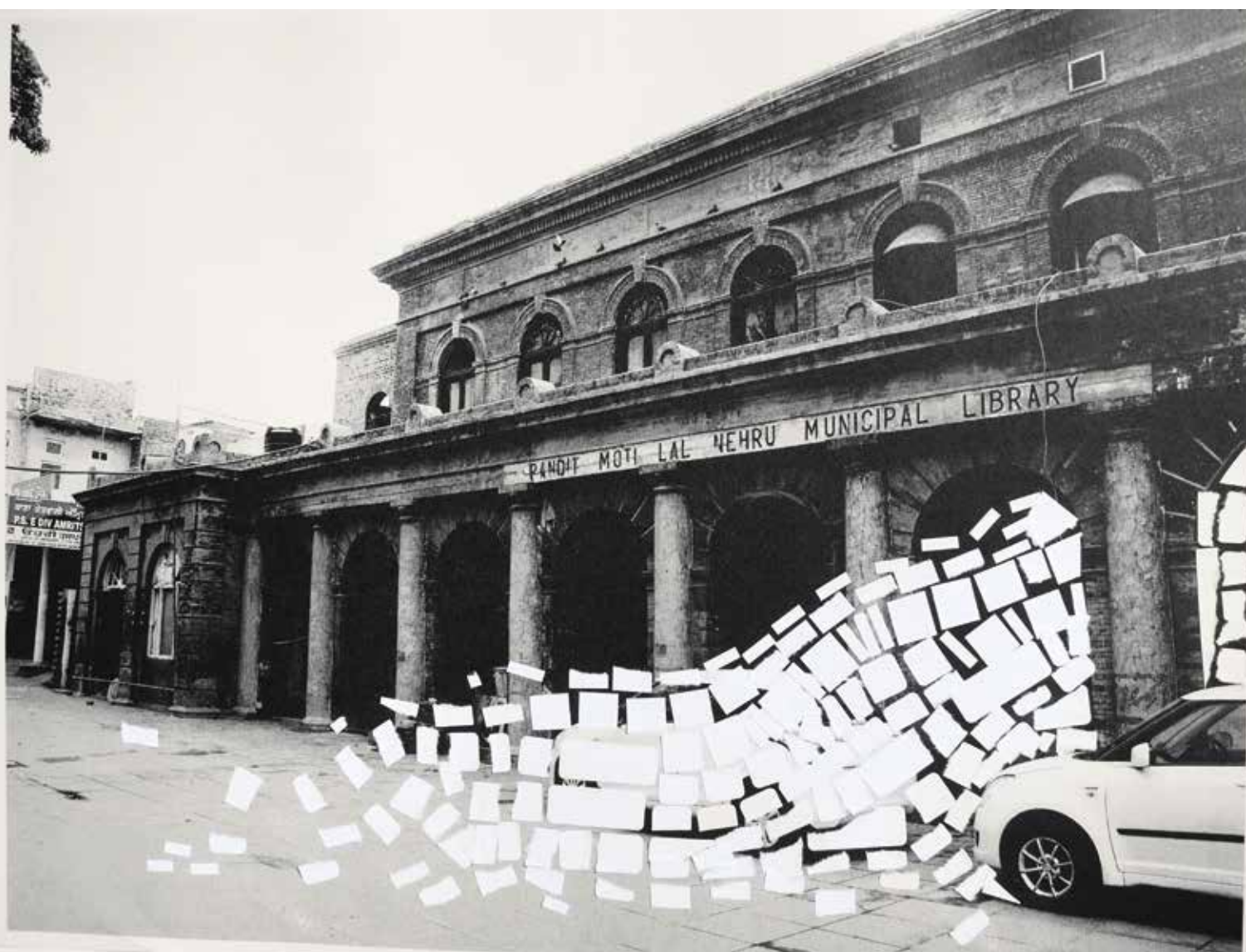


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*Devika Singh*

# HERA BÜYÜKTAŞCIYAN, *DECONSTRUCTORS*





**Devika Singh** is an art historian, critic and curator based in Paris. She is an affiliated scholar at the Centre of South Asian Studies, the University of Cambridge and a member of the Global Art Prospective at the Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art (INHA) in Paris. She holds a PhD from the University of Cambridge and was the Smuts Research Fellow at the Centre of South Asian Studies. She has published extensively in journals, exhibition catalogues and magazines including *Third Text*, *Journal of Art Historiography*, *Art History*, *Modern Asian Studies*, *Frieze* and *Art Press* and is currently writing a book on artistic practices in post-independence India for Reaktion Books. Her next exhibition, which includes the work of Hera Büyüктаşçıyan, is 'Planetary Planning' at the Dhaka Art Summit (2018).

