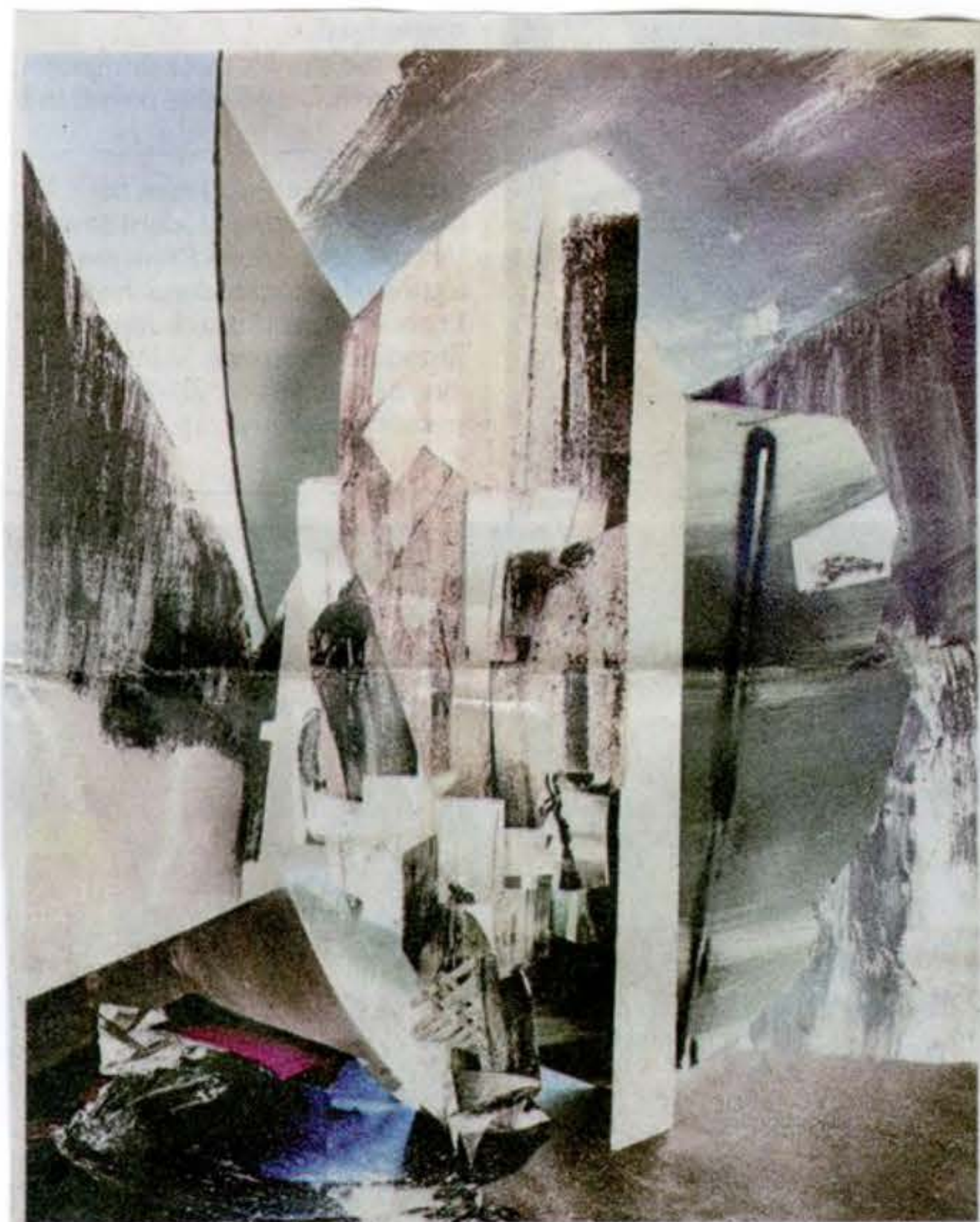


THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2013

Art in Review



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND THOMAS ERBEN GALLERY, NEW YORK

"Akhet," C-print from 2013 by Yamini Nayar in her second solo show, "An Axe for a Wing-bone," at Thomas Erben Gallery.

