

# DELHI

## THAT WAS

HABIB RAHMAN

MADAN MAHATTA

RAGHU RAI

OJAS  
ART

*Garche hai mulq-e-daccan mei in dino qadr-e-suxan,  
Kaun Jaye 'Zauq' par dilli ki galiyaan chhod kar*  
Sheikh Muhammad Ibrahim Zauq (1789-1854)<sup>1</sup>

Originally in Urdu by the famous poet Zauq, the above couplet may be transliterated as, “..the seat of power may now rest in the Deccan (Southern India) along with all worldly comforts. But, still who would want to leave the streets of Delhi?”

In 2012, Ojas Art presented *Delhi... that was* a solo show of Raghu Rai's archival images, spanning more than four decades of his work on Delhi. Seven years later, we present *Delhi That Was*, exploring the photo archives of Habib Rahman, Madan Mahatta and Raghu Rai.

The earliest photographs presented are from the 1950s and span more than six decades of pictorial documentation of Delhi. The images cover different aspects of the city and highlight its architecture, monuments, people and lifestyles.

Delhi is very peculiar in multiple ways and takes a lot to get used to — the *babudom*, loudness, boisterousness and now of course the pollution. On the other side, we have a rich history, arts, culture, diversity and ironically large green spaces.

Raghu Rai's archives present an astounding insight into Delhi's heart — with a prolific representation of the people and their emotions that make Delhi, what it is. Interestingly, Delhi Zoo Entrance, one of the images in the exhibition was photographed by Mahatta to photo-document the Delhi Zoo for Rahman and Rahman's profile picture is by Mahatta!

Personally, with two centuries of family history in Delhi, I am the quintessential *Delhiwallah*, and no other city even comes close to Delhi. The only place that may be better than Delhi as it exists today is the city as it existed in the past, the *Delhi That Was*.

Anubhav Nath  
Curatorial Director, Ojas Art



<sup>1</sup>In 2012, the same couplet was used for the essay. Ideally, I wanted to find another one, but was unable to find one so befitting.

# HABIB RAHMAN

Habib Rahman was born in 1915 in Koklata, Bengal in Undivided India. He was an engineer, musician and photographer and played a pivotal role in the architectural landscape of the country in the early decades after India's independence. He trained at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the 1940s under Lawrence Anderson, William Wurster and Walter Gropius.

On his return to India, In 1946, he brought the design approach of architecture's new International Style with him. Beginning with his design for Rabindra Bhavan in 1961, Rahman began to develop a distinct design style that fused a Bauhaus approach with a contemporary India idiom.

Over the years Rahman created a regional modernist approach, visible in his designs for a number of buildings including the Lalit Kala Akademi building, the University Grants Commission office and several low-cost housing blocks under the Public Works Department.

His concern with aesthetics, as much as utility, elevated his photographs of buildings (usually his own) from mere historical documents into fine-art architectural photography.

His photographs of the modern buildings he designed are infused with his own extensive knowledge of the style of photographic modernism. Rahman often photographed from unexpected angles in order to produce a sort of disorienting mesh of lines.

Rahman's Photographs, both in their visual mode and the buildings they capture, have come to represent the glories of Indian Postcolonial modernism at the moment at which it was being produced and defined.

He was married to Indrani Rahman, a classical dancer of international fame and their son Ram Rahman, also became a distinguished photographer, documenting Delhi's society, its streets and architecture.

