



**AVANTIKA BAWA**  
ATLANTA

Contemporary consumer culture's co-optation of historical modernism challenges viewers in Avantika Bawa's *Perfect Distortions* [Saltworks Gallery; November 7—December 30, 2008]. Bawa fills the new gallery's bare, industrial spaces with clean installations resembling modern furniture and precise geometric drawings inspired by Saltworks' proximity to Ikea and Home Depot as well as the light industrial character of its neighborhood. However, Bawa introduces unexpected materials, relationships, and formal inconsistencies, sabotaging the tidiness of late-modernist form and concepts of physical and social space.

*Yellow Rising*, 2008, an enormous canary yellow rectangle with rounded corners, initially resembles a minimalist shaped canvas with a light blue bench-like structure before it. In reality, the bold yellow is painted directly onto the wall, and the "bench" is a primary structure protruding from the wall underneath, like one of Donald Judd's untitled "specific objects." The legs of the "bench" are angled, making it completely non-functional. Furthermore, the intense, saturated yellow projects into space despite its literal flatness and overpowers the pale tint of the blue structure, negating its three-dimensional advantage.

In the same gallery, two sparse geometric drawings each depict the same rectangular box, adding two rectangular ramps in front. However, deliberate inconsistencies in line quality and subtle variations in placement and coloration of the similar forms undermine the formal purity of modernism and the spaces that the drawings map out.

Bawa equates modernism's pared-down formal vocabulary with mass-produced Ikea tables and modernity itself in *Beneath Modernity*, 2008. A rectangular table abuts a square table half its size at an obtuse angle. Similarly shaped, a bed of rich brown topsoil is placed off-center underneath each. The soil is edged with diagonal bricks cut in half and painted white to resemble typical garden borders. The pristine geometric regularity of the white tables and the bright white bricks invokes the uniformity of mass-production as well as the

domesticated spaces of contemporary culture. The standardized tables echo the modular schemes that characterized modern design from de Stijl and the Bauhaus onward. Ironically, the unexpected brown soil also alludes to installations by earthwork artists such as Walter de Maria, who during the mid-1970s filled sterile galleries with aromatic topsoil to undermine the commodification of late-modernism. Furthermore, the white-brick-defined soil plots are characteristic of gardens in India that Bawa recalls, opening the structures of Western modernism to acknowledge non-Western cultural spaces. Finally, due to irregularities in the cutting of the bricks and the unstable nature of the soil itself, the geometry of the soil plots is inconsistent and imperfect.

In *Altered Interactions*, 2008, a blond wood table with stainless steel legs holds a series of rectangular black and orange drawings of floating box-like forms. Resembling Danish Modern furniture, the table was actually acquired at Home Depot. The blond wood continues on wall panels and a strip at the base of the floor picks up the orange. Despite the coordination of the entire space with the familiar Home Depot colors, the room seems barren, and the changing interaction of the geometric shapes from drawing to drawing leaves the spectator with more questions than answers.

*Experiments with Connectivity*, 2008, presents two pale wooden chairs formed by the simplest and most perfectly perpendicular, rectangular planes. The chairs face each other on opposite ends of a narrow strip of AstroTurf. Viewers are encouraged to sit opposite one another and attempt to communicate. The modern chairs and synthetic AstroTurf become limits that define and restrict humans' ability to connect with each other in our contemporary environment.

—Diana McClintock

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Avantika Bawa, *Experiments with Connectivity*, 2008, AstroTurf, wood, and latex, dimensions variable; installation view, left to right: *Two Blue Drawings A & B*, 2008, acrylic and graphite on paper, 11 x 20 inches [framed]; *Yellow Rising*, 2008, latex and wood, 10 x 12 feet [courtesy of the artist and Saltworks Gallery, Atlanta]