Yamini Nayar

'An Axe for a Wing-bone'

Thomas Erben Gallery
526 West 26th Street,
fourth floor
Through Dec. 21

Yamini Nayar's second solo at Thomas Erben builds on and complicates what she has done in the past. And whether she is fundamentally a photographer or a sculptor is still, in a sense, a tough call. Many of the photographs are of assemblages, often vaguely architectural in form, that she puts together in her studio from scrap materials, photographing the work in progress at various stages, and from different angles once it's done. Afterward, she more or less finesses the photographer-or-sculptor question herself: The models are discarded; the pictures remain.

As before, her pictures project us into disorienting interiors. What look like ceilings could be floors; floors could be walls. It's hard to get a footing and an illusion of damage, possibly in progress, is pervasive. In some of her recent vertically oriented photographs, we seem to peer down tight corridors into distant, blasted rooms. The interior in the photograph titled "Akhet" — the ancient Egyptian word for flood season — looks like a river is running through it, stripping off wallpaper as it goes and pooling up as

it surges toward an exit.

This picture has a sense of textural delicacy new to the work, which brings it very close to painting: It's filled with brushy strokes, suggesting yet another identity that this ambitious young artist is playing with, absorbing, making her own.

HOLLAND COTTER

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-

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".

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



CRITICS' PICKS

[CURRENT](#) [PAST](#)

New York

- Michael Buthe
- Cary Leibowitz
- Josh Kline
- " 'Pataphysics: A Theoretical Exhibition"
- Aldo Tambellini
- Anna Betbeze
- Will Rogan
- Cynthia Daignault
- Paul Elliman
- "Sensitive Geometries. Brazil 1950s–1980s"
- William Kentridge
- "Death of a Cameraman"
- Walter Dahn
- Société Réaliste
- Ben Morgan-Cleveland
- A. K. Burns
- Jon Pestoni
- Pedro Neves Marques and Mariana Silva
- Annette Kelm
- "Ajar"
- "Descartes' Daughter"
- "On the Relativity of Distance (and Some of its Consequences)"
- Aaron Flint Jamison
- Tom Holmes
- Joshua Abelow
- "Counter Forms"
- "A Scanner, Darkly"
- Dale Henry
- William Anastasi
- Paul Ramírez Jonas

New York

Yamini Nayar

THOMAS ERBEN GALLERY
526 West 26th Street, Floor 4
November 7–December 21

Eschewing any media-specific appellation for her practice, Brooklyn-based artist Yamini Nayar constructs intricate, abstract architectural still lifes, photographing the tabletop assemblages from various angles before ultimately discarding them. Questions as to whether the dozen or so photographs exhibited are the final phase of Nayar's latest project or merely documentation of her process come off a ponderous circumlocution that detracts from the dynamic effect of the images themselves.

As with the large color photograph *Chrysalis*, 2013, Nayar deftly plays with the planar distortion and ambiguous perspective that results from the flattened dimensionality of photography. In the image—a frenzied architectural mise-en-scène constructed from found and raw materials—a honeycombed structure projects into a disparate field of angular, paint-streaked cutouts. Elsewhere, in *Head over Heels*, 2013, a bifurcated interior scene evades easy spatial apprehension. Bounded by sloping floors and angled walls, the work calls to mind a tripped-out version of Samuel van Hoogstraten's seventeenth-century perspective boxes. The five smaller black-and-white unframed images that compose the series "On Form and Growth," 2013, highlight a painstaking attention to detail that belies any sense of chaos found in Nayar's other final compositions. Throughout, architectural forms, first sketched in felt-tip pen, transform into densely layered photocollages, which then become tableaux's themselves—there is, no doubt, a method to her madness.

Included in the exhibition, *Akhet*, 2013—a jagged accretion of streaked, subdued-hued scraps—makes titular reference to the ancient Egyptian concept for both horizon and the season of inundation when the Nile flooded. The threshold of vision for the pharaonic set was tied to periods of destruction and regeneration. Indeed, despite an aesthetic that favors ruin, Nayar looks to be less concerned with razing media-based boundaries than with expanding them.



Yamini Nayar, *Chrysalis*, 2013, C-print, 50 x 40".

— Joseph Akel

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Nobody asked me for a Top Ten Exhibitions of 2013 list this year, so I asked myself.

