

## Hadid at Guggenheim: Liquid Walls, Fractured Floors (Update2)

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(The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of Bloomberg.)

By James S. Russell

June 2 (Bloomberg) -- For architect Zaha Hadid, floors, walls and ceilings are simply inconveniences. "This is architecture?" many have asked, looking through her plans and buildings in vain for conventional rooms and spaces.

Hadid's paintings and models of splintering, unfolding structures, as well her challenging furniture and decorative objects, take over Frank Lloyd Wright's spiral at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York in a deserved retrospective of her 30-year career that opens tomorrow.

The 55-year-old, Iraqi-born, London-based architect has expanded the universe of what's possible in architecture. The 2004 Pritzker Prize winner is notably the only woman to have reached the field's international top tier.

The exhibition was organized by Gemano Celant and Monica Ramirez-Montagut, but Hadid designed the installation, which trades a distinctive curatorial voice for the architect's bravura take on herself. Visitors will get a sense of the dynamism of her form-making in the zigzagging, black and white wall surfaces she's used to reshape the spiral's bays, but the Guggenheim could not afford to erect the planned "wow" gesture: a tubular, taffy-pull form that would have peeled off the spiral's balustrade and taken a loop or two through the atrium before reattaching itself.

### Aerial Views

Much of the show is devoted to the paintings of buildings that brought her fame when she was in her early 30s, after she'd apprenticed with Dutch colleague Rem Koolhaas. Their vantage is frequently a wide-angle aerial view that takes in luminous grids of endless imagined cities fractured at their edges into glasslike shards. The air is filled with flying boomerang shapes and fluttering, ribbon curls. These mega-city visions are both breathtakingly beautiful and icily menacing.

On display are paintings of The Peak, a 1982 competition-winning proposal for a club in Hong Kong. Its slipping, overlapping planes poke improbably out of a hillside and evoke the frozen tension of Russian Constructivism. But Hadid's version had a freedom and sensuality all its own and signaled a prodigious new talent.

For years, those paintings defined her career; the designs (including The Peak) were viewed as too difficult to build and too outlandish to inhabit.

Most of her work since the 1990s is shown using models in glowing, clear and tinted plastic. Building elements that can evoke Stealth-bomber wing shapes or geological strata look as if they are in constant, high-speed flow -- architecture tensed as a runner at the starting line.

## Sensual, Aggressive

A billboard-like display of photos shows that the frozen motion visible in the paintings and models can indeed translate to concrete and steel. Her realized buildings are at once sensual and aggressive, dystopian yet tinged with a nostalgia for that early 20th-century moment when modern architecture united with industrial technology to equal social progress.

Hadid ran a sinuous track conveying auto bodies flowing in ghostly procession right through an engineering building she designed for a BMW auto-assembly complex in Leipzig, Germany. An addition to the Ordrupgaard Museum in Denmark looks like a benign sea creature beached on a neatly mowed Danish lawn.

The shifting, blocklike forms of her only American project so far, the 2003 Lois and Richard Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art in Cincinnati, are for Hadid visually conservative. Yet, embodying a coiled visual energy, the urban structure looks ready to burst out of its corner site.

## Troubling Tea Set

Hadid has raised critical hackles because her talent is turned so fully to aesthetic showmanship in an era when architecture is trying to find a new moral and ecological footing. Her exploratory work does help us to see architectural and urban space in new ways, but the curators focus on little more than style and effect. A measure of Hadid's gutsiness is that she's willing to risk becoming an out-of-step indulgence, contributing, for example, a set of wave-shaped towers, a mirage in steel and glass, to the architectural circus that is Dubai.

I'm as drawn as anyone to Hadid's sensual abandon and dramatic flair, but is it too much to ask that the tea and coffee service she designed for Alessi, a delightful spatter of liquid rendered in silver, actually be usable?

“Zaha Hadid” opens tomorrow and runs through Oct. 25 at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, 1071 Fifth Ave. (at 89th Street). The exhibition is sponsored by Oldcastle Glass and Deutsche Bank AG.

Information: (1)(212) 423-3500 or <http://www.guggenheim.org>. An exhibition catalog overburdened with essays and published by the museum is \$50.

(James S. Russell is Bloomberg's U.S. architecture critic. The opinions expressed are his own.)