Reflections on Zaha Hadid

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Francesco Vezzoli
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Reflections on Zaha Hadid
(1950 – 2016)
Preface

Hans Ulrich Obrist  Yana Peel
Artistic Director  CEO

We were immensely saddened by the loss of our friend and long-term collaborator Zaha Hadid, who was a trustee of the Serpentine Galleries for twenty years. She once said that she put all of her creative energy into the attempt to override nature’s principles of gravity and death and, as we have witnessed since her passing, her creative legacy and the extraordinary impact she made on cities around the world will remain alive forever.

The Serpentine is honoured to have collaborated with Hadid on numerous occasions, beginning with the inaugural Serpentine Pavilion in 2000 commissioned by Julia Peyton-Jones – former Director of the Serpentine Galleries. Seven years later she created Lilas, a temporary installation displaying some of the signature elements of her work, and in 2009 a pop-up structure for The Summer Party, the Serpentine’s annual fundraising event. In 2006, she participated in the Serpentine’s Interview Marathon, as well as the 2013 89plus Marathon. Most significantly, Hadid oversaw the dramatic extension for the Serpentine Sackler Gallery, one of Zaha Hadid Architects’ first permanent buildings in central London. It has been an incredible blessing to have counted Zaha amongst our friends; she remains a source of endless inspiration.

Hadid was not only a great architect, but also a great artist, and she leaves behind an extraordinary body of work. A glowing admirer of Russian Constructivism, she made paintings influenced by Malevich, Tatlin and Rodchenko. Among the many lesser known facets of her work are the free calligraphy drawings in which she often explored the ideas that would later be transformed into architecture. Drawing
was at the very heart of her practice, and these projects contained all the lightness and weightlessness of her buildings, which seem to float, then to land on the ground – they do indeed appear to override nature’s principles of gravity and death.

We would like to extend our deepest gratitude to Zaha Hadid’s family and to the Zaha Hadid Foundation for their commitment to this project. We are thankful to Patrik Schumacher, Principal of Zaha Hadid Architects, for his dedication and to the studio’s Exhibitions team: Manon Janssens, Woody Yao, Daria Zolotareva, Henry Virgin, Zahra Yassine, and Jessika Green for their indispensable collaboration. Thanks are also due to Brian Clarke for his invaluable advice.

We are enormously moved by the tributes contributed by Zaha’s colleagues, family and loved ones in order to bring together this collective memory of our friend:

David Adjaye
Shumon Basar
Deborah Berke
Hélène Binet
Michael R. Bloomberg
Stefano Boeri
Ricky Burdett
Brian Clarke
Nigel Coates
Michael Craig-Martin
Jane Duncan
Peter Eisenman
Rolf Fehlbaum
Norman Foster
Frank Gehry

Stephen Jones
Anish Kapoor
Hanif Kara
Samuel Keller
Rem Koolhaas
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Rirkrit Tiravanija
Bernard Tschumi
Francesco Vezzoli
Madeon Vriesendorp-Koolhaas
Zhang Xin

We are sincerely grateful to them, and it is a great pleasure and privilege to publish this written monument to the great Zaha Hadid.
Zaha Hadid was an architect whose life had a seismic impact on the theory and practice of architecture and whose death leaves a chasm in the profession. Her meteoric rise has been an uplifting, inspirational story, and I have long delighted in following her architecture and her work. She created a new language of form, drawing on her own force of spirit and distinct vision – her indomitable character – which is so present in her buildings.

I believe her work is testimony to her extraordinary talent – from her early ideas on paper through to the first realisations of her experimentation with form and space and the more recent exploration of new materials and technology. Most incredible is the enduring and constantly evolving legacy she has left behind. Seeing her diverse work collected is an insight into not just a lifetime of achievement, but a whole new trajectory for her work and her vision. It is a bright future – her optimism and inventiveness winning through the tragic fact of her absence.

It’s beyond belief – I’m beyond grief. Zaha Hadid has died? Zaha can’t die. That’s not the blueprint we deserve. The plan of her life was – surely – that she’d outlive her hero, Oscar Niemeyer, who drew till the age of 104. Or the shape-shifting Philip Johnson, one of her great supporters, who kept reincarnating himself until he was 98. Architects like them don’t retire, because there is no wall between their life and their work. There’s no after to a life of work. There’s just the world before you arrived and the world you want to see during your life. The rest is for eternity.

In an early interview with Alvin Boyarsky, Zaha said, ‘I almost believed there was such a thing as zero gravity. I can now believe that buildings can float.’ I always assumed she would defy the gravity of death, too. That those whorls of Issey Miyake or Yohji Yamamoto, wrapped around her with mathematical precision, accented by her obsidian, weapon-like jewellery, were more proof – as if it were needed – that she wasn’t really like the rest of us. Even though she was really interested in the rest of us (no one gossiped quite like Zaha).

Her approach – brusque and brutally honest – made a mockery out of the lame, xenophobic, misogynistic essentialism that dogged her in the press. Her name was forever prefixed by the adjectives ‘Arab’, ‘Muslim’ and ‘woman’ in a way none of her contemporaries would be prefixed by ‘Occidental’, ‘Christian’ and ‘man’. I think it an insult to her, and to womankind, to refer to Zaha as ‘the most important female architect in the world.’ Her spiritual predecessor was the Brazilian architect Lina Bo Bardi – whose obdurate work out-toughs

David Adjaye

Zaha Hadid 1950–2016

Shumon Basar

Zaha Hadid 1950–2016
the toughest of male Brutalists, but never rhetorically engages gender in its making.

Right now, I’m thinking about our daily life some 20 years ago when I started work at her London studio. It was a converted school; we entered through the ‘Boy’s Entrance.’ I was a fresh graduate. As such, I knew my way around post-structuralism but not much else. I was giddy to be at The Office of Zaha Hadid. I was convinced I’d been accepted into the heart of a living avant-garde. Here, I’d find the spirit of Malevich and Suprematism defiantly alive at the tail end of the 20th century, having survived the cultural wasteland of post-modernism and the pediments of revivalism.

