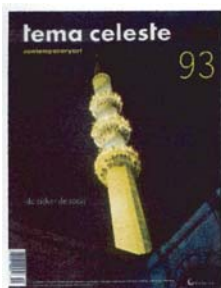


## JASON MIDDLEBROOK

Tema Celeste  
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## jason middlebrook

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London's Tate Modern and the Guggenheim Bilbao are two cultural colossi that have been widely showered with praise. Although there will always be those who look for chinks in their institutional armor, they are generally perceived as panaceas, capable of curing all manner of urban ills while triggering a spate of architectural one-upmanship among museum directors. Now enter Jason Middlebrook, whose architectural models present an alternative reality. In one work, he imagined a time in the indeterminate future when the gleaming titanium shell of Frank Gehry's building will have sagged and buckled, letting in the rain while hordes of irreverent squatters set up camp in its graffiti-tagged ruins, leaving evidence of their fires amid the overgrown shrubbery. Meanwhile, in the next room, all that remained of Tate Modern was its tilting tower, the main bulk of the building having been swallowed up by a craggy tabletop mountain, the result perhaps of some tectonic calamity. An intricate drawing displayed nearby suggested the possible cause of this apocalypse: iconic works by Robert Gober, Rachel Whiteread, Bruce Nauman, and others

shown exploding outward in an art historical Big Bang. Middlebrook's works combined the language of geological diagrams with references to science fiction, his defunct Tate recalling the climactic scene of *Planet of the Apes* (1968) and Charlton Heston's melodramatic tirade against the self-destructive fate of mankind. On one level, Middlebrook provided an antidote to the boardroom backslapping one imagines going on behind museums' closed doors, tapping into the same vein of dark humor present in Ed Ruscha's painting, *The Los Angeles County Museum of Art on Fire* (1965-68). In the case of the decrepit Bilbao, there was an added poignancy in the fact that an edifice credited with pulling a town back from the brink of post-industrial ruin should itself be seen in such a state of decay. Happily, Middlebrook doesn't stop at institutional critique. His imaginary time-traveling takes a cue from the work of Robert Smithson, exploring a process of entropy that, in this instance, is synonymous both with art's obsolescence and the tendency of nature to reassert itself over the manmade.   
Chloe Kinsman

reviews

