

## ARTFORUM

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### 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.

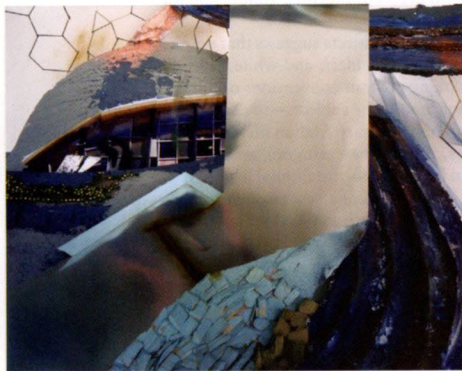
These images conjure a feeling of push and pull: an invitation into spaces that are impossible to enter, both imaginatively and literally. Even Nayar's method—the tableaux created only for photographing, the confounded dimensions that suggest deft work with Photoshop but are in fact made entirely by 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

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Yamini Nayar,  
*Cascading Attica*,  
2011, color photo-  
graph, 40 x 50".

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