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Crash Dig Dwell
Asim Waqif and Yamini Nayar
7 December 2017–13 January 2018

Crash Dig Dwell brings together recent work by Asim Waqif and Yamini Nayar, artists working at the intersections of sculpture and photography, whose respective practices conceptually draw from and generatively open up to broader reflections on the history, theory, and practice of architecture and our lived experiences of our built environments.

Yamini Nayar takes large scale photographs of complex abstract sculptural installations she builds in her studio using simple materials—wood, cardboard, newspaper, flour and water, house paint—all easily found at the local hardware store. Asim Waqif, trained as an architect, is best known for creating elaborate but temporary site-specific installations out of found and discarded materials, an approach he also uses to craft smaller wall-based sculptures. While for Nayar, the shutter release enforces closure on an ongoing and unending accretive process, sealing the spatial multiplicity and tactile intensities of an otherwise ephemeral sculpture into a two-dimensional image for posterity, for Waqif, the photograph is first and foremost material, one more cast-off object, to be manipulated, modified, and incorporated into his sculptural assemblages, along with other bits of urban detritus.

Pitched between construction and deconstruction, Waqif and Nayar embrace a condition of entropy, change, flux, and even decay. Their methodologies are intuitive and open-ended, extending the discrete object into interminable process, embracing the aesthetics of the unfinished and ephemeral. Embedded in their work is a postcolonial critique of modernist architecture and urban planning. Rejecting the rational instrumental logic of the fabled modernist master plan for the writerly notion of the draft, they espouse modes of thinking and making that are provisional, that can be built on and revised continually. They take cues from informal and vernacular architectures, driven by need and availability that adapts to rather than transforms the status quo. Growth and expansion is not systematic or prescribed but natural and organic. The modernist predilection for the monument is offset through a conscious adoption of strategies of impermanence.

Distinct in approach and end product, these artists both engage in a type of urban archaeology, excavating their contemporary built environments, attentive to the multiple material, spatial, and temporal conditions and rhythms of embodiment and inhabitation. Through an accumulation of vibrant matter and the repurposing of found objects, their practice reflects a truth to materials, privileging texture, weight, and color, qualities through which the otherwise fleeting traces, memories and stories of living bodies and natural environments might be registered.

Though inspired by built structures and urban spaces these works are deeply ecological in ethos. Faced with an increasingly inevitable environmental apocalypse they ask vital questions: How does one build—an image, an object, a structure, a space, a city, a life— in an age of growing uncertainty, transience, displacement, and precarity? How do we dwell in the Anthropocene? How do we continue to think once already dead?

Murtaza Vali
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