

# Building Design

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## A voyage around Zaha

Zaha Hadid's New York show is a visual feast, writes Marco Goldschmied

The New York **Guggenheim** last Saturday hosted the opening of Zaha Hadid's 30 year retrospective exhibition. It is an inspired location. Several hundred guests gathered in the great ground floor reception area before spiralling up on a journey of discovery following the same timeline as Hadid's own journey to date.

Put together in only six months, the show is a fascinating, captivating experience which takes in the eternally vibrant day and night "blue slabs" paintings of Hong Kong's Peak project (1982-3) and the prescient and graphically stunning Berlin 2000 and Victoria City Berlin (both 1988). It moves the visitor through the built projects including Vitra (1990-94), Cincinnati Art Centre (1997-2003), Bergisel Ski Jump (1999-02), Phaeno Centre (1999-05) and BMW factory (2001-05).

These are interspersed with a vast range of projects, from maritime terminals, stations, bridges, offices, art centres and master-plans to the most recent projects in Moscow and Dubai, culminating, at the end of the spiral journey, in the sadly unrealised proposal for the temporary transformation of the **Guggenheim** itself through a series of additional muscular interventions spiralling up its interior.

Working unwaveringly in the enforced abstraction of graphic and model representation, the show is visually overwhelming. It evidences Hadid's breathtakingly single-minded, uncompromising dedication over three decades - from the early years struggling against the architectural establishment's whispered accusations of merely running an artist studio masquerading as a "real" architect's practice, to the flood of work now being commissioned in 11 countries.

In many ways Hadid's career is the inverse of that of the **Guggenheim's** architect, Frank Lloyd Wright. By his early 20s Wright had several projects under construction all in his own back yard. Hadid has had to wait two decades to be in that situation and then anywhere but in the UK.

In the wealth of built and un-built projects on display, Cardiff's failure to carry through her winning design for the opera house competition stands as a beacon for that uncanny British knack so aptly summarised by Oscar Wilde as "the ability to turn wine into water".

Now Hadid finally has projects in the UK, we must hope the Architecture Foundation HQ compromise and the Jowell wobble on the Olympic aquatic centre will not typify the discomfort commissioning bodies, public and private, have with anything powerful and uncompromising. Nothing is better guaranteed to bring out the bean counter weevil from the UK construction industry's woodwork than a Hadid design, with its exuberant disregard of the normative and the unmeasurable added value that such vision can bring to a city.

As the first woman to win the Pritzker, the sobriquet of the "World's greatest living woman architect" would not be inappropriate. But as well as transcending time honoured boundaries of art, architecture and urbanism, Hadid is arguably now breaking through the limits of gender too.

As Detief Martins summarises in one of the 35 pages of essays at the front of the beautifully

presented catalogue: "In a world of instability, contrariness, uncertainty and deception she produces an architecture that embraces flux and polyvalent mixtures. Urbane, daring and exuberant, her oeuvre supports a vision of life as an art - lived intensively and expansively with imagination and style."

This show is a feast not to be missed. It is, as the Michelin Guides say, worth the detour. It's only a pity the London art establishment couldn't get it together to put it on as well.

\* Zaha Hadid Architects, until October 25, Solomon R **Guggenheim Museum**, 1071 Fifth Avenue, New York, USA.

\* Marco Goldschmied is a former RIBA president, and chair of the Marco Goldschmied Foundation.