

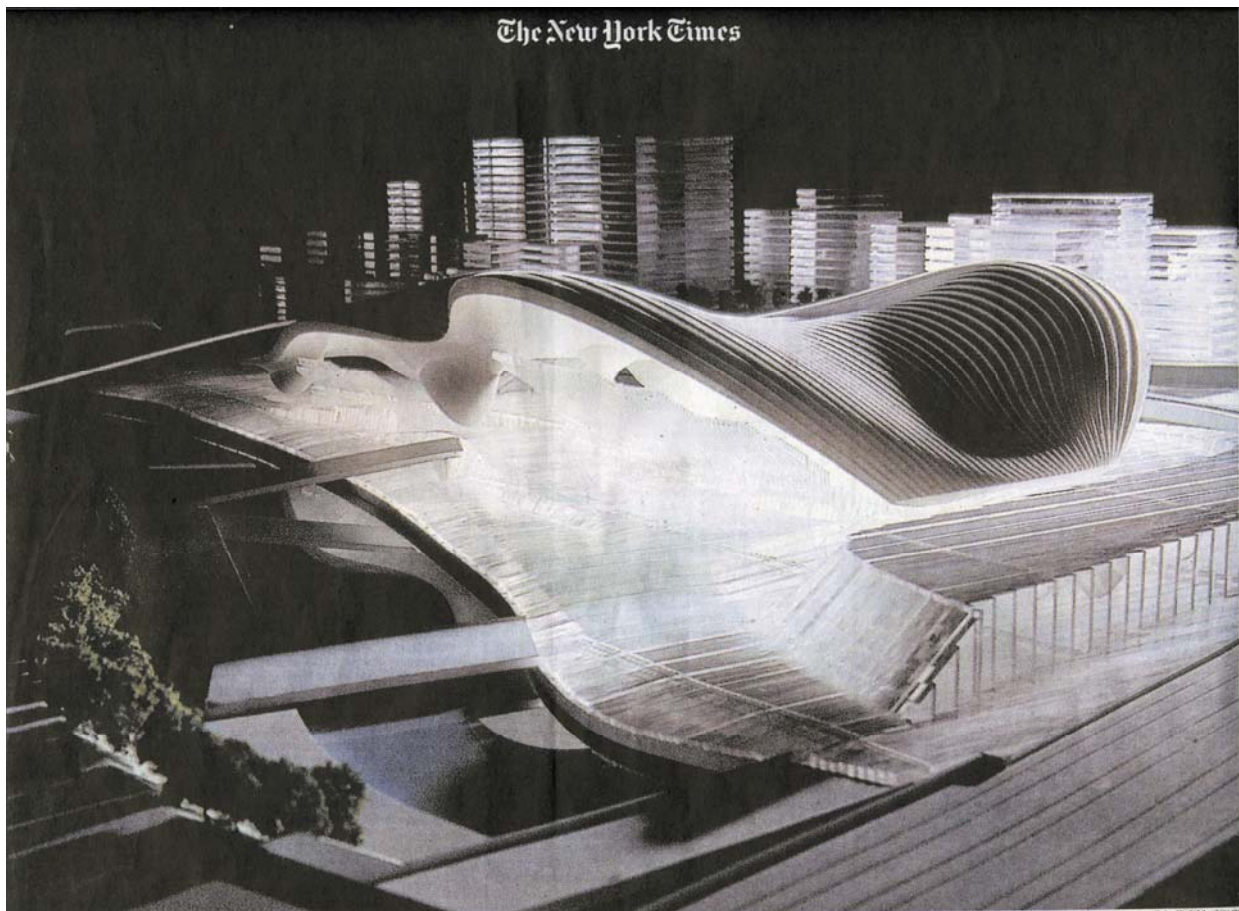
WEEKEND Arts FINE ARTS
LEISURE

ARCHITECTURE REVIEW

Zaha Hadid

A Diva

For the Digital Age



Zaha Hadid Architects
The architect Zaha Hadid's design for the Olympic Aquatic Center in London.

ZAHA HADID has never built anything in New York. But to her followers around the world, that hardly matters. You can admire Renzo Piano's exquisite detailing or Frank Gehry's turbulent forms, but Ms. Hadid is architecture's diva, the most precocious talent in her profession.

"Zaha Hadid: Thirty Years in Architecture," her first major retrospective in the United States, gives New Yorkers a chance to see what they've been missing. The show, which opens tomorrow in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum's rotunda, spirals through Ms. Hadid's career, from her early enchantment with Soviet Constructivism to the sensuous and fluid cityscapes of her more recent commissions.

It illuminates her capacity for bridging different worlds: between traditional perspective drawing and slick

Zaha Hadid

Guggenheim Museum

computer-generated imagery, between the era of utopian manifestos and the ambiguous values of the information age.

Born in Baghdad in 1950, Ms. Hadid came of age in an era when the Middle East was enchanted by Modernity: its glamorous forms, progressive aura

and faith in the future. Early on, she soaked up the cosmopolitan values that bound cities as diverse as London, New York, Moscow, Beirut and Berlin.

She was raised in one of Baghdad's first Bauhaus-inspired houses. In the late 1950's she observed the construction of Gio Ponti's planning ministry, a replica of his Pirelli Tower in Milan, a symbol of postwar Italian style.

She bounced to Switzerland and Lebanon before settling in the mid-1970's in London, where she cut her teeth as a student at the Architectural Associa-

tion, then a center of experimentation. It was there that she met Rem Koolhaas, Elia Zenghelis and Bernard Tschumi, architects who would leap to the forefront of experimental European architecture in the following decade.

Shaped by the 1968 student protests, those architects were groping for a way to distinguish themselves from their immediate forebears without sundering their ties to Modernity. Many of them found inspiration in the utopian forms of the Soviet Constructivists, an attraction that had the romantic benefit of having been crushed in its infancy by Stalin.

The show whirls us back to that time with a reinterpretation of a 1976 painting from Ms. Hadid's graduate thesis. (The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art declined to lend the original.) Inspired by one of Konstantin Malevich's "Tektonics," in which overlapping geometric forms suggest a fragmented city floating through space, Ms. Hadid uses a similar vocabulary to propose a 14-story inhabited bridge spanning the Thames. The work also hints at a theme that would obsess her for the rest of her career: the idea, minus the revolutionary rhetoric, of a society in perpetual motion.

Before long, you encounter the project that signaled her breakthrough to stardom at an obscenely early age: a 1983 design for the Peak, a country club in Hong Kong. Appropriately set off in their own gallery, a series of remarkable paintings depict a cluster of splintered horizontal forms thrusting out from the edge of a mountain as if they were about to shoot into space.

For those who have seen them only in books, the paintings are striking for their meticulousness. To create a bird's-eye perspective, Ms. Hadid began by sketching hundreds of abstract buildings in ink, then transferring them onto paper mounted on canvas. Each of the surfaces was then painted in a different color.

Any experienced draftsman will recognize the years of practice and repetition it takes to work at this level of precision. The inking alone, and the steadiness of hand it requires, takes years of training: skills that have been virtually lost in the age of the computer. This is part of what distinguishes Ms. Hadid's work from the synthetic imagery churned out by computer software in a culture that is too often obsessed with surfaces.

The Peak project also reflects how quickly Ms. Hadid matured in just a few years. Malevich's geometric forms hover in space; Ms. Hadid's are packed with energy. And they were meant to exist in the real world. For all its flamboyance, the Peak's jagged, cantilevered structures are based on basic engineering principles, those common to

"Zaha Hadid: Thirty Years in Architecture" continues through Oct. 25 at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1071 Fifth Avenue, at 89th Street, (212) 423-3500.

freeways, for example. In this way she also subtly ties them into the city's infrastructure.

Similarly sensitive to her surroundings, Ms. Hadid has ingeniously capitalized on the shape of the Guggenheim's rotunda in overseeing the installation of her work. Contrary to common assumptions, Frank Lloyd Wright's ramp is hardly a fluid experience. As you round each level, the rhythm is continually interrupted, encouraging you to take a pause.

To take advantage of that pattern of movement, Ms. Hadid deliberately slows and then accelerates the pace. The relatively even spacing of the paintings on the lower levels leads to a busy bottleneck of architectural models. Further up, an undulating billboard physically unfurls within the space of the ramp, shifting the tempo.

The sense of a building that is an extension of the city around it is reinforced as you proceed. In many of Ms. Hadid's paintings the buildings she has designed seem almost secondary, their forms fading into vast surroundings following the curvature of the earth. These views are drawn in a series of shifting perspectives: as your eye glides across the surface, you sense that the work of art itself is gliding or revolving.

In "The World (89 Degrees)," from 1983, several of her earliest designs are collected into a single image: a city of ebbs and flows in which each building is conceived as a fragment of a larger urban vision. These works anticipate, to a remarkable degree, the networks that we now take for granted yet that are a revolutionary development of the electronic age.

Later, the ground plane that she engineers for her buildings becomes as important to her structures as the existing buildings that surround them. The sleek, streamlined Zollhof 3 Mediapark (1993) in Düsseldorf, Germany, for example, represented here by a model, breaks open at one end like the shards of a glacier. She creates a cracked, shifting ground plane for the Cardiff Bay Opera House and the Guangzhou Opera House in China. And the new Phaeno Science Center in Wolfsburg, Germany, is lifted onto supports that allows cars and pe-

that converge at a site, they seek to draw in the active street life around them. Barriers are circumvented.

It leads you to reflect on how, for decades, America seemed conversely to have given up on its cities, or at least the vast public works projects that had held them together.

Europe's break with the Modernist vision of the city was never so traumatic. By the 1980's the kind of bold urban planning characteristic of early European Modernism was still thriving there. Ms. Hadid's vision is an outgrowth of that vision: her buildings can be understood only as part of a more continuous urban pattern.