My memories of those few years are vivid: the Broadway-level drama of Zaha’s arrival at the office each afternoon (which made Meryl Streep’s strop in The Devil Wears Prada seem positively quaint). How I never got Zaha’s cappuccino right (I’d never foamed milk before, OK? They don’t teach you that at Oxbridge). And the second-hand London black cab I used to drive Zaha around in (‘Let’s stop at Maroush on the way’). She also bought me designer clothing (style charity?). Shopping with her was so much fun.

But mostly I remember her incredible private kindness towards me, often forged in London traffic, inside that black cab, her in the back, and me up front, while I wondered, with all the intensity of a 22-year-old, how did I get here?

Zaha did not see your preternatural age. All she cared about was whether your ambition was related, in kinship, to hers. (It also helped if you’d forsake sleep to better further it. Sleep is Kryptonite to architects.)

This private generosity was famously complimented by a default desire to publicly humiliate or berate you. But once I understood this was merely a lesson to affection’s paradoxical expression, an exercise in eccentric closeness, the jibes no longer felt like tiny spears, but soft snowflakes. I’ve probably never been so simultaneously cursed and valued at the same time.

I realised, even then, that this was a close-up experience with someone Really Historically Important. I stand by that. It should be a no-brainer. More importantly, for me, I was part of a totally unique world, full of singular individuals orbiting this relentlessly driven centre of gravity who was also so fucking hilarious. (Who else picks Drake’s Hotline Bling as one of their Desert Island Discs?)

Zaha went from cult famous to famous famous. Pop stars in silly hats believed a selfie with her made them even cooler. Because I had long left, there’s a lot less I can say about this expanding period of the office, as it grew into the architectural equivalent of a Chris Nolan film: from indie blockbuster/boutique to corporate. The future, as rendered in science fiction cinema, was forever changed by Zaha’s futurism. Critical assessments aside, in the 21st century, the world caught up with Zaha’s visions. I’m so glad she lived to feel that glow.

There’s a painting attributed to Zaha from 1983 (though in fact, most were collaborative efforts). It’s an aerial view of a warped earth – floating shards of colour, tectonic plates colliding – colonised by several of her unbuilt projects, flying apart or tied together by an unnameable force. This painting is called The World (89 Degrees).

That’s who she was. Who she always will be. The 89th degree.
I have met and worked with many great architects and designers throughout my professional life. Zaha Hadid always stood out. Her singularity is part of why people around the world feel her loss so profoundly. We foolishly assumed we would have more of her. She was a force. We live in a world that she shaped. She expanded our imagination of what architecture could be, and she moved us forward. We will be deciphering her work — her drawings, her buildings, her legacy — for decades to come. We're just beginning to understand the scale of her influence. It is too easy to describe her work in metaphorical terms: as only resistance to received notions of form and space. She wasn't trying to overturn orthodoxies or break out of the box. Rich with energy, her early drawings are evidence of a vision entirely her own.

Technology eventually caught up to where Zaha had pointed us. Suddenly what seemed to have been possible only in the imagination became buildable: museums, concert halls, athletic facilities, infrastructure, skyscrapers, furniture, objects, fashion. Her output was dazzling; even her most controversial projects would fascinate and inspire awe.

She was an excellent teacher, effective but rarely effusive. Her students strived, struggled and absorbed. Her standards made them better designers. At Yale, we miss her deeply.

She was, of course, a pioneer: always fully herself, different from others at the table. She wasn’t concerned with being liked. She had work to do — perhaps she knew she needed to work fast.

Our paths crossed many times over the decades, beginning at the Architectural Association, then in studios at Yale, at faculty dinners and events in New York. We even designed projects that sit next to each other in Cincinnati, Ohio, of all places. The Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art was her first project in the US, and it was a break-out success. Somewhat restrained and crisply volumetric on the exterior, the museum’s soaring interior and dynamic circulation created an experience of ‘heightening the mind-body connection’, according to one prominent critic in 2003. I was happy to play her wing man with my 21c Museum Hotel next door. Our projects complement each other and they have both helped make Cincinnati a more culturally rich and vital place. I’m proud of that.

In person, Zaha was warm and funny. She was generous. She was intimidating at times, but that is what made a shared moment with her — a knowing glance, a wry quip, an amusing memory — so rewarding. She could make your day with a smile.
Hélène Binet

The construction of The Phaeno Science Centre, Wolfsburg, Germany, 2005 – Photographs 2003
Michael R. Bloomberg

With Zaha’s passing, the world lost a visionary architect and all of us at the Serpentine Galleries lost a dear friend. Zaha’s creative genius broadened the horizons of what is possible in architecture and her contributions to the Serpentine helped make it into the institution it is today. Over two decades as a trustee, her input and guidance were always invaluable. As an artist, she helped establish a great tradition by designing the inaugural Pavilion, and created one of London’s most exciting new arts spaces with her design for the Serpentine Sackler Gallery. She’ll be dearly missed, but she’ll live on through the many extraordinary buildings she designed around the world.

Stefano Boeri

Zaha Hadid has Woven the World

— Weaving as assuming with great effort the task of re-stitching the levels of reality of which the world is composed.

— Weaving as a device between the context of places and those of her imaginary space, between inner and outer city, between aesthetics, passions and projects.

— Weaving as absolute confidence in the idea of an architecture that incorporates in its body – and thus promises and anticipates – the changing perception and perspective of its users.

— Weaving as the link between context and project, between city and architecture.

— Weaving as the particular way of interpreting femininity in the male-governed discipline of architecture.

Zaha wove the letters of a speech about us being inhabitants of this planet – a new discourse that we have just begun to read and decipher.
'La Borromini' is how the Romans fondly rebranded Zaha when she won the competition to build the millennial city’s modern art museum in 1999. Completed at a very Italian pace ten years later, MAXXI remained one of her favourite projects despite the politics and the delays. She was proud of the purity of its architectural concept and fond of the loyalty of the people who made it happen.

She told me how it was one of the last projects to be conceived as a three-dimensional whole with paper, pen and cardboard – as the amazing cut-out models testify – before the computer completely took over. She felt close to it and lived the project in full: waiting in ministerial corridors for government ministers to appear, and then giggling over a grilled artichoke with her close group of collaborators and new Roman friends in a local restaurant. Rome and Beirut, in the end, have much in common.

Purity and loyalty were important to Zaha. We all know she was intolerant. Yet, to those she cared for, she was generous and attentive. But she was particularly irked by lack of rigour and blatant self-centredness. Her eyes flashed with anger when she felt an architect, developer or critic had been less than honest or – worse – had been disloyal to her friends. She was extremely sensitive to any form of bias and spoke out against hidden or explicit bigotry.