The photographic investigations of Istanbul-based artist, Hera Büyüктаşçıyan caught my attention when I saw them displayed in Dubai in 2016. These consisted of appropriated black and white archival images that mapped out the history of Hezekiah's pool in Jerusalem (The recovery of an early water, 2014), where the artist was commissioned to make a site-specific installation. More recently, an oneiric view of a man cleaning the sacred water tank known as the *amrit sarovar* (pool of nectar) of Amritsar's Golden Temple arrived in my inbox. It illustrated the announcement of her exhibition at Green Art Gallery in Dubai. The image belonged to the first iteration of Büyüктаşçıyan's on-going work in India's Punjab ('Reconstructors', 2017). The selection reproduced in this issue is part of a larger body of collages ('Deconstructors', 2017) that was produced after she returned from a second trip to the region in the autumn of 2017. Both series will be exhibited for the first time in the exhibition 'Planetary Planning' that I am curating at the Dhaka Art Summit.

A sense of wonder infiltrates the images and ties them to each other. Strange elements and gestures are often the focal points; the statue of a historical leader holding

a menacing sword, the body of a construction worker balanced between the top of a wall and a bamboo scaffolding, a man standing on slabs of marble, a hand (which some will recognise as being that of Jawaharlal Nehru) touching a model of Chandigarh's Secretariat.

As in her previous work, both series excavate the social and cultural memory of architecture and subtly address its connection to power and violence. Focusing on the layered and conflicted history of the Punjab, Büyüктаşçıyan explores how, in her own words, "restructured territories [...] rebuild national and social realms". Her work moves along the axes of references of architectural imagination. "I [...] think that in order to 'read' the true memory of a place, one must move back and forth along its various histories and timelines, between past and present," she explains. "I often relate this to hybrid (or 'spolia') architecture, the kind that repurposes pieces of older sites to build new constructions or remap a space."

Through the prism of architecture, her work not only references the social promises of modernism that were embraced by the Nehruvian state, but also the syncretic traditions of the Punjab.

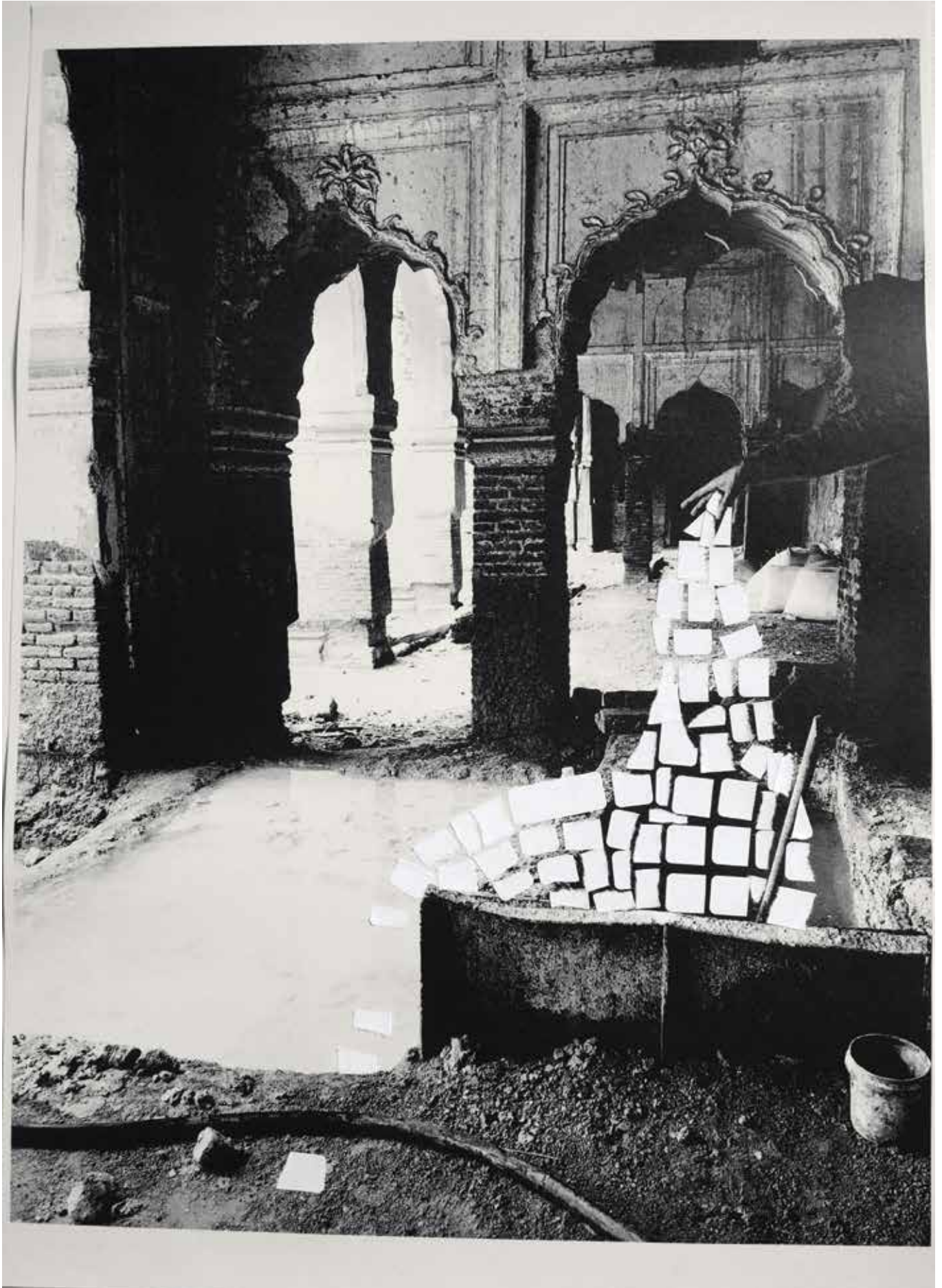
It is thus fitting that she gravitates towards its inhabitants and

