

# REGEN PROJECTS \*

Wakefield, Neville, "Toba Khedoori," *Artforum*, October, 1995,

## TOBA KHEDOORI

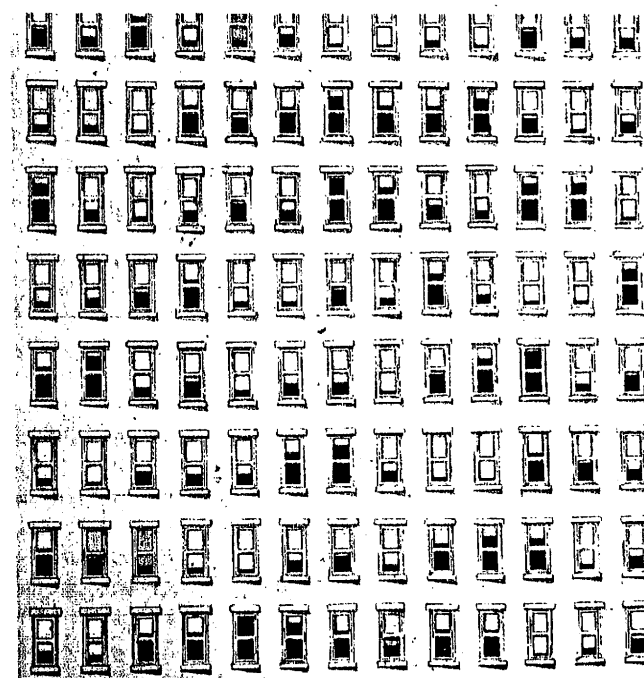
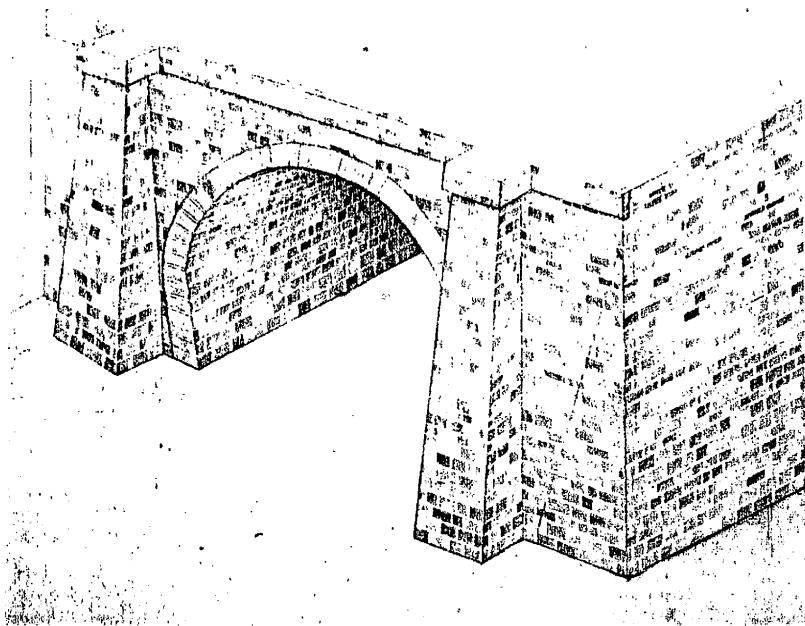
**A**nounced without fanfare or disclaimer, Toba Khedoori's immense but delicate works join the art party as reluctant guests enticed out of solitude. Her slow deliberations, inscribed as they are on empty expanses of paper, take uneasy position within the throng and jostle, where intimacy comes protected by the

opportunity, registered but unconsummated.

Khedoori's artworks begin life as vast stretches of paper laid out on the studio floor. Wax is laboriously melted, then puddled and scraped over these unrolled, parchmentlike sheets, as if in ritual preparation for the first tentative marks. Working sometimes from a model, sometimes from her imagina-

pieced together in huge vertical panels stapled casually to the wall.

What the pictures represent is hard to say. Projections of a redundant future? Reconstructions of some golden past? The thread of their arguments is secret, their rules absurd, their perspectives deceitful. Within the minutiae of their detail,



thick prophylactics of in-talk and irony. Standing aside from the slippery prattle of "discourse" and the quips of gallery-opening repartee, their allure is that of the lone stranger glimpsed from across a crowded room. Familiar in imagery yet emotionally distant, they are the conversations never had. By the time they are approached, they seem already to have slipped away, their beauty an

tion, Khedoori then incises the image into the surface. False starts become visible records of her hesitancy, like the stutter that precedes enunciations too long or complex to be managed in a single utterance. Yet the final outlines are impeccably rendered. Built into singular but sometimes obsessively repeated images—a crane, an aqueduct, a facade, a footbridge, a train—they are painstakingly colored, then