Behind the drama, Zaha was always deadly serious. In her own way, she was deeply political, always engaged with the current state of the world, strongly influenced perhaps by her father who was a key public figure in post-war Iraq.

The last time I saw her we talked at length about collaborating on a research project about East London. She was shocked by the fragmentation and desolation of neo-liberal Britain, right on her doorstep. She wanted to recapture the vision behind the spectacular oil paintings that she developed at the Architectural Association in the 1970s. These were much more than just paintings. They were genuine attempts to engage in visual research with potential political impact. Zaha was not alone in bemoaning the poverty of the debate and the ineffectiveness of the design professions, but there are very few who had what it takes to have the imagination and energy to synthesize ideas into form.

The snaking shapes of MAXXI in Rome had the same electric effect as Zaha did when she walked into a restaurant or public event. The new building has jolted the sleepy bourgeois neighbourhood into action. Whether as an observer or participant, Zaha’s presence turned the everyday into a special occasion – and our lives have been the better for it.

The Lonely Planet Rome city guide has Zaha’s MAXXI on the same page as some of Bernini’s and Borromini’s Baroque masterpieces. It would have made La Borromini smile and break out into her raucous laugh. I can still hear it now.
Brian Clarke

ZAHA often described things as ‘RIDICULOUS’.

Earlier this year Zaha and I stood in the nave of this great cathedral looking up to the dome. ‘It’s RIDICULOUS!’ she exclaimed.

I’ve been allotted 6 minutes to deliver a eulogy about Zaha whom I knew for 40 years. ‘It’s RIDICULOUS’.

Zaha and I shared many things, including the bewildering grief that accompanies the deaths of those we loved.

The void that travels with death is not so bleak if its space is shared, and being included by Zaha’s family in this celebration of her life brings warmth, for all of us today, into the freezing isolation that is grief.

Zaha understood the nature of friendship and never let me down; her loyalty was anchored in a profound ability to love her friends. Our friendship was, most powerfully characterised by laughter.

Laughter at the world and its ways and laughter at ourselves and our own particular absurdities.

When she bought the design museum building I asked her what she planned to do with it. ‘Make it into a wardrobe’, she said.

Zaha left 1,381 dresses, 471 pairs of shoes and 284 handbags. Her flat in Dallington Street certainly wasn’t big enough.

It was there that Zaha had a dinner for some Japanese clients. When I arrived they were hanging around the drawing room waiting for her to appear. Zaha was rarely on time for anything, even if it took place in her own home. The guests were trying to sit down on Zaha’s self-designed and just delivered sofas, but were not sure which bits of the furniture were meant to be sat on. As the wait grew longer, they began politely contorting themselves into crevices or trying to stop themselves sliding down ramps of polished fibre glass, or balancing themselves next to upholstered stalagmites. When Zaha finally appeared she was followed by a lady carrying a perfectly conventional chair for her to sit on. Which she did.

When she looked around the room at the guests, none yet sitting down, she roared with a laughter that infected everyone in the room. Then she howled,

‘IT’S RIDICULOUS!’

She had a sense of humour as big as Baghdad and a heart as big as the Ritz.

Amid the abundance of writing about Zaha, I’d like to offer up some personal thoughts. And to help, I’ve pulled an old book from the shelf about Zaha and I. Back then, in 1991, we were relatively new kids on the block, yet we were both attracting a surprising amount of attention from abroad. I’d already lived my NATO moment and Zaha had her first commissions. News travels and London was considered the height of directional cool; we were both offered real projects in Japan where the book was published.

So, at the risk of skating over her broader achievements, I’ve looked again at the 39 projects on the pages of this very thin archival picture book. They remind me of her true DNA, and how over that brief period of the mid-80s to the early 90s, so many of our experiences were unfolding in parallel – as young tutors at the Architectural Association, being a bit of a sensation in Japan, and discovering our mutual interest in furniture design.

I treasure this bond; in effect it underlies our long-lasting friendship even though our trajectories diverged enormously. I evolved into an architectural artist and designer, she became stratospheric with an influence reaching way beyond that of any of our contemporaries.

Back to (her part of) the book. The cover project 59 Eaton Place was never built, but clearly she wanted it to be; it contains many of the strategies in her lexicon. Though tiny compared with later design projects, this ‘interior’ was charged with distorted planes, shifts of scale, and a functional choreography that reshaped a suite of relatively conventional rooms at the top of this terraced stucco pile. An exploded perspective of the interior treats rooms like public squares; the plan, on the other hand, belies the diminutive scale of the proposed site with a miniaturised strip of London superimposed on the adjacent street. Restrictive conditions are being prised apart so as to reconfigure the order of things. The design looks to how an interior can match the desires of an adventurous client.

Zaha was famously inspired by Suprematist artists. Our book proudly states it; the connection is palpable. On the one hand we can detect the post-modern tendency to fragment components, distancing them from one another so they read as discrete artefacts. The way they slip and slide against and between one another certainly echoes the drive behind Zaha’s Russian heroes. But the panoptic scale of the imagination she had developed in her years of study at the AA needed to be referenced too. Another part of the Eaton Place project takes the principle elements of the design, shifts their scale to that of buildings (rather than cupboards or furniture) and flattens them out as though they were blocks in an urban landscape.

Even here it’s utterly apparent that Zaha is funnelling a wealth of manoeuvres into this tiny space, and while she is absolutely aware...
of its limitations, the sideways shifts, transformations of scale and sheer imagination we know from her entire oeuvre are already fully formed. This book covers a good ten years, and a period of her work often remembered for its unrealised brilliance, yet it includes several exemplars that apply her vision for architecture to real spaces. She did this with the Bitar apartment in west London, and for some of her key competition projects like the Irish Prime Minister’s Residence (1979–80) and for her first major competition win, The Peak in Hong Kong (1982–83).

These interior projects had an important, prescient role to play, not least in rehearsing for some of the larger and better-known projects that were to come. They also included an attention to detail that is most clearly visible in examples of furniture design. The book features a chaise longue designed for Edra in 1988. Its sweeping, fervent red swooshes capture her calligraphic verve in an object that is equally structural and useful. Her furniture is nothing more than a micro-architecture, equally as spatial as the larger pieces, but tuned to a different interface with the human body.

