



YAMINI NAYAR
CINCINNATI

Yamini Nayar makes photographs of small interior spaces that she constructs from detritus and reclaimed collage materials [Pearlman Gallery; September 10—October 8, 2010]. Flattened into photographs, these mysterious models put forth an alternative to modernism in the twentieth-century narratives of art, architecture, and multiculturalism. Nayar orchestrates spaces that are in chaotic disarray, as if the historical assumptions of patriarchy, utopian purity, and Western superiority that are embedded in many of last century's iconic buildings had been rent apart, leaving strange rubble out of which we might comb new readings of past and present. To borrow a term from the theorist Homi Bhabha, Nayar's imagery elucidates *contramodernity*: whereas modernist tropes are solid, direct, and idealistic, her spaces are defined by rupture, deconstruction, and intermediacy.

In *By a Thread*, 2009, a crystalline basin mitigates the work's overall futuristic feeling with the handiwork of collaged art materials like colored film, rhinestones, and slide mounts. The work is based on a photograph of Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace made in London for the 1851 Great Exhibition but Nayar has turned the arched interior upside down. This maneuver suggests femininity, which is further emphasized by the two female silhouettes collaged onto the back wall of the space. Here, the monument to the onset of the Industrial Revolution has been recast as a feminist temple devoted to the return to a handmade environment.

Pursuit, 2010, overtly recalls Richard Hamilton's collage *Just What Is It that Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?*, 1956, which uttered a critique of mid-century consumerism through an ironic assault on show homes that promised the American Dream. In Nayar's image, the male figure has been bisected, leaving only legs and pelvis, and the woman is entirely absent, absorbed into the portrayal of the space, now draped in fabrics and adorned with beads and antler-shaped constructions.

In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha wrote, "What is

theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself." Nayar's photographs offer views into a possible world of such transient spaces, where the complex is preferred over the singular, and the blended cultural vestiges of diaspora articulate a globalized aesthetic.

The setting for *Strange Event*, 2009, might be the festive interior of a Bedouin tent or a peyote ceremony tipi. Garlands of pointed leaves and fragments of mirror are arranged around a central point of light shining from within the print. The purpose of this space—or any of the others depicted—is uncertain. Arcane rituals seem to have been performed, leaving charred floors and afterimages of interior decorations marked onto crumbling walls. Abandoned and vacant, they seem to be built out of the rapid succession and accumulation of outmoded industries, conflicting social theories, and an encroaching awareness of what houses, cities, and other constructed environments betray of our inner psychologies and value systems.

The reality sets in: polarities such as male/female and east/west are represented in our current landscape in definite and determined ways. This series of rooms seems to have been the site for more collisions than celebrations. Nayar's work eschews both utopia and dystopia. She invents fantasies of an in-between state where discourse is problematic and chaos underscores the entire structure.

—Matt Morris

DUKE RILEY
CLEVELAND

Visitors to Duke Riley's *An Invitation to Lubberland* are swept into the maze-like exhibition by a video projection of train tracks, as the itinerant traveler-artist reimagines bits of buried history [MOCA Cleveland; September 10, 2010—January 9, 2011]. Scrawled in chalk over the projection surface, an inscription positions the work as a Depression-era tale: "Long ago, when the country was poor a lot of people started riding the rails. They traveled from town to town looking for work." Riley appears in the seven-part video as a Chaplinesque traveler riding the rails into Cleveland, which was once a welcome stop for itinerants crossing the country in search of work. He sets the action in a blighted inner-city neighborhood, a former hobo's paradise that rose and fell by the fortunes of a body of water, as he explores the buried river beneath Kingsbury Run—now a sewer drain. Hurling off moving trains, paddling through polluted sludge or wading through sewer tunnels—Riley is forever moving ahead, searching for the fictional *Lubberland*, a reference to a seventeenth-century sea ballad.

Focusing on disenfranchised outsiders, Riley's artistic concern is the exploration of the ways in which history and politics shape and reshape our land. His commission-based practice combines studies of material culture with reenactment as he relives chapters of history like a passion play. Here, the sum total is a set piece of evidentiary displays laid out like a hands-on children's museum exhibit—a mordant tale deceptively sugar-coated. His commissions comprise research as rigorous as a trained archeologist's, but he deftly uses social science as a weapon of critique. Situated at the crossroads of Great Lakes shipping and extensive railway networks, Cleveland blossomed into a full hobo village at Kingsbury Run. In response to this set of geographic and historical circumstances, the political machine quickly filled in the river to choke off new life, that is, to foreclose the further development of a burgeoning counterculture of alterity—"people not from here." The Roma of Europe, fenced populations in the

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Yamini Nayar, *Strange Event*, 2009, digital chromogenic print, 30 x 40 inches [courtesy of Thomas Erben Gallery, New York]; Yamini Nayar, *By a Thread*, 2009, digital chromogenic print, 30 x 40 inches [courtesy of Thomas Erben Gallery, New York]