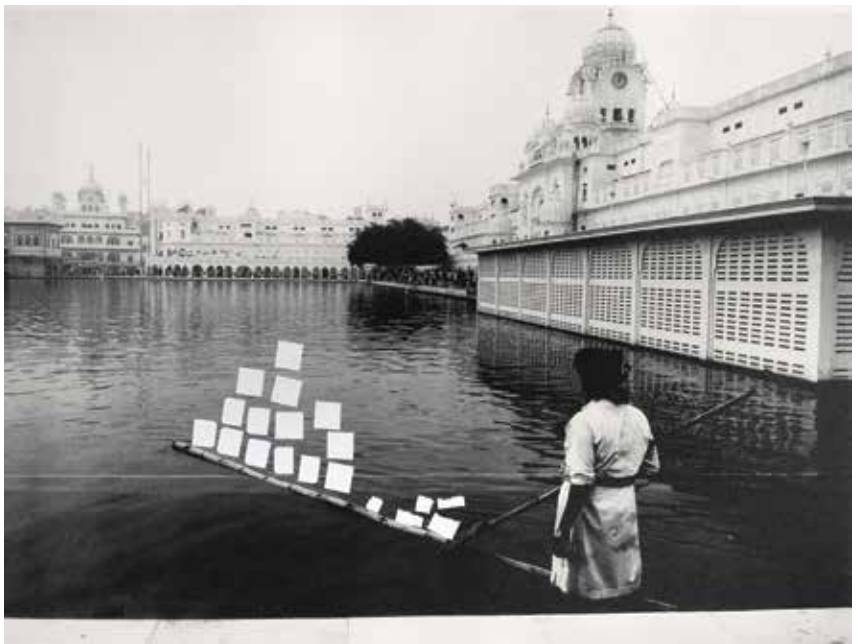
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builders. Büyüктаşçıyan, who usually works with sculpture and installation, has investigated the global economy of marble labour and unearthed the stories of anonymous builders that are often forgotten behind well-known commissioners. Fluvial routes, that have formed connecting channels over centuries, and aquatic landscapes, associated with purity and redemption, are threads that run through her work. Standing in for marble mosaics, she affixed square white paper labels, arranged in fluid motions, onto the photographs of her collage series. Behind them lie deeper histories.

Büyüктаşçıyan has been particularly fascinated with the process of sanding marble stone and the actual and symbolic erasure of fingerprints and identity. "What actually constitutes the magnificence of power is each and every particle tiled by the invisible fingerprints of its builders," she states. Even at Amritsar's Golden Temple, her attention has been drawn to the religious but seemingly solitary and repetitious act of cleaning. Her collages capture the complex, superimposed histories of Punjab's sites of memory, and reveal the tensions between individual expressions — that of workers and commissioners — and the collective meaning of architecture.







Caption for all images: Hera Büyüktaşçıyan, *Deconstructors Volume II*, collage on paper, 11.4 x 16.5 inches (each). Image courtesy: The artist and Green Art Gallery, Dubai.