

TO JULY 23



Stuart Brafman & Rajesh Nair

Given Bhutan's geographic isolation and its obscurity in the mind of the American public, it's a surprise this summer to find not one but two photographers exhibiting work that depicts the Himalayan kingdom. As it happens, the two artists—Stuart Brafman and Rajesh Nair—took complementary approaches during their separate visits over the past six years. Nair's warm sepia tones easily surpass Brafman's inky black-and-white in visual effect, but Brafman's images of people are at times more compelling than Nair's litany of seemingly unpopulated monasteries and temples. Brafman, for instance, brings us an old woman dwarfed by the hay bale she's carrying on her back, a man carrying a jury-rigged backpack and a prayer wheel resting in front of a dreamily lush valley, and (in just about the show's only sign of modernity) a vendor holding a carved bowl in one hand and a cell phone in the other. Despite the redundancy, Nair's architectural studies of intricate wood facades and courtyards are impressive, especially when one considers that most of these well-preserved structures were built four centuries ago. And Nair takes the viewer to a few truly magical places, such as the pagoda-style "Tiger's Nest" monastery built into the side of a mountain and a rural house surrounded by quilly flowers, with a low peaked roof that echoes the "V" of both the valley and the mountains above. In what may be their finest works, however, both artists use horizontal formats to communicate vertical repetition: for Nair, a long row of prayer flags stuck into the ground; for Brafman, a young student pausing at one of a row of prayer wheels (pictured). Even without the religious subject matter, both images would somehow feel spiritually fulfilling. The show is on view from noon to 6 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays, to Saturday, July 23, at the Kathleen Ewing Gallery, 1609 Connecticut Ave. NW. Free. (202) 328-0955. (Louis Jacobson)