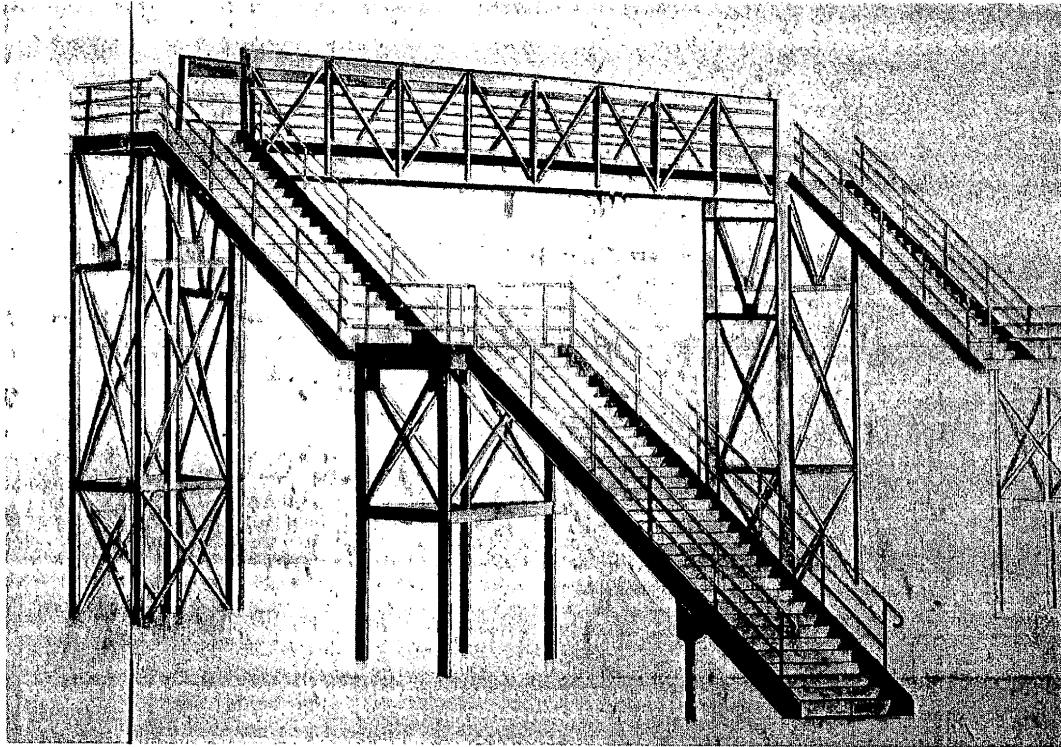
nearness and distance collapse. Horizons buckle as the orthogonals that anchor the solitary images within their pictorial fields refuse to converge, finding neither eye level nor vanishing point. Floating within this vacant proscenium, the windows, train carriages, and small explosions drift across our field of vision—thoughts that, detached from the continents of rationality, have the weight-

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lessness of the unfulfillable wish. Immense and ponderous, their domain becomes that of the daydream, the philosophical category described by Gaston Bachelard as the movement of the motionless man. We board a train of thought only to find its carriages disconnected, its promises of movement and deliverance uncoupled. A pedestrian walkway offers

the odd dog hair or stain of studio detritus that has strayed onto their otherwise impassive surfaces. Paralyzed by the meticulous outlines of details never fully fleshed out, they hang suspended in space and time like incomplete sentences trailing into silence. They demand to be approached with caution, as if the faint phantasmagoria they conjure might fade or



safe passage over some unnavigable flow; but there are no people to make the passage, no river or road to cross—the promise of the other side nothing more than a reflection fading into incompleteness.

Innocent and beguiling, Khedoori's images float freely in vast spaces, oneiric plains where fantasy once roamed. The silence that threatens to overcome their plea to be heard is broken only by the white noise of

disappear with proximity. Khedoori, like her subject matter, seems to have gotten lost within the extension of her work's possibility. Seduced by the evidence of thought and labor, the viewer follows her, becoming absorbed in the expanse of the work—in the limitlessness of an endeavor at once manic and withdrawn, Herculean and pointless.

In Khedoori's untitled zodiac, instruments of

progress hatched in the golden age of engineering—from Mason-Dixon to Isambard Kingdom Brunel—reappear as empty chrysalises. In this humble genre of still life, obsessive empiricism has become little more than a ruse, a dry husk, compensation perhaps for the fact that the promise of empire has fled. Each brick of the aqueduct is etched into the waxed paper as if into memory. Each window in the building facade is defined with the sincere yearning of an architectural draft. Models of possibilities now long extinct, the works make up worlds beyond worlds, small, self-contained cosmologies where bygone hopes are faintly traced upon the confines of civilization's disrepair. If their remarkable silence preserves, mummifies, the appearance of the rational, it is because the particular rationality to which they refer has become nothing but a circular ruin, a daydream of order in which dreamer and dreamed are confused.

Khedoori's pictorial antecedents may be the desolate fractured spaces of Edward Hopper, Vija Celmins, or Edward Ruscha, but her sensibility belongs elsewhere: to the metaphysical labyrinths of Jorge Luis Borges, the infinite regression of Franz Kafka's hierarchical universes, the fantastic architecture of Italo Calvino's invisible cities. Smuggled into her deserted structures is the sadness of late summer's diminishing evenings. The works might show, as Calvino puts it, "the desperate moment when we discover that this empire, which had seemed to us the sum of all wonders, is an empty formless ruin, that corruption's gangrene has spread too far to be healed by our scepter, that triumph over the enemy has just made us the heirs of their long undoing." Khedoori captures this moment and spreads it before us. Withdrawn from the very worlds they seek to describe, theirs is a seductive quietude which lives on in the mind as if in a particular time now wholly their own. □

Neville Wakefield is a writer and critic who lives in New York and is a frequent contributor to *Artforum*.