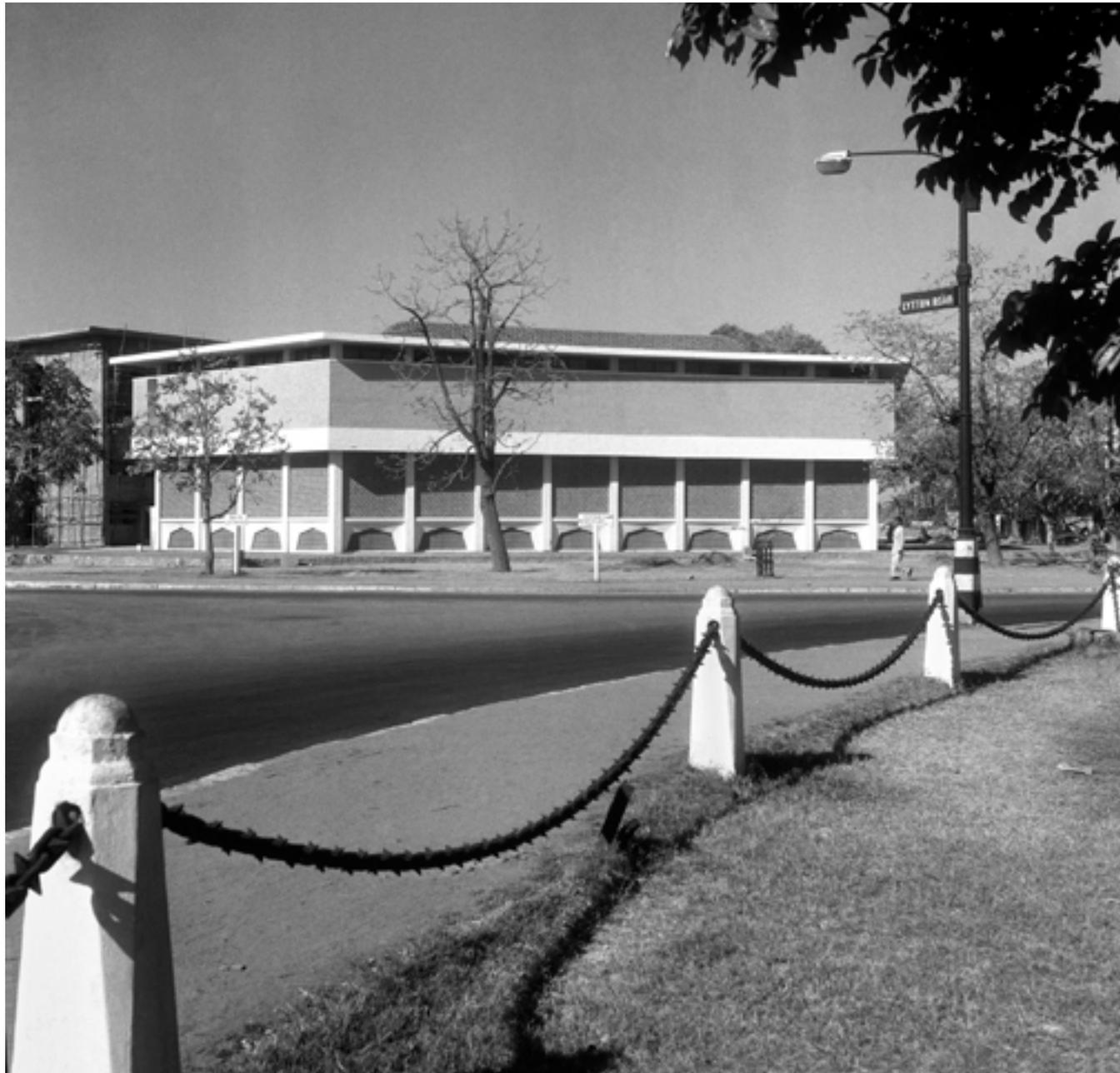
Habib Rahman passed away in Delhi in 1995 and his son Ram Rahman manages the Habib Rahman Archives.



Photo by Madan Mahatta

Curzon Road Hostels, 1967  
17x16 in.  
Edition of 10.





Rabindra Bhavan, 1961  
16x16 in. Edition of 10



Rabindra Bhavan Interior 2, 1961  
16x16 in. Edition of 10.



Rabindra Bhavan Interior, 1961  
16x12 in. Edition of 10.



Rabindra Bhavan Interior 1, 1961  
16x12 in. Edition of 10.



Patel Bhavan, 1973  
16x16 in. Edition of 10



IP Bhavan, 1965  
16x16 in. Edition of 10



*Facing page:* Accountant General Building, 1954  
17x16 in. Edition of 10.

MF Husain, 1956  
16x16 in. Edition of 10



Inder Gujral, Indrani with Ram, Satish Gujral, MF Husain, Charles Fabri, 1957  
16x16 in. Edition of 10



Indrani Portrait,  
1953  
16x17 in.  
Edition of 10.

# MADAN MAHATTA

Madan Mahatta (family name, Mehta, anglicized as *Mahatta*) was born in 1932 in Srinagar, Kashmir. The Mehta family, opened their first studio in Srinagar in 1915 and subsequently opened branches in Rawalpindi, Sialkot, Jammu, Gulmarg and Murree which were closed during India's partition. The family eventually moved to Delhi and opened their studio, Mahatta & Co. at Connaught Place in 1947.

Madan Mahatta went for his graduation to the Guildford School of Arts & Crafts in Surrey England in 1950. After completing his graduation in photography, he stayed on for another year to learn colour negative positive printing just being introduced there by AGFA.

On his return to India in 1954 he put to use this knowledge of the new technological advancement in photography and Mahatta & Co. became the first studio in the country to introduce colour negative positive printing. The studio grew to become a famed and iconic destination though Madan Mahatta rarely displayed his professional photography works. Shooting on medium-format monochromatic film for more than

three decades, from the 1950s to the 1980s, Madan Mahatta documented the development of New Delhi. He experimented in a range of subject matters beyond his architectural images, such as studio portraits, industrial photography and feature magazine work. He had a special affinity for Connaught Place, where he ran the studio for more than five decades.

In 2012, Photoink presented his solo show, *Delhi Modern* curated by Ram Rahman, an exhibition of Madan Mahatta's architectural photographs. In 2015, an exhibition was held at Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), marking a century of Mahatta & Co. and presented numerous works by Madan Mahatta.

Few of Madan's notable achievements has been a special invitation to photograph the King of Bhutan. His picture of the monarch's profile was used on Bhutan's currency and coins. Madan photographed many a celebrity on their visit to India. Queen of England, Madame Titto, Jacquelin Kennedy, J. L. Nehru, Dalai Lama, to name a few.

Not merely a photographer, but an artist,

Madan painted each picture with love and understanding... love for his work and understanding of the form in front of him. Over a span of 60 years, Madan Mahatta assembled a huge archives of images.

Moments of national importance appear in his vast archive, including photographs of Queen Elizabeth II's first visit to India in 1961.

He passed away in 2014. The legacy of Mahatta & Co. is carried forward by his sons Pavan and Pankaj and grandson Arjun Mahatta.



Photo by Pankaj Mahatta.

Glider being towed over Qutab Minar, 1972  
16x24 / 20x30 in. Edition of 20.





Delhi Zoo Entrance, for architect Habib Rahman, 1978  
10x15 / 20x30 / 30x45 in. Edition of 10.



Jantar Mantar, 1955  
20x20 in. Edition of 20.



Jantar Mantar, Delhi,  
1955  
20x20 in.  
Edition of 20.



Connaught Place during  
rains, Delhi, 1970  
16x24 / 20x30 in.  
Edition of 20.



Mahatta & Co., Connaught Place, Delhi, 1951  
20x30 in. Open Edition.



Minto Bridge, for OBM, Delhi, 1971  
16x24 / 20x30 in. Edition of 20.



Pierre Cardin Fashion Show, Delhi, 1967  
16x24 / 20x30 in. Edition of 20.



Hindon River Mills, 1971  
10x15 / 20x30 / 30x45 in. Edition of 10.



American Embassy, Delhi, 1968  
10x15 / 20x30 / 30x45 in. Edition of 10.