Bodiness crystalises in her first built project in Japan, a restaurant interior that was literally yards from my first building in Sapporo. Here rooms and furniture make use of the same swirling aesthetic, again in bright reds and oranges, with movement materialised into Kandinsky-esque spirals and zigzags that disguise the limits of the space. We are inside a three-dimensional painting, a field of signals and signs that re-contextualise human experience in a dynamic maelstrom of pure sensuality.

There can be no prizes for realising that this proto-methodology underpins all of the work that follows. Of course, the computer as design tool had increasing influence, as did newcomer Patrik Schumacher with his more algorithmic manipulations of space in what came to be known as Parametrics. But on the pages of our little book her flirtatious, anti-gravitational architecture is already formed, not as a car manufacturing plant, a fire station, opera house or giant shopping mall, but as a lexicon of strategic moves that have a disruptive (even liberating) effect on physical spaces. The rest is literally history. Perhaps most surprising is the fact that she maintained an intimate atelier-like creativity, or what some people dismiss as a theoretical way of working, even when the projects became so large and so many that only a huge well-oiled machine like ZHA could sustain them.

1 Anthony Fawcett (ed.), Nigel Coates, Zaha Hadid: New British Interiors (Art Random, Kyoto 1991). The cover features drawings by both of us. Hers is of a giant piece of city that she used to organise a tiny project in Eaton Square in London; mine is of the interior of the Silver jewellery shop, also in London.

2 Narrative Architecture Today (NATO) group and eponymous magazine was formed in 1983 with graduate students of AA Unit 10. See Nigel Coates, Narrative Architecture (Wiley, London, 2012); pp 55 – 78.
In 2007, Sandy Nairne, the then Director of the National Portrait Gallery, asked me if I would be interested in doing a portrait for the gallery’s collection. I said I couldn’t imagine doing so, since portraiture in general did not interest me and was far from the central concerns of my work.

He replied that for this sitter he instinctively felt I was the right person. I asked him whom this might be. When he said ‘Zaha Hadid’, I replied without hesitation, ‘Yes, fine, I’d be happy to do it.’ I cannot think of anyone else who could have elicited from me the same spontaneous response.

At the time, I knew Zaha, not well, but well enough to know her to be an exceptional and extraordinary person, striking looking, with the natural charisma to command every room she entered. She was clearly a great architect and one of the most accomplished women in the world, highly intelligent, witty, sensitive, explosive.

Zaha was totally single-minded, a perfectionist, who worked constantly, travelled relentlessly, and made profound personal sacrifices for her work: she was well aware of its importance. She could be a diva, hardly surprising considering the steely self-belief, courage and tenacity required to achieve what she did, particularly as a woman.

I was happy with the portrait, and though Zaha never really liked it, the time we spent together on it cemented our friendship. She spoke often about her sophisticated and liberal childhood and education in her native Iraq and later in Beirut. She gratefully recognised her professional debt to her years at the Architectural Association
in London, and the lifetime friendships she formed there. Zaha loved texting and did so constantly. She would sometimes text throughout a formal dinner, oblivious to the guests around her. I always knew I could text her at any time, and no matter where she was in the world, receive an immediate reply.

When I was a child in America in the 1950s my friends and I were obsessed with ideas and visions of the future, mainly from science-fiction comic strips and movies. These gave us a sense of what the buildings and cities of the future might look like – voluptuously different from everything familiar to us. I had forgotten this childhood vision until I discovered the work of Zaha Hadid. I suddenly recalled that in the architecture we had anticipated the primacy of the straight line had been supplanted by the curve, and here for the first time was an architecture formed primarily by curves. The future had arrived at last, and become the present.

I cannot imagine any man creating this new possibility in architectural expression, but there is nothing soft or ‘feminine’ about Zaha’s uncompromisingly tough and challenging work. Her achievement puts paid forever to the patronising idea that women lack the fundamental spatial capacity necessary for great architecture.

Her architectural vision was truly original, a new way of understanding both form and space. For many years it was assumed that her work was so visionary it could only exist in theory and through drawings, never to be realised in actual buildings. Though her career was cut tragically short, we are fortunate that her extraordinary buildings exist in countries across the whole world.

Very occasionally someone does work that is so original that our experience of the world is forever altered, but which is also so obviously and unquestionably right that it seems immediately familiar, as if it had always been there. It becomes impossible to remember or imagine the world without it. This is the lasting achievement of the work of Zaha Hadid.
Jane Duncan

Zaha
Few people are known by one name
Woman of courage and intellect,
forthright and charming in equal measure
Fearless trailblazing architect,
forging your own language and expression
Unique, imaginative, amazing
You taught us all to dream, and we will dream
Few people are known by one name
You will always be
Zaha

Peter Eisenman

Probably like her other friends, I had a special way of getting through the many layers of telephone security erected around Zaha’s being as she became a worldwide phenomenon. This consisted of a special code, and it always worked. The code was simple. Upon connecting with a voice, I would ask not for Zaha but for ‘ZooHoo’. After some fumbling and consternation on the other end of the line, London would ask, ‘Who is calling?’ My reply was always ‘the kid’, which was the password. No matter how busy, Zaha would always answer.

This code went back decades. Playfully, there was always some form of code between us that allowed us equal access, especially during the Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center project, when I was quietly part of the campaign to secure Zaha one of her earliest commissions, if not her first in the US. From her heady days as a student at the AA to our respective faculty appointments at Yale – where I saw her last – to the void her death leaves in architecture today; through forty years of shared distance and closeness, Zaha remained true to her beliefs, her unique vision of architecture, and her friends. We could still gossip together and laugh together, and I could still, and always will, call her ZooHoo.
Rolf Fehlbaum
Snapshots from the inauguration of the Vitra Fire Station (1993)
Norman Foster

My friend Zaha Hadid died yesterday morning. She was a mere 65 years old. When I saw her last, it was a couple of weeks ago at the Yale University Architecture School where we were both teaching studios this term, something that we have been doing regularly over the years. We do it not only because we like to teach, but we also like being together when we teach. So over the years we have managed to arrange our schedules to be at Yale at the same time so that we can meet and greet and talk and drink and complain and have fun and explore the wonderful culture of Yale University.

I met Zaha many years ago when she had just been announced to the world as the winner of the competition on The Peak in Hong Kong. The drawings that she produced for the competition were mesmerising and suggested a new idea, a new world for architecture. We had all looked at Constructivism for years and had always been inspired by it, but the Zaha personal touch gave it a new freedom, a new engagement, a new opportunity. And wow.

I was working at that time for the Vitra furniture company on their campus. Nicholas Grimshaw had done the first factory, and I was given the second factory and a small museum. Rolf Fehlbaum, the owner, was enamoured with creating an architectural centre of works by architects whom he found to be particularly interesting. Tadao Ando and Alvaro Siza each did buildings and there was a small Fire Station project that I, along with others, thought would be perfect for Zaha Hadid. We thought that whatever potential lack of experience she had in building at that point, since we didn’t really know her, could be filled in by the group. She made a sculpture that clearly came from the drawings that she had produced for The Peak competition – shafts of material colliding and forming space in a

Frank Gehry

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kind of an edgy symphony. It was startling and engaging, and we all fell in love with Ms. Hadid.

From there she pretty much began to fly on her own. She did various small projects – a funny parking garage, a ski lift – I can’t really remember all of the buildings. There was the museum in Cincinnati that created a fuss and more glory and more appreciation. Within 3 to 5 years she became a part of the architectural upper crust clan and, so to speak, became one of the boys.

In this gender-driven world of architecture, at least 50% of the graduates in architecture schools around the country are women. But when you look at the practices, they are not there in those quantities. They are not at the heads of offices in that magnitude and while there are some in very senior positions, the leadership has still been mainly male. Zaha was the exception and became the model.

She had the confidence, talent and willingness to jump into the fray and would not accept a secondary role. She was the whole show. She created an incredibly beautiful language of architecture that the world had never seen before. It was unique and it was her voice all the way.

My work took me into the computer world trying to find a way to use the clarity of those machines to keep the architect as the master builder, as the leader of the team, directing the construction from the beginning to the end. These ideas resonated with Zaha and her forever collaborator Patrik Schumacher, and they quickly took it into their world and used it to create many exemplary buildings. Some of them I have not seen. They are in faraway places to which I don’t normally travel, but I was in the right place at the right time to attend the swimming meet at the swim pavilion that Zaha designed in London. I was able to sit beside her as the building was used by the great swimmer Michael Phelps and I watched her enjoy the fruits of her labours; and the building really works. It’s light and airy and welcoming and wonderful to be in and a great addition to the London scene.

Zaha became more and more prominent in the international press, and her photogenic persona became recognisable around the world to the point where people started to call her a diva. She had those airs it seemed, but that wasn’t the main event of her world. She did pose for the pictures, she did enjoy the attention. I loved watching her with students in China as they gathered around and swarmed her, and she did it with an elegance and dignity and caring generous feeling toward the kids that certainly marginalised the idea that she was living in the world of diva.

I was in Venice for the Biennale a few years ago and walking down one of the alleys I came around Zaha, surrounded by reporters swarming her and I thought I’d tiptoe by so I didn’t disturb them. I got about 50 feet away and I heard this voice call out, ‘Frank, Frank Gehry, come here, come here immediately’ and so I turned around and there she was calling me to this swarm and she pulled me into the swarm and introduced me. She said, ‘This is Frank Gehry, my friend’ and no diva does that. She was a love. God I loved her. I don’t want her to be gone. I want her to be my colleague forever.
David Gill

I first met Zaha back in the 1980s. Zaha had already set up her own architectural practice and I had just left Christie’s and was on the cusp of opening my own gallery. During that era London really felt like the hub of global creativity. The city was emerging from the social, economic and political gloom of the 1970s and was rapidly taking over from Paris. Zaha had grown up during turbulent times in her home country of Iraq, but for her, like many of us, it was London where she finally settled. It was London that seemed to offer all the chances and possibilities to the creative, ambitious individuals that we all were.

Zaha was always someone whose drive and vision were readily apparent. You instantly knew you were in the presence of a woman who was going to change the world. In 1988 when MOMA featured her work in the show *Deconstructivism in Architecture*, curated by Philip Johnson and Mark Wigley, it really felt as though a stamp of official acceptance had been given to her work. What had always been considered the furthest edge of the extreme avant-garde of architecture was at last edging into the light.

Throughout her career Zaha continued to push expectations of what we thought could be possible. Both as an architect and as a designer, she understood the cult of the personality and realised that she had to be visible to win projects on a global stage. She understood that it was her very individualism that was the key to pushing her practice and her theories of architecture and design forwards to a wider audience. Whether designing sets for major pop acts or working in fashion, from creating furniture that was seemingly unimaginable to appearing on Desert Island Discs – Zaha always understood that it was her visibility across a multitude of platforms – not just the architectural – that would ultimately allow an international audience to embrace both her and her work.

When we first began to talk about working together, it was typically Zaha. She didn’t want to launch in London, she wanted to unveil her first collection – Dune Formations – at the Venice Art Biennale in 2007. The result was incredible and together we showed the world an interior landscape that confounded the very idea of what furniture could be. The pieces bled from the vertical to the horizontal and we tore up the book in terms of what was possible with 3D modelling at that time. That collection set up a relationship between Zaha and David Gill Gallery with collections that examined materials such as metals, resins and acrylic offering an assault on what was considered possible for furniture and the conventional laws of design. It seems poignant, however, that her final collection, which we launched this autumn actually revealed Zaha to be looking back in time, towards the 1950s and 1960s working in more traditional materials such as wood and leather. The shapes still offer a dialogue in the aesthetics of flow, but the materials perhaps show a slightly different side.
I miss Zaha terribly, not only because of her genius but also for her unending spirit to seek and discover, to experiment and never to give up. Every generation is lucky to lay claim to a small collection of truly creative talents, people and minds that will make an indelible mark on the world that they leave behind them. Zaha is one of that small group, one that our generation can say has truly changed our lives and our world for the better.

We will miss her vision, we will miss her laugh. But more than anything, we will miss our very dear friend.

Isabella Giovannini

Zaha was a force field, a one-woman singularity – the normal laws of space-time simply did not apply to her.

Gravity never seemed to affect her the way it does the rest of us; her buildings often ignored it, or straight up defied it. So did her clothes.

And Zaha ran on Zaha time. Which, usually, was running a lot later than real-world time. But she was always worth the wait. Time with Zaha never felt real. It went by too fast. You’d sit down to lunch and get up two hours later, with absolutely no idea where the time went.

I was lucky enough to grow up with Zaha in my life. I can’t remember ever not knowing her. She never, ever forgot a birthday. She always texted congratulations, even if it was just for being in the high school play. She always checked in when I was sick, offering to drop everything and come take care of me.

Zaha taught me how to be a woman in a man’s world. In a world that makes women sit down and apologise, Zaha never apologised for anything. She was a rebel. Others are far better qualified to talk about the bigger, architectural rebellions – but I remember one smaller rebellion, which meant the world to me.

When I hit puberty, my dad didn’t want me to wear jeans. Other pants were fine, but for some reason denim was an aesthetic horror, not to be endured. He was also very concerned that jeans were ‘too tight’. Of course, that meant that all I wanted was a pair of jeans. I came to stay with Zaha in London, and aired my grievances to her. She said, ‘That’s ridiculous’, gave me the money, and sent me off to Topshop.
‘Buy the tightest jeans you can find’, she commanded. And that was that.

Last March, I walked into the lobby of the Yale School of Architecture, en route to the library to study. Zaha was teaching there that semester. As I walked by a cluster of grad students, I overheard one say, ‘She’s so funny! I love her!’

I knew immediately who they were talking about. I wanted to chime in, ‘Me too!’

Zaha could mimic absolutely anybody with hilarious, devastating accuracy, because she saw people for what they were. Nothing got by Zaha. Whenever I was with her, even in a big group, I felt like she really saw me — all my fears, insecurities, hopes, joys.

She also saw people for what they could be. She knew what you were capable of before you did. She continually bought me fabulous clothes, always about two years before I had the courage to wear them. She taught me never to apologise, never to doubt myself, to always laugh, and that you can never, ever have too many friends.

More than anything, I wish I could go back on Zaha time. I wish I could be back in her flat watching Little Britain, or back in the lobby of the Mercer having breakfast, or back eating her special lamb and rice, wheezing with laughter. My time with Zaha went by way too fast.

At the centre of that force field was the biggest heart.

I have to agree with the young man who, when he spotted Zaha at the Venice Biennale a decade ago, kneeled at her feet, ripped open his shirt, handed her a pen and asked her to engrave his chest with her autograph. As a critic, I got drawn into the Zaha vortex, and never left – nor even wanted to: her talent was so towering and the vision so original that I could write about few other architects with the same conviction and admiration. Her architecture elevated my expectations and monopolised my attention.

And then there was the friendship itself. As an impartial critic, I resisted becoming close until, over nearly three decades, her character, charm and talent just wore me down and won me over: I capitulated. By the time she died, I had no Zaha resistance left, no immunity whatsoever, and attended nearly every event and saw nearly every building. At some point, she even entered my unconscious: in a recent dream we were walking in the woods on winding dirt trails, her crippling arthritis miraculously cured, just talking, in search of an unbuilt building that stayed elusively out of sight, around blind bends, a tall mirage. By the end, she owned part of my soul, and my family’s. There were no barriers. She gave love easily and wholly.

More than a brilliantly inventive architect, Zaha was a phenomenon, a charismatic, driven, unstoppable, indomitable force who attracted perfect strangers into her orbit. Architects generally can’t design outside their temperament, and in Zaha’s case, she was right to stay in character at the drafting table. She was full of life, which she channeled directly into her drawings: as a young woman, she danced, sang, smoked and clubbed, and after her salad days, she cooked, cussed, told hilarious stories, and gave her friends clothes
and lent them money. I got a Tatlin-ish necktie hand-painted on
silk in thanks for fundraising for her Great Utopia installation
at the Guggenheim (though she never quite got around to the suit
she threatened to design to correct my errant tastes).

Her humour ran to the wicked side, and you’d have to pick yourself
off the floor after one of her imitations, usually delivered at
someone’s expense (sometimes mine, I’m told). In her company,
when she was on a roll, you felt more alive – as in her spatially
thrilling buildings, which always zoomed the eye on spatial rides.

With Zaha and her designs, you couldn’t separate the dancer from
the design: the designs came indelibly tattooed with both her giving
character and her ferocious and demanding personality. Perched
on tiny ankles supported by precarious heels, wearing billowing
Issey Miyake dresses and capes, she used to float out of the elevator
at the Royalton and then the Mercer in New York free of gravity,
like her buildings, levitated, and you’d get magnetically drawn in.
The buildings and she were complex, confident, disciplined, wild,
simultaneously strong and fragile. Never coy, they charmed in a
powerful way. In Vitruvius’s formula, ‘firmness, commodity and
delight’, she always checked the firmness and commodity boxes,
but dialled delight way up.

Her temper has been described as Vesuvian, but so was her joy, and
in fact explosion was a constructive dynamic in both her personality
and work. What she called her Big Bang breakthrough occurred
when she first drew a building just after the moment of explosion,
as it broke free of gravity, impelled by another force. Early on in 1980,
with her entry for the Irish Prime Minister’s Residence competition,
she hit a rectangle with a triangle and generated architecture in the
exploding fall-out.

Zaha argued; she sent back dishes she had just ordered; she was
not afraid of the unexpected consequences that collisions set off
socially or architecturally. She tested people, situations, ideas. She
specialised in buildable disruption. Captivated by the poetics of
fracture and fragmentation, she collided forms and the resulting
explosion replaced mono-directional gravity with omni-directional
forces no longer accountable to the ground. Air was their natural
habitat. She changed the age-old architectural narrative and
buildings flew. Her forms and spaces were vectorial. So was Zaha.
She and they had force and direction.

Following a Russian avant-garde M.O., or perhaps just because
she was Zaha, she made things strange. Warp, distortion and
accident invaded her designs like an invisible, defamiliarising ether.
She mechanized accident in her designs when she walked over to
the office Xerox machine and slid the design over the glass as the
tumbler of light scrolled under the drawing. The result resembled
the smears that Francis Bacon painted across faces. Liberated from
homogeneity and regularity, she fought against the normative and
sought and forged individuality in the part and the whole. She was
the Gertrude Stein of space.

The core of her vision developed during a decade of intense research
when she built nothing. She effectively built through drawings and
paintings, and arguably made more progress faster since drawing
and painting are faster arts than building. But she did want to
build, and finally did with the Vitra Fire Station in Weil am Rhein,
Germany, a sensation that at last proved the constructability of
her vision.

At Vitra her interest in painting translated into plays of perception,
with each of the three leading horizontal volumes bending in
forced perspective, tapering to different, contradictory vanishing
points. Space and form no longer agreed, and no longer constituted a cogent Renaissance whole. Space was conflicted, indeterminate and irrational; the building fooled visual physics and the body by playing perceptual tricks on the eye. The design exceeded three dimensions on its way to the ineffable fourth spatial dimension prized by Malevich and Lissitzky. Arguably Vitra was the first Suprematist building. Right out of the box, she achieved architectural history.

Always, the buildings offered public spaces inside and out that were gifts of welcome and civic ownership. The designs invited the public onto articulated ground outside, which flowed into the buildings via promenades, ramps and stairways. Underlying all Hadid’s architectural designs was her concern and deep respect for the public and her care in designing public space. She had the heart and convictions of a socialist and believed that though the disadvantaged might live in modest homes, they should at least enjoy elevating public buildings that dignified the public realm. She charged beauty with social intelligence.

At first her vision itself and then her huge success bred reactionary resistance, and lately the new ayatollahs espousing social issues and environmental politics have misinterpreted Hadid’s work as formalist and elitist. They have neglected to realise that underlying almost all Hadid’s architectural designs is her concern for the common good. Like Hadid herself, her buildings are abundantly generous. Zaha and her buildings are the gifts that kept on giving.

Her face started with her preternaturally huge eyes, with which she sized people up mercilessly in nano-seconds. Encounters were always personal: she liked people; she liked company, and she judged carefully because she was always on the look out for friends. She created families of friends who became friends themselves. Her intuitions about people, like her memory, were seldom wrong, and if you passed muster, she accepted you forever, even through the tantrums and falling-out. You could always come back. She might never apologise but she would make up instead by some act of over-the-top generosity. She had the gift of friendship.

With her intensity, passion, and frankness, England was hardly a natural fit. She wasn’t ingratiating. She didn’t smooth things over with adjectives. A woman with so much Iraqi sun in her, so much intensity, was bound to have problems integrating in polite England, which might tolerate eccentricity, perhaps, but not deep originality, contrarian independence, unapologetic intelligence, bluntness, and artistic ambition. Daniel Burnham once advised young architects to make no little plans, but she didn’t need the advice: Zaha instinctively just went for it. Early on she ambitiously said – some thought preposterously and pretentiously – that she wanted to reinvent the floor plan, and she did when she released buildings from gravity.

The girl who was enabled by parents who gave her an allowance to design her own unusual clothes (her mother called her Carmen Miranda) was only accepted in England after successes elsewhere that could no longer be ignored. Success was imported. Only after her 2004 Pritzker and an unrelenting series of brilliant buildings did the RIBA recognise her with the gold medal, and then only a few months before her death. The Queen actually beat the architectural establishment by a few years when she named Zaha a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire. The Queen knew something about having and holding power in dominantly male worlds.

Zaha’s flamboyant persona – the shoes, the capes, the sculpted jackets with cantilevered lapels – captivated the image-driven press
but threw off the scent: she was, on one level, a field marshal of organisation, fascinated by the many ways in which to conceptually structure a building. She drew paradigms of organisation in her notebooks: bundling, aggregation, jigsaws, lasagna, bubbles, folding, amoebas, multiple grounds. Her scheme for the Cardiff Bay Opera House (1995) was a necklace with pendant crystals; her garden pavilion in Weil am Rhein (1999) was a bundle of strands – ramps, stairs, bridges – that emerged from, and merged back into, the landscape. She was organised down to her suitcases: she packed her bags with engineered precision into minor miracles of compactness. You could tell she liked you if she advised you how to organise your life.

Most of her projects were triumphs; many of those were masterpieces. And though a masterpiece would seem to be an absolute beyond improvement, there were the masterpieces, the better masterpieces, and the best masterpieces. And they have just kept on coming, even posthumously.

She was architecture’s comet, shooting out of the firmament as if from nowhere, and then suddenly gone, vanished, the likes of her luminous talent not to reappear again for generations.

Thomas Girst

‘I’m not coming’, Zaha told me when I first met her. Her eyes wandered over a list of about 100 international media for which I had booked flights and accommodation to come and see her BMW plant in Leipzig before its official opening. I had just started at BMW. I had fought hard for the budget. She looked at me. I was afraid that everything would fall apart; of the hell I would get from my bosses. We looked at each other. And right there, deep down somewhere in the third layer of her eyes, I saw a child who wanted to play; who wanted to see whether I could stand my ground. I managed. She did come to Leipzig for a great tour of her plant. That day, in April 2005, she taught me how to send text messages and she made a drawing for me the day the plant opened. She was generous in so many ways. CNN came for the opening, not so much for our CEO, not so much for the Chancellor of Germany, who was also there; CNN came for Zaha.

We continued to text each other, no matter the time of day. I was humbled, sometimes insecure and felt small vis-à-vis her amazing skills, achievements, power and international recognition. Yet it was fun. Her attention made me feel special, a great privilege. Even during chance encounters, I could pour my heart out, about my messed-up life. Zaha would listen. She was there. With Zaha, you never had to pretend. Her relentless intelligence and deep knowledge of people was always on. She would see right through people. I never felt I had to be somebody else for her. Somebody I was not. She would write me a reference when I applied for a job. She would inquire how I was. And just as her buildings do, she connected people with each other. Most importantly, she made those she cared for realise things about themselves.
We hosted an evening for her in Berlin in 2010, at Klärchen’s Ballhaus, with many international guests in attendance. She arrived late. She was with an entourage. Her leg or back hurt that night and therefore she refused to go up the stairs to the Mirror Room where the dinner was to start the moment she entered. She wanted to go back to her hotel immediately. ‘I knew this wouldn’t be easy. I am truly sorry. I did send your office the exact number of stairs beforehand, the elevation and angle of steepness. You may walk upstairs over my coat. We can carry you between us in a chair’. She smiled. Again, she was playing with me. She climbed the stairs. It turned out to be a marvelous evening. Thanks to her presence.

My third child turned out to be a daughter, born in 2012. I told her during Art Basel. ‘Don’t you already have two sons?’ was her only remark at the time. ‘You are supposed to say “Congratulations”!’ I left it at that. A little later, I dared to ask her in a long and winding letter whether she would design a canopy, an awning for the entrance of our new house in Munich. She wholeheartedly said yes, waiving all fees. Generous as always. I was so grateful and happy I had a hard time sleeping for several nights. The only cost would be the material, mostly stainless steel, and the construction work. We had a meeting at her offices in London about the canopy. When I arrived, the design had been completed, blueprints ready, down to the depth in millimeters of every hole for drilling, including a 3D scale model of our entrance. However, she reproached the project manager for initially creating the railings with too sharp protruding edges, saying my daughter could get hurt. So she did know and care about my children. For some other reason, an argument ensued at the table, a to and fro among her and her team, a family affair. Patrik handled it well as always. Though sitting right next to me, I texted her: ‘Turn around and smile at me!’ Her mobile beeped, she read my words, turned around and smiled. I loved her smile.

When I confessed to her that I didn’t have the money to have her entrance built, ‘just make it out of plastic’ she said. I want to build it today more than ever. I will.

While she was on the plane to the States before she passed away, we were in touch about her contribution to a book I was about to publish: 100 Secrets of the Art World. She promised to come through. And she did, a few days later. Zaha revealed her Big Bang moment in architecture: ‘the explosion was the decisive analogy and gesture that set off my creative career, breaking up the rigid order of all prior architecture, opening up the city block and injecting the fluidity and dynamism of contemporary life’. She wanted her remarks to be accompanied by a 1981 study for the renovation of a London townhouse at 59 Eaton Place.

When Zaha died, all major media worldwide honoured her accomplishments. The New York Times ran a series of images of her greatest buildings, at least two dozen of them. While clicking through, admiringly and in awe, I realised that she had left the world a better and more beautiful place, an amazing achievement and legacy. As an architect, as a woman, as an Iraqi, and for everyone who knew her, she left behind a huge void. Much earlier, I had written her name on a scrap of paper I keep in the drawer of my desk, a list of a handful of geniuses I was privileged to meet in the past two decades. Her loss is unfathomable to so many. Closing your eyes and putting your hands on one of her buildings is an intimate moment, rewarding you with comfort, solace and empowerment.
Zaha walked into our lives when my brother Hussein and I were 5 and 6 respectively. She had come to Beirut to study mathematics at the American University of Beirut. Our parents had just got divorced, which was a relatively rare occurrence back in the late 1960s. From the minute Zaha appeared we felt loved and protected. She brought Zaha magic with her: love, laughter, fun, music, dance and her group of close friends, who remain her friends to this day. She would spend hours teaching us how to draw, how to actually use the colouring pencils: how you tilt them to colour in, how you could blunt the tip to shade in or how you could sharpen it to have a bold razor-sharp edge. That was LONG before she became an architect; as far as I can remember with Zaha, everything started with a drawing.

Whenever my father Haytham, my uncle Foulath and Zaha got together for lunch, dinner or any family gathering, soon after the hugging and kissing, their exchanges quickly became charged. Voices were often raised, the Iraqi dialect prevailed and heated discussions soon followed. All three of them were highly opinionated, very bright and very passionate. Us younger Hadids did not really understand it – we would watch quietly, slightly baffled, not allowed to participate, let alone take sides. It was only YEARS later, when my best friend, who had often been present at these occasions, finally understood it and explained it to me: ‘Rana, they are so passionate, this is how they express and communicate their love to one another’. Hadids have a special way of showing love; Zaha’s way was even more unique. It often took the form of criticism and outburst, pushing and pushing especially those she loved and cared for. I am sure this will resonate with many of you – we have all experienced the pushing and brutal honesty. She simply wanted us to be the best she thought we could be, something she
applied to herself relentlessly. She saw in us much more than we saw in ourselves.

Zaha loved life and lived her life by giving more to all those she cared for, her family, her office family and her family of friends. Zaha was a master at bringing together people across all nations, cultures and religions, bridging all those differences and forging solid bonds. A bit like her spaces. The minute you stepped into a Zaha Space, whether it was her home, her bedroom, her ‘gallery’, Studio 9 or public buildings, you instantly felt at harmony with your surroundings – with a sense of inner peace. I think this was due to her deep understanding of people and human behaviour. Through those friendships, through her buildings, through her, we were all connected. Just as we are here today. She taught us that life is best when you build bridges between people and not walls. (Even if sometimes there were minefields under the bridge!)

Zaha always wanted one big reunion. She spoke to me about this EVERY TIME we saw each other: a get together of all the Hadids and the Sabounchis, as well as all the peolpe she loved around the world: Baghdad, Beirut, London, Vienna, Miami, New York, Istanbul, Milan … the Office group, the AA one, the architects … She wanted to bring everyone together. All those she loved. She had a profound and deep sense of gratitude and loyalty to all those who had given her strength, support and love throughout her life. I would like to treat this memorial TODAY as that reunion. A reunion to celebrate Zaha’s life. I am sure she would have a lot to say, starting with my hair and Tala’s. But I came well-armed today: thanks to John, Caroline and Tracey (Zaha’s team) and I’m wearing a coat and jewellery she gave me! She would be moved to see Ammo Ghazi stand in for Haytham and Ammo Ghassan for Ammo Fou. She would be so proud that Hassounni is reading. She would also be saying ‘Where is Patrik? Where is Flappatoor? For God’s sake who are all these people?’ She would also know exactly who was not here and would be so happy to see all those who are. She would certainly thank Luitto and Christian and her team who’ve done such a great job. And then she would say ‘This is a total waste of time, it’s time for everyone to go back to the office!’

There are many sides to Zaha that I shall miss terribly. The Zaha who made us laugh till we cried, Zaha the brilliant mimic who did the best impressions, Zaha who came up with the best nicknames (Sinkapoo, Yes but No but, Melo, Happy Ending, Kermit), the Zaha who rooted for the underdog, the Zaha who set standards, Zaha who believed in the power of education, Zaha who loved her Sunday lunches at the River Café, the Zaha who pushed our limