



Yamini Nayar. *Cleo*. C-print. 30" x 40".
Edition of 5 (+2 AP). 2009.

Worlds Coming Apart

Abhay Sardesai engages with Yamini Nayar's intensely crafted photographs and Sheela Gowda's sensitively mounted installation.

HOW DO SPACES INFLECT EACH OTHER ACROSS dynamic socio-architectural and cultural-memorial axes? This is one of the questions Yamini Nayar and Sheela Gowda ask in *Arrested Views*, a two-artist show mounted at the Thomas Erben Gallery, New York, from April 7th to May 9th.

Yamini Nayar designs interior spaces out of what look like overused and discarded materials, which she then proceeds to capture photographically. Intuitively constructed and often with vandalized objects, the messy spaces seem to simulate territorial carcasses with fragile after-lives. In *Far Between*, torn, shimmering curtain-wings frame a black hydra-headed form rising from the middle of a foam-filled bed against a wall with scratched, brown patterned wallpaper. The same forbidding sculptural shape is seen through the flowing tatters of a white cloth draped over the frame of a four-poster bed against a wall partially covered with an orange patterned wallpaper in *Between the Lines*. What kind of a theatre is Nayar exposing us to? Her re-assembled worlds bring home South Asian warfronts but also domestic settings emptied of the human presence,



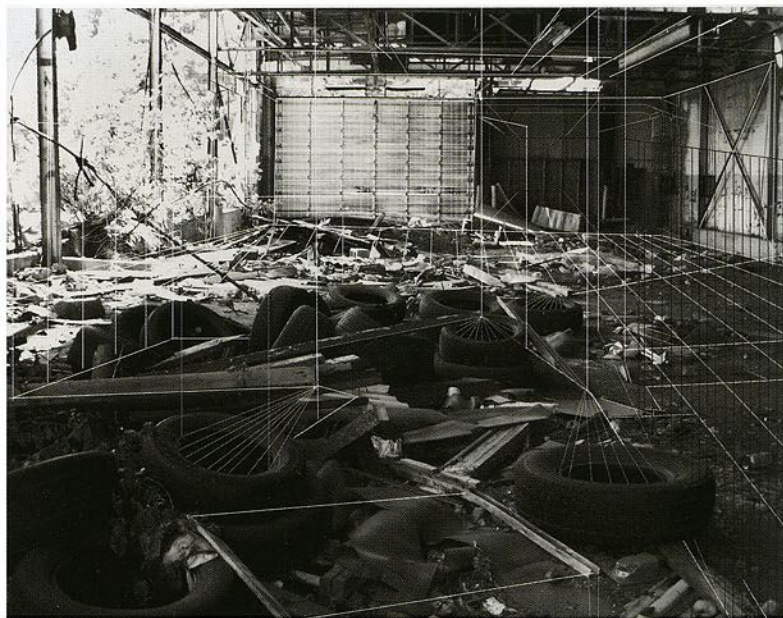
Yamini Nayar. *Far Between*. C-print. 30" x 40". Edition of 5 (+2 AP). 2009.

where unequal acts of passion have been enacted and accords negotiated under duress. In *Cleo*, for instance, we come across a surreal eye pasted on a makeshift screen in a closed part of a devastated room – it stares at you over a wooden floor that has been brutally ripped out. What is remarkable is that though Nayar probes the contract between battle-scarred objects and the spaces they occupy, she refrains from wistfully memorializing their scarred pasts. It would be tempting for her at this juncture to construct a sentimentally conceived archive of effects – by giving in to nostalgia as an agency she could engage with what one might call the romance of the ruin or the lure of the fragment. By underscoring the constructedness of the chaos and the deliberate nature of the debris, Nayar investigates instead the very act of *performing* documentation even as her careful staging strategies complicate the protocols of representation.

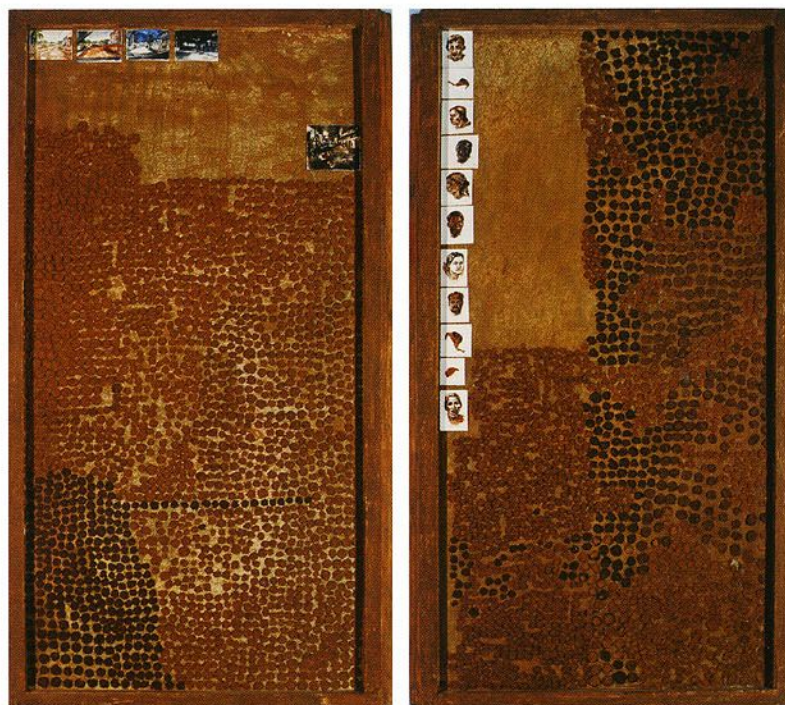
The decay that has set in at the heart of the grand industrial modernity project is framed in Nayar's two smaller photographs – images of tyres, metal strips, charred wooden beams and assorted trash are covered with architectural drawings that create geometrically defined faux-flow charts – is the purpose here to bring into view invisible and lapsed circuits of power? The works, while slyly referring to the planner's drawing board, point to the tyranny of the diagrammatic grid – a gesture and a flourish much favoured by patrons and adherents of the technological-managerial complex. Incidentally, Nayar grew up in Detroit, a once-thriving hub of automobile production, which has now been desperately hit by the recession.

Even as Nayar frames landscapes of rupture and estrangement in her photographs, Sheela Gowda's installation, involving two rectangular panels set together like an open book, recreates a *Private Gallery* of people and places adapting to various urban developmental transformations. A set of small watercolours featuring migrants, labourers and streets next to thumb-sized cow-pats create an environment which provocatively makes you aware of the relationship between dirt and displacement. Facilitating a pattern between the portraits and the cow-pats, this ten year-old work creates a network of connections between everyday practices of rural Indians and the texture of their lives even as it reminds you of ritual acts involving cowdung and the sacred and the secular uses it is put to in many Indian households.

Arresting Views brings together Gowda and Nayar, engaged as they are in mapping zones of transition without falling prey to the lure of spectacularisation. Though their works do not always speak fluently with each other or share the excitement of inhabiting the same gallery space, their similar thematic positions enrich the viewer by complicating his understanding of worlds coming together and worlds falling apart.



Yamini Nayar. *Untitled Study 1.* C-print: Architectural drawing on photograph. 10.5" x 13.5". Edition of 5 (+2 AP). 2008.



Sheela Gowda. *Private Gallery.* Installation. 2 panels: 78" x 42" x 1.5" each + a set of watercolour paintings. Ply board and wood, lamination sheet, cow dung, watercolour on paper. 1999.