

THE
EMPIRE
STRIKES
BACK



SAATCHI GALLERY

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

INDIAN ART TODAY

INTRODUCTION BY ZEHRA JUMABHOY

Yamini Nayar's puzzling photographs circumvent this tricky terrain. *Underfoot And Overhead* (2008) looks like the facade of a building. A shaky wooden staircase that stretches to the edge of the print leads us into the image. Yet, the further we look, the more baffled we become. Is the edifice for real? If so, how does the sloping structure manage to avoid tumbling down? In fact, Nayar does not take photographs of actual buildings. She fabricates architectural models from fragments of cloth, tiny ornaments, photographs and cardboard. The artist grew up in Detroit and her strangely dilapidated constructions – like the cracking walls and irregular tiling of *Luck Is The Residue Of Design* (2007) – resonate with this decaying city. Perhaps, too, the unpopulated rooms occasionally littered with 'exotic'-looking fragments – a golden filigreed object in *Being There* (2006) that could be an ingenious reuse of 'ethnic' jewellery or the Subodh Gupta-like aluminium container in *Luck* – are melancholy markers of India. But there aren't enough of these objects to convince us we are on the right track. Just as we think we have grasped her intention, Nayar undermines us. She manages to suggest the various competing strands of her identity with little fanfare.

The increasing international prominence of contemporary Indian art is altering our expectations. The big names (Atul Dodiya, Jitish Kallat and – clearly – Subodh Gupta) have joined the international ranks and are no longer based full-time in India. In the meantime the artists of the Indian diaspora are scheduling exhibitions back in the subcontinent and are being included in the major survey shows as integral components of 'New Indian art'. It is difficult to know now what makes an artist 'Indian'.













