSHI THIRUKODE - SOUTH ASIAN CONTEMPORARY ART

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