December 30, 2013 at 2:11pm

Dan Cameron's Top Ten Exhibitions of 2013

2013 Carnegie International – So much has already been written about this year's edition of the country's oldest contemporary art survey that it's difficult to avoid offering points that seem superfluous. What especially struck me was the degree to which the three curators seemed to challenge each other's methodologies, to the point where every work has a specific place not only within the broader curatorial framework, but also relative to adjacent works. The added touch of incorporating artists' projects into the geology, botany and classical sculpture sections of the Carnegie Museum might have gone seriously awry, but they proved to be high points in an already impressive exhibition.

Sean Shim-Boyle (LAXART) - This LA artist's first solo institutional exhibition was a daring experiment that somehow worked. Installing vertical crossbeams of raw timber that had the double effect of lowering the project room's rafters and introducing the smell of cut wood, he then placed two sets of sliding doors at the far end of the room. Operated by electric eye, the sliding doors are just close enough to each other that they continuously set off each other's movement detectors, causing them to open and close at random, oddly threatening intervals. The result is a stilted mechanistic ballet within the rustic, cramped interior, which only compounds the work's poetic effect.

Yamini Nayar (Thomas Erben) – I knew nothing about this young photo-artist's work before walking into her second solo exhibition, but the sensibility captured in these densely illusionistic photos is deeply compelling. The photos are of the studio-setup genre familiar enough since the 1970s, but the succession of layers of torn, distressed and then re-photographed surfaces makes it mostly impossible to determine what has been incorporated into the composition, and at which stage of its creation. This combination of crisp details and spatially ambiguous frames-within-frames keeps the viewer looking for the key, even after it's clear there isn't one.

Josh Kline (37 Canal) – One of the few stars to emerge from last season, Kline followed up his curatorial debut at PS1 (which I missed) with a solo exhibition that was nothing less than hair-raising in its morbid depiction of mass culture's fetishistic relation to youth. Interviews with holograms of Whitney Houston and Kurt Cobain seemed squarely in line with the previous year's debut at a music festival of a fully digital double of the late Tupac Shakur, and the installation itself resembled a low-rent clinic for injections or other medical procedures of dubious benefit.

Amie Siegel (Simon Preston) – The premise of Siegel's film *Provenance* is quite simple: tracing the movement of original furniture from the Le Corbusier-designed city of Chandigarh, India, her film begins simply enough with lengthy shots of chairs, tables and settees placed in upscale rooms in New York, Paris in London. As the film progresses, we go back in time to the auction sales where these pieces commanded record prices, through restoration and shipping, and end at the city of Chandigarh itself – a modernist utopia that is being systematically (and probably illegally) stripped of its modernist heritage in order to provide more expensive baubles for the international ultra-rich. Siegel's video never comes out and points fingers, but it doesn't have to: by simply tracing a trajectory of questionable provenance, she lets us connect the dots, whether they lead to the Elgin Marbles or art looted by the Nazis.



Dan Cameron

Chief Curator at OCMA / Orange Co

Notes by Dan Cameron

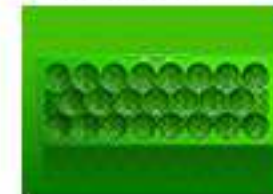
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Bob Mizer (Invisible Exports, MoCA at Pacific Design Center, 80 Washington Square East) – I never understood until this year what a ubiquitous force Mizer has been in American visual culture, and the gradual unpacking of his estate over the course of a handful of exhibitions this year only reinforced my awareness of how he singlehandedly transformed masculine archetypes already associated with the West Coast (cowboys, surfers) into homoerotic triggers for a hunger that most of the culture pretended didn't exist, until Hollywood, gay culture and Calvin Klein brought it all front and center in the 1980s. No longer just an acquired taste for beefsteak fans, Mizer's vision is proving to be more mainstream than even he might have imagined.

Barbara T. Smith (The Box) – One of the secondary benefits of the exhaustive Pacific Standard Time surveys of 2011-12 is the increased local appetite for learning more about pioneering figures like Smith, whose long-term dedication to an experimental and often ephemeral practice grounded in performance has rendered her career into a sort of meta-cult. This exhibition, covering the Xerox-based work she began in 1965 while still at home in Pasadena with her husband and three children, was surprisingly fresh and intimate nearly a half-century later, and helped clarify the copy-machine origins of Smith's deployment of her body as a principal material.

Ragnar Kjartansson (Luhning Augustine, MoMA, Venice) – It was hard to avoid Kjartansson this year, what with his extraordinary nine-channel *The Visitors* at Luhning Augustine and his sleepover residency at PS1's Colony installation last summer. My favorite Kjartansson moment, however, came at the end of a hot, tiring Sunday at the Venice Biennale. Having trekked miles that day to see most of the Giardini and Arsenale, I was mostly looking for an exit when I spotted the peculiar sight of a boatful of musicians, performing earnestly for whoever happened to be sitting, standing or strolling nearby. It wasn't until they pulled into the loading dock and I read "S.S. Hangover" that it dawned on me just who was responsible for this magical moment of musical serendipity.

Gutai (Guggenheim) – Until this year, Japan's most consistently radical art movement was known to Americans only in a shorthand version, in which the individual artists & their distinct contributions never seemed to come to the forefront of viewers' awareness. This long-overdue exhibition changed that, giving us a sort of timeline for each artist by showing who did what first, who stayed with it until the end, and who drifted. Coming in the wake of Paul Schimmel's definitive *Destroy the Picture* at MoCA in 2012, the Gutai survey demonstrated that there are still decades of catching up for American art-lovers to do before we'll be able to appreciate that the importance of Kazuo Shiraga's early work, to take one example, is on a par with that of Tapes or Rauschenberg.

John Mason (Kordansky) – It wasn't until I walked into this exhibition that I had to admit to myself that I'd never actually seen a solo exhibition of John Mason. Considering his towering role in the modern history of U.S. ceramic art, I thought I had nobody to blame but myself, until I read his biography and realized that in a five-decade career there have been only four solo exhibitions in New York, making him one of the most egregiously neglected of major West Coast artists. A massive plinth constructed in the center of the gallery served as a stage for the seven tall monochrome works, made between 1997 and 2002, which constituted this beautiful overview. Built from massive slabs of clay, each work had an impressive sense of gravity, and Mason's close dialogue with the history of Minimalism was clearly demonstrated in the mute solidity of the grouping, which encourage walking around multiple times to see each sculpture from every possible angle.

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S T A T E O F T H E A R T S

From a stellar debut in Delhi to the only Indian representation at Art Cologne, meet the artists behind this month's must-see exhibitions



YAMINI NAYAR

YAMINI NAYAR MAY HAVE HER ARTWORKS at Guggenheim Museum in New York City and Saatchi Collection in London, but this month she adds a new distinction to her career: The Brooklyn-based photographer will have a solo exhibit at Art Cologne in Germany, the world's oldest fair for modern and contemporary art.

Calling her just a photographer, though accurate, doesn't do justice to her work, which spans sculpture, collage, and installation. Nayar, 41, creates elaborate models with found objects, scrap from her studio, and other materials, each one constantly reworked, filled out, broken down, and then built back up. And she captures the entire process through

analogue or large format film. The sets are then dismantled, their only evidence being the image, either of the final result or of a state in between. "I am interested in the relationship between the constructed object and the photograph, and how the photograph is an entirely different thing. I create a physical object by making a picture that only really exists in one's mind," says Nayar, a photography graduate of the School of Visual Arts in New York, and the Rhode Island School of Design, where she also pursued a minor in sculpture.

Her new work for the Collaborations section of Art Cologne explores the relationship between architecture and the body—themes of public space, urban development, and public housing. Large framed photographs, unframed mounted pieces, and un-mounted prints pinned to the wall will cover the booth held by Thomas Erben Gallery, New York, and Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai (the only participating gallery from India).

Nayar, who has previously exhibited at prestigious venues like Bose Pacia in New York, says she draws inspiration from everyday life. That, for her, includes psychoanalysis, architectural modernism, philosopher and critic Walter Benjamin, ethnographic photography, playwright Svelana Boym, even science fiction. But the biggest has been her mother. "She was always very expressive—painting, writing poetry, playing instruments, singing. Years later, she went on to become a psychoanalyst but always kept a genuine excitement for human experience, and creative and abstract thought," she says.

And her pieces, in some ways, translate this abstraction. With confused perspectives, complex spaces, unidentifiable materials and viewpoints, they almost seem like paintings or digital manipulations. "It's similar to filmmaking, where the filmmaker doesn't care as much about the integrity of the structure but rather what shows up on film. Because of this, my spaces can be impossible. They can be dream-spaces," says Nayar. Dreams she chooses to shatter, with astounding results.

The Art Cologne 2016 is on from April 14 to April 17.

(From top)
Yamini Nayar;
Untitled (Bodies);
Past Present.

