

PROSPECT.3

**Notes
for Now**



ZARINA BHIMJI. Still from *Jangbar—Recce Notes*. Single-screen installation with sound; 35mm film, high-definition-video transfer with Dolby 5.1 sound; work in progress

ZARINA BHIMJI

After decades of British rule, it was only fifty years ago that East African countries began to gain their independence. In the British artist Zarina Bhimji's (b. 1963) new film installation, *Jangbar*, she explores the social, political, and psychological effects of colonialism by pointing her lens at its visual history and the aesthetic ramifications of the era. Bhimji's interest in East Africa is not solely, or at all, intellectual. When her father was eleven years old, he moved to Uganda from Gujarat, India, to make ghee, a type of clarified butter used in Indian cooking. There, he entered into an existing service economy that worked to support the cultural needs of the burgeoning Indian population, many of whom had originally come to build the Ugandan railway at the end of the nineteenth century.

The railway offers an example of the countless ways colonial powers controlled, and subsequently changed, the land they "acquired" and the lives of its native inhabitants. It is this colonial landscape and its remnants that pervade the

ethos of much of Bhimji's work, including *Jangbar*. In a thirty-minute single-screen installation of moving images and sound, the artist brings us closer to the altered landscapes, architecture, automobiles, interiors, and objects of contemporary Maralal and Mombasa, Kenya; and Zanzibar, off the coast of Tanzania. One still depicts a seemingly abandoned building marked "Mackinnon Road," after the colonial business magnate Sir William Mackinnon, founder of the British India Steam Navigation Company and the Imperial British East Africa Company. Mackinnon's home government supported his commercial endeavors as a means of bringing British influence to the region in the late nineteenth century. Unlike in Bhimji's earlier work, there is no narrative or attempt at traditional documentation in the film. Instead, its investigations are poetic; the images function as text, amounting to an impressionistic history of Indians, Africans, and British in East Africa. AO



ZARINA BHIMJI. Still from *Out of Blue*, 2002. Single-screen installation with sound; Super 16mm color film, DVD transfer; 24:25 min. Commissioned and coproduced by documenta 11, Kassel, Germany