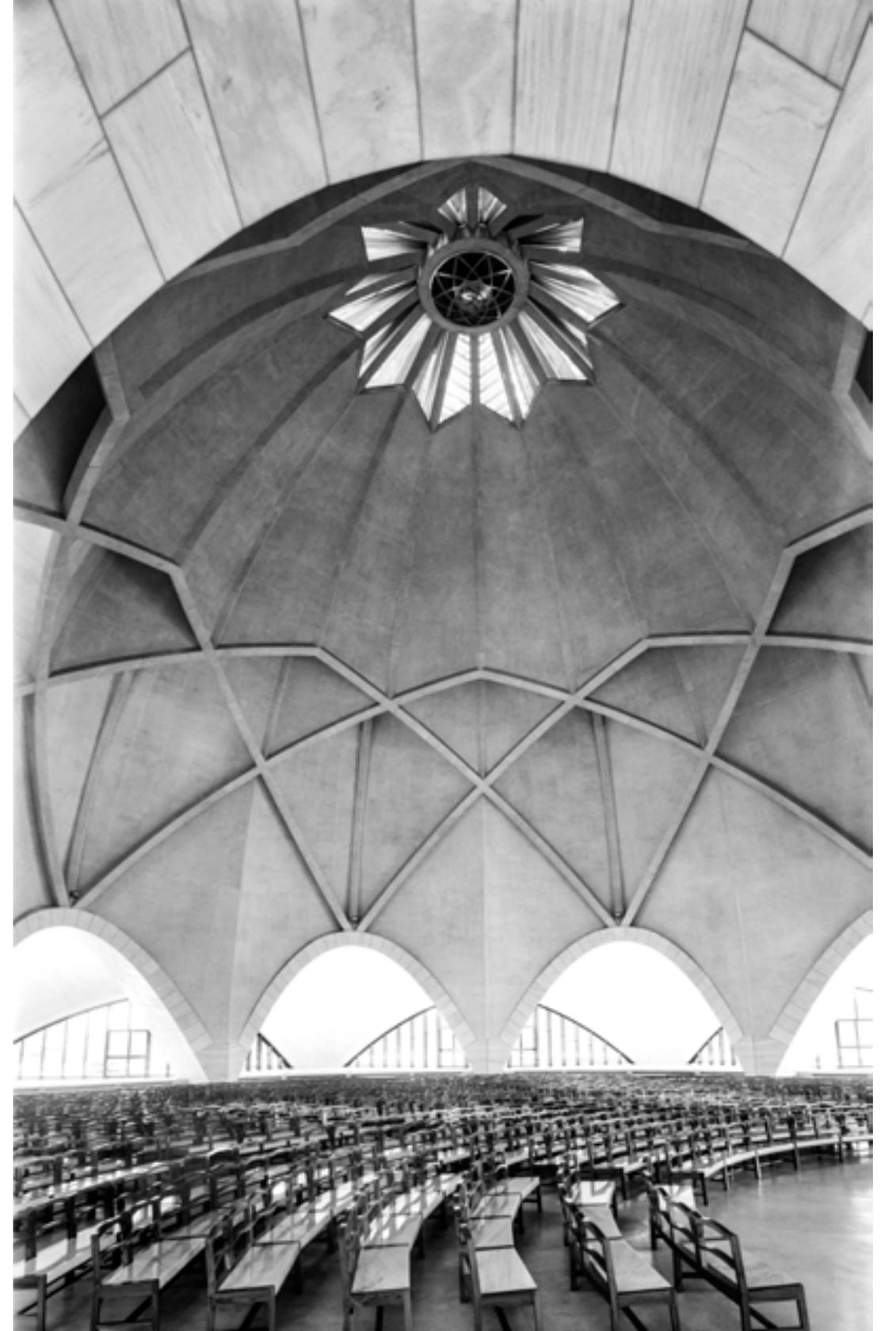
South Block, Delhi, 1958  
16x24 / 20x30 in. Edition of 20.

Parliament House, Delhi, 1956  
16x24 / 20x30 in. Edition of 20.





Talkatora Stadium, Delhi, 1974  
10x15 / 20x30 / 30x45 in. Edition of 10.



Bahai Temple, 1987  
20x30 in. Edition of 20.



Connaught Place, 1971  
20"x30" in. Open Edition.



Connaught Place, construction of Palika Parking and LIC Building, 1983  
20x30 in. Open Edition.

Safdarjung Tomb by Glider, 1972  
16"x 24" / 20"x30" in. Edition of 20.





Elephant Procession, Rajpath, Delhi, 1955  
16x24 / 20x30 in. Edition of 20.



Husain Painting Cinema Hoardings, Delhi, 1974  
16x24 / 20x30 in. Edition of 20.



India Gate, 1965  
16x24 / 20x30 in. Edition of 20.



Queen Elizabeth and Dr. Rajendra Prasad motorcade passing through Connaught Place, 1961  
20x30 in. Edition of 10.

# RAGHU RAI

Raghu Rai was born in 1942 in Jhang (British India - current Pakistan) and graduated as a civil engineer. He started photography at the age of 23 in 1965. He joined *The Statesman* newspaper as their chief photographer (1966 to 1976), and was then Picture Editor with *Sunday* - a weekly news magazine published from Calcutta (1977 to 1980).

In 1971, Henri Cartier Bresson nominated him to Magnum Photos of which he is still a partner today. In 1982, he took over as Picture Editor-Visualiser-Photographer of *India Today*, India's leading news magazine, a position he held till 1991.

For the last two decades, Rai has exclusively devoted his work to India. He has produced nearly 60 picture books on different aspects and themes on India: Delhi, The Sikhs, Calcutta, Khajuraho, Taj Mahal, Tibet in Exile, Mother Teresa.

Under special assignment from *Greenpeace International*, his coverage of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy (1984) was compiled into a book with three sets of exhibitions that travelled throughout the world. In 2002, Rai

participated in a special exhibition and picture book on India and Mexico with Sebastião Salgado and Graciela Iturbide.

In 1972, he was conferred the *Padmashree*, one of the highest civilian orders in India. In 2009, he was conferred *Officier des Arts et des Lettres* by the French Government. In 2018, Lucie Foundation, New York honoured him as *Master of Photojournalism*.

In 2019, The Academy of Fine Arts Photography Award - William Klein bestowed Rai with the consecration award. This prize is intended to reward a photographer for their entire career, making Rai the first recipient of this award for special contribution to the world of photography.

His photo essays have appeared in *Time*, *Life*, *Nat Geo*, *Le Figaro*, *Le Monde*, *Die Welt*, *The New York Times*, *The Sunday Times London*, *Newsweek*, *Vogue*, *GQ*, *Marie Claire*, *The Independent*, and *The New Yorker*. He has been an adjudicator for the *World Press Photo Contest* and UNESCO's *International Photo Contest* many times.

Many exhibitions have been dedicated

to him around the world including retrospectives at Arles Photography Festival in 2007 and at National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi in 2008. He held two solo shows with Ojas Art: *Delhi That Was....* (2012) and *Picturing Time* (2015).

In 2012, Raghu Rai created the *Raghu Rai Center for Photography* to share his 50 years of knowledge and experience with the young generations.

Raghu Rai lives in New Delhi with his family.



Courtesy: Raghu Rai Archives



Breezy girl,  
Humayun's Tomb,  
1973  
18x27 in. Edition of 51.



In a drummers house, in a Delhi village, 1968  
18x27 in. Edition of 20.



“Since I was based in Delhi, on my lean days, I started visiting the heritage sites and monuments... I would usually walk away, going to the less visited places around the monument to see what was going on there. This usually gave me a different sort of canvas.”

In front of Jama Masjid 50 years ago  
18x27 in. Edition of 20.



New constructions near Kailash Colony, 1969  
18x27 in. Edition of 20.



Construction near  
Delhi-Haryana  
border, 1973  
18x27 in. Edition of 20.



A boat bridge on Jamuna, 1971  
18x27 in. Edition of 20.



Wheat Threshing, Humayun's Tomb, Delhi, 1967  
18x27 in. Edition of 51.



View of the Central Vista  
leading to Rashtrapati  
Bhawan, 1974  
18x27 in. Edition of 20.



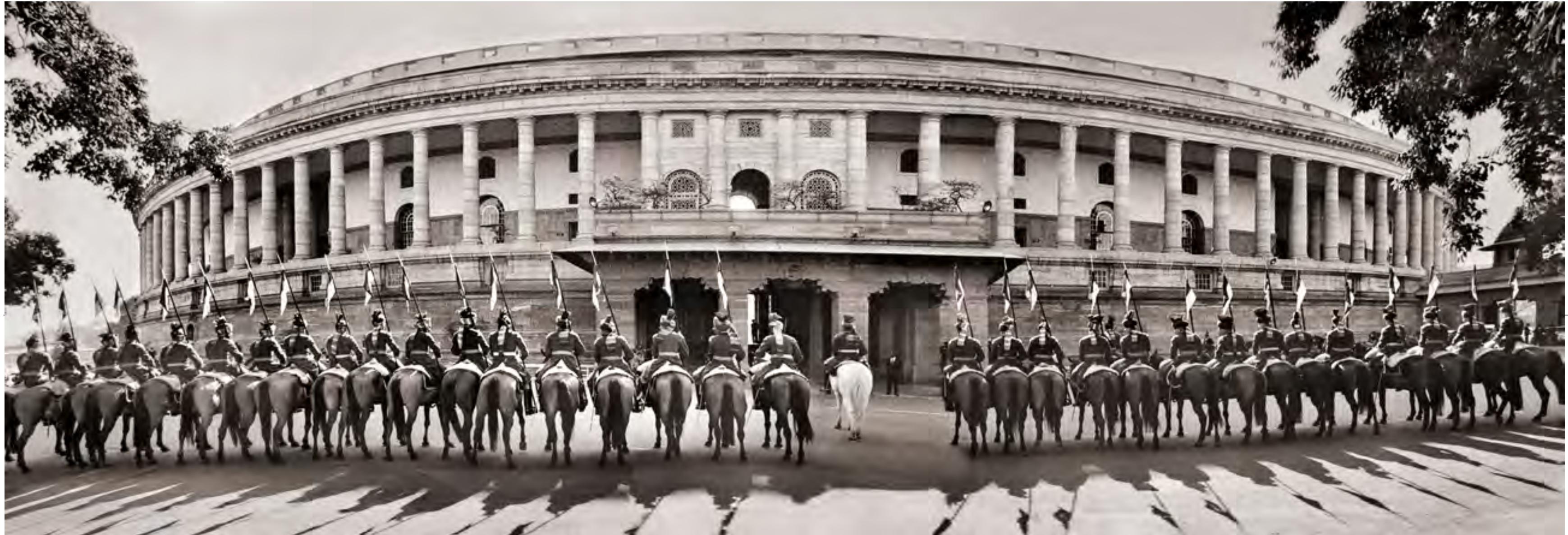
Monsoon rain, India Gate, 1986  
18x27 in. Edition of 20.



Presidential procession, Rajpath, 1972  
18x27 in. Edition of 51.



Beating the retreat at Vijay Chowk, 1967  
18x27 in. Edition of 20.



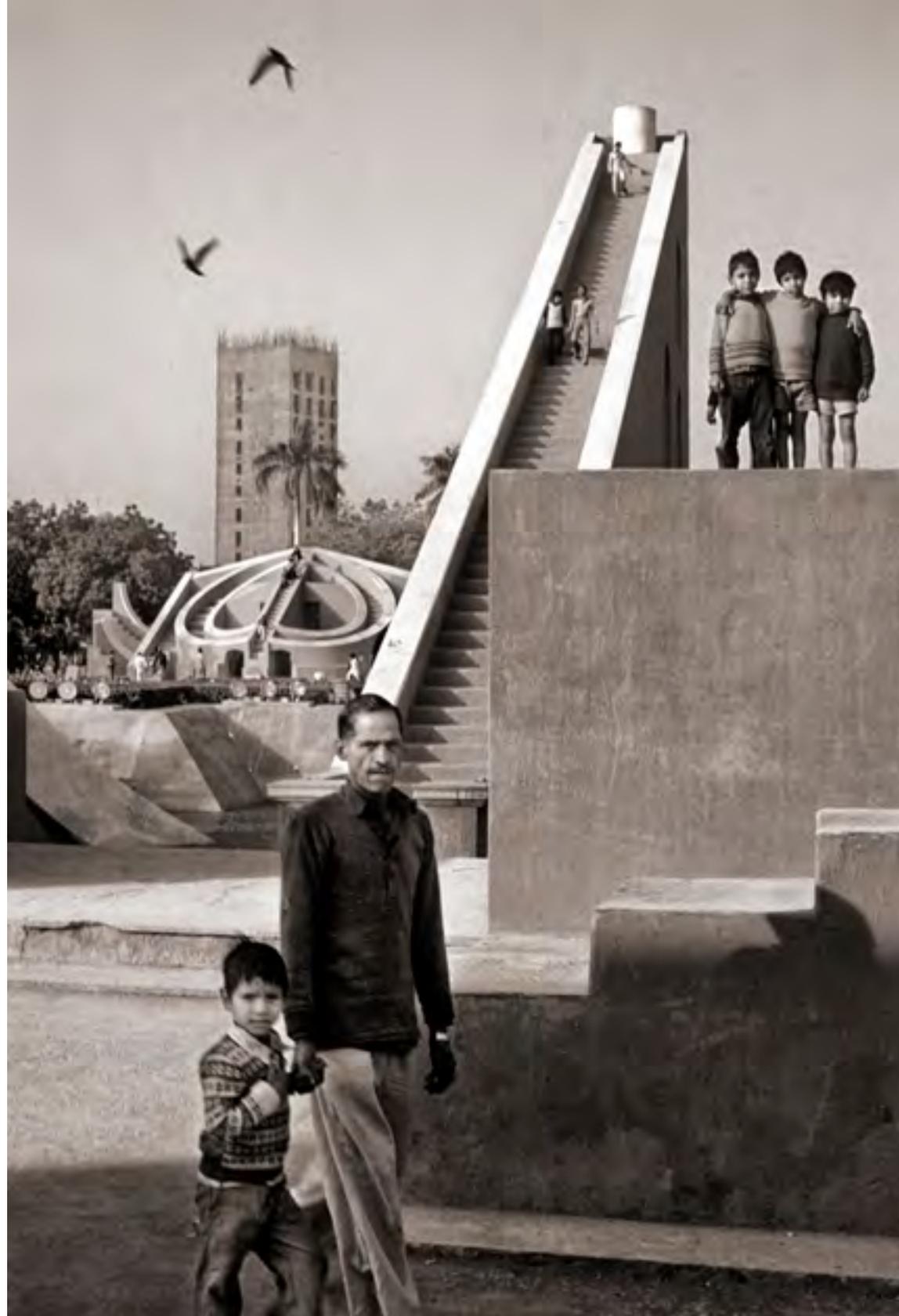
Parliament House, Delhi, 1977  
15x42 in. Edition of 20.



Jama Masjid, 1979  
18x27 in. Edition of 51.



On a monsoon day, Jama Masjid, 1975  
18x27 in. Edition of 51.



Jantar Mantar, Delhi,  
1973  
18x27 in. Edition of 20.



Republic Day rehearsal, 1996  
18x27 in. Edition of 20.



At Bakhtiar Kaki Dargah, Mehrauli, 1990  
18x27 in. Edition of 51.

“Today, when I look back at some of the pictures that I took 30-40 years ago, what emerges is a Delhi that does not exist anymore, or has changed so drastically, that these images stand as a testimony of photo-history that cannot be rewritten.”



A view of the Central Vista from Rashtrapati Bhawan, 1990  
18x27 in. Edition of 51.



Crossing railway track,  
opposite Humayun's  
Tomb, 1968  
18x27 in. Edition of 51.



Installing Lord Mahavir, 1990  
18x27 in. Edition of 51.

# DELHI THAT WAS

Delhi, October 2019  
Ojas Art, New Delhi

This Publication  
Published in India in 2019

For  
OJAS ART  
1AQ, Near Qutab Minar  
Mehrauli, Delhi 110 030  
art@ojasart.com +91 85100 44145

Copyright Photographs © Respective Artists or as indicated  
Copyright Text © Anubhav Nath

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form  
or by any means, without prior written permission.

© OJAS ART 2019

Supported by: Ramchander Nath Foundation

Designed by: Rajinder Arora, Ishtihaar, New Delhi