

Report

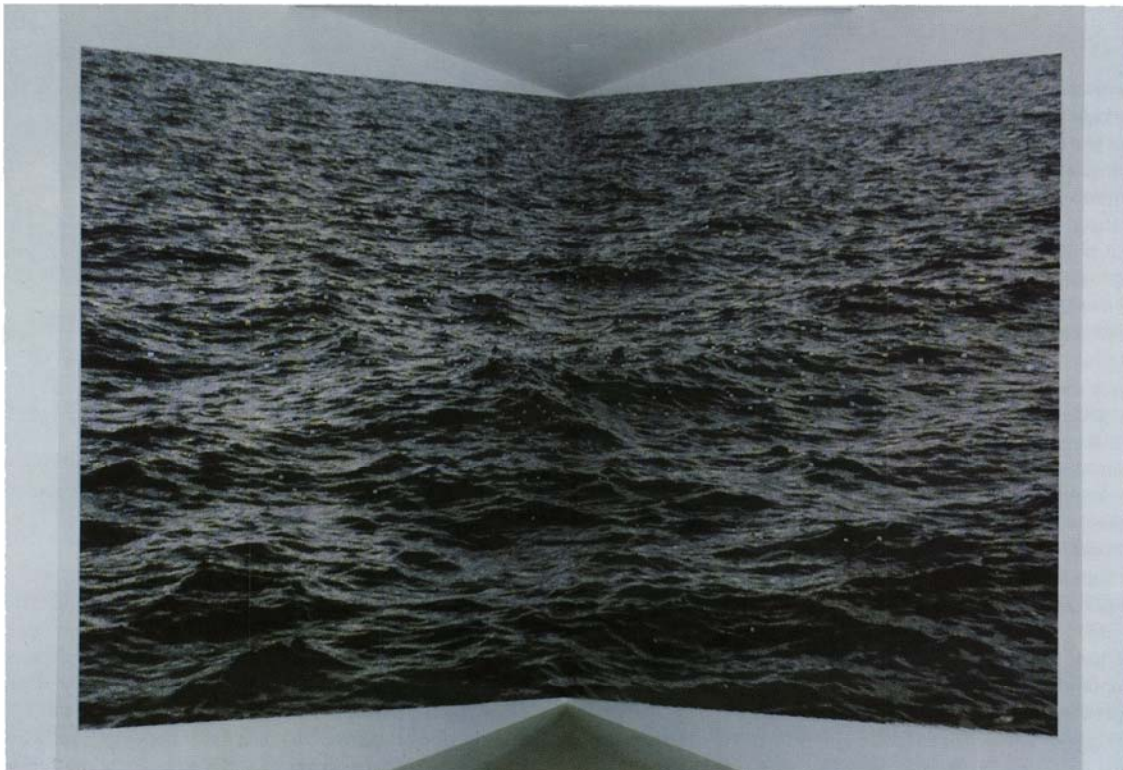
The Big Picture

Meera Menezes steps up close to Rashid Rana's large-sized photographs and finds them teeming with tiny contradictions.



Rashid Rana. *Offshore Accounts - I* (Detail). Digital C-print on customized wall. Edition of 5. 106" x 213". 2006.

APPEARANCES ARE DECEPTIVE. THIS WAS AMPLY DEMONSTRATED AT RASHID RANA'S SOLO show, *Reflected Looking*. Held between the 17th of February and the 17th of March at Nature Morte, Delhi, it gave Rana the chance to conjure up images that shocked, bemused, provoked, and disturbed. The expert illusionist that he is, Rana's sleight of hand involved a mouse-click (as opposed to a card-trick), as he digitally layered narratives in his computer-generated art works.



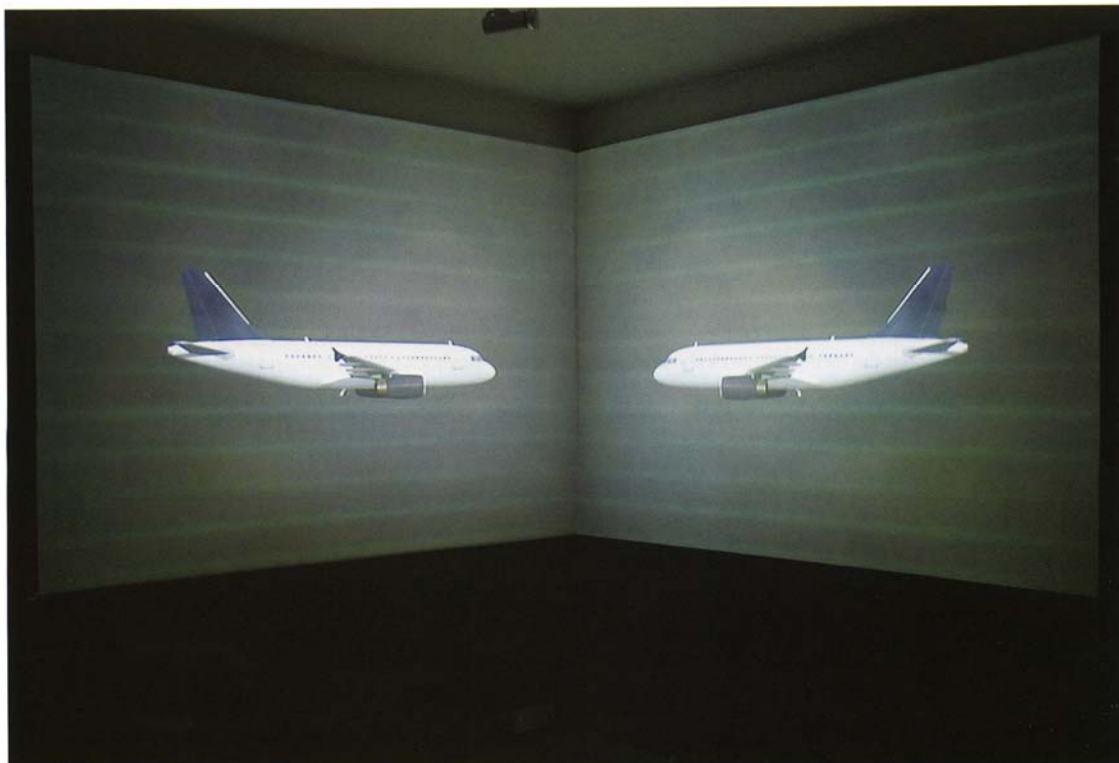
Rashid Rana. *Offshore Accounts - I*. Digital C-print on customized wall. Edition of 5. 106" x 213". 2006.

In the cheekily titled, *Offshore Accounts - I*, a large digital photographic print offered an image of the choppy sea, light bouncing off the waves. As the viewer moved closer, the glinting water turned out to bear tiny pictures of medieval ships with billowing sails – the kind of vessels used by European explorers when they set out to conquer and colonize the ‘uncivilized’ world. A further examination revealed that the frothy waves were composed of minuscule photos of garbage and plastic debris from Lahore’s landfills – the works played on the irony of using photographs of man-made waste to construct scenes of natural beauty.

Most of Rana’s work hinges on a deliberate rupture between the larger picture and the smaller images that constitute it. It is the tension between the two and the meanings generated by their interaction that give his works an edge. Is the larger picture a sum of its parts? One need only recall *Veil*, exhibited at Nature Morte a couple of years ago, where the visage of a burqa-clad woman was made up of pornographic photos. In the current *Dead Bird Flying* series, tiny images of caged birds composed the image of a large bird in flight, juxtaposing notions of freedom with entrapment.

Rana regularly uses his work to make scathing comments on society. By breaking up the pictorial plane into its constituent pixels, he manipulates familiar and popular media images to offer multiple views on political and social issues. *Offshore Accounts* was a dig at the neo-colonial machinations of the US in his home country, Pakistan. On a formal level, Rana’s interest in the grid and its ability to offer multiple perceptual sensations continued at this show – as did his preoccupation with doubles, mirrors, and symmetrical images.

All these preferences came together in his video, *Meeting Point* (2006), which depicted two planes flying towards each other in what seemed to be a pre-programmed mid-air collision. However, just as they looked set to crash, the planes pulled apart, retracing their journeys backwards, as if hoping to reverse time. The work was an extension of another of Rana’s videos, *Ten Differences* (2004), which led to the making of a six-channel video-installation, *Departure Lounge* (2006), aired at the Singapore Biennale last year. As Rana says, “My videos are about my recurring interest in the representation and depiction of reality in art and media”. In a post-9/11 scenario, these videos effectively framed the tension produced by the threat of possible confrontations.



Rashid Rana. *Meeting Point*. Two-channel video with soundtrack. 2006.