Slathered in images of her current projects, the undulating billboard makes clear that Ms. Hadid is finally getting commissions worthy of her talent, except in New York of course. The projects unfurl along its length, piled atop one another, alas, like so many advertising images. While they have a powerful visual impact, they lack the energy of the early drawings. Nor do they provide the kind of information — conceptual or practical — that can be gleaned from the models.

By the time you reach the rotunda's upper levels, Ms. Hadid's forms look as fluid as mercury. The curving roof of a design for London's Olympic Aquatic Center, composed of a series of parabolic arches, and the molded white Corian form of a prototype kitchen are slightly hedonistic, descendants of the sensual Modernism envisioned by architects like Ponti, Carlo Mollino and Oscar Niemeyer half a century ago but pushed to an extreme that none of them could have imagined.

And here is where her architectural magic coalesces. For all the apparent radicalism of her forms, Ms. Hadid's work forms a bridge from early Modernism to the digital age. By collecting such disparate strands into one vision, she defiantly embraces a cosmopolitanism that is hard put to assert itself in our dark age.

It is as close to a manifesto for the future as we have.

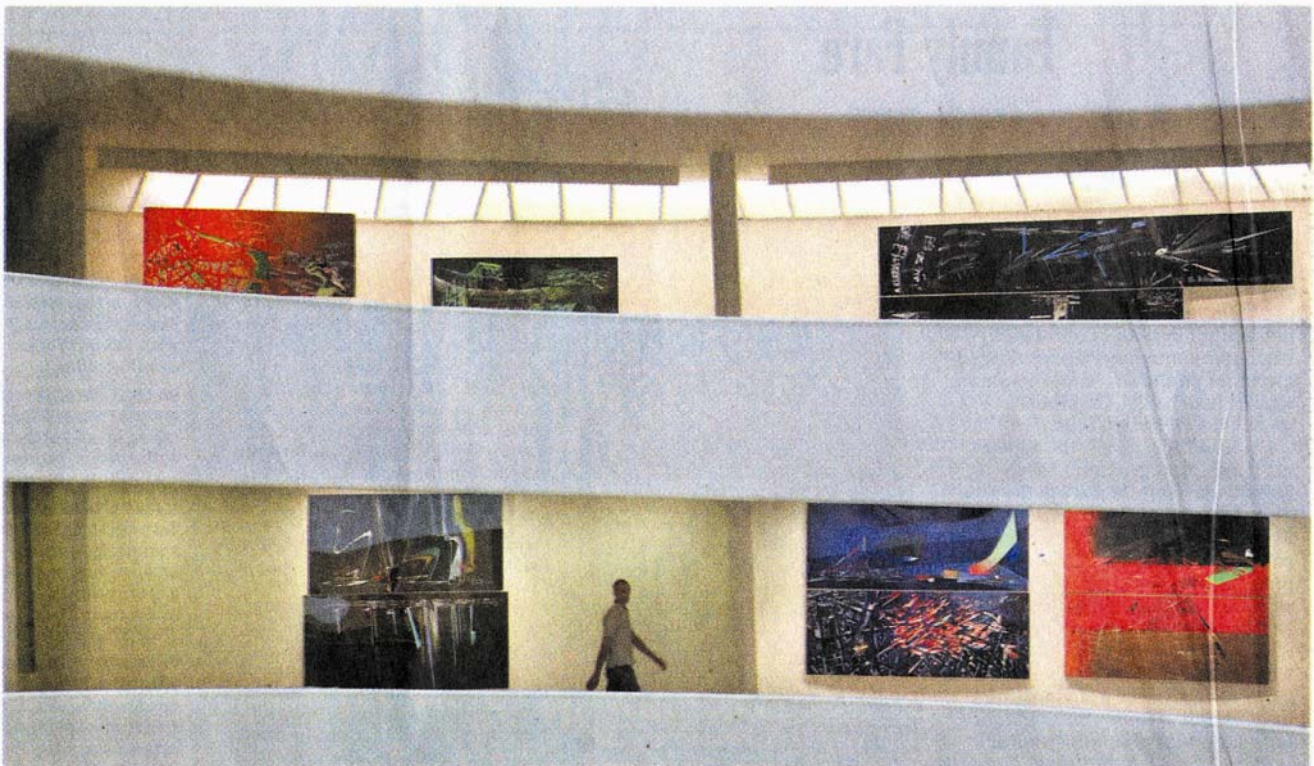
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 *A slide show of additional photographs from "Zaha Hadid" at the Guggenheim Museum:*

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destrians to flow through underneath.

Ms. Hadid is not interested in emulating period styles, Modernist or otherwise. Yet her buildings are obviously deeply rooted in their context. By taking their cues from the vectors of the roads, bridges and freeways



Sara Krulwich/The New York Times

The Guggenheim Museum is presenting the Iraqi-born architect Zaha Hadid's first major retrospective in the United States.



Zaha Hadid Architects

A master plan for the One North complex in Singapore, one of Ms. Hadid's designs on view at the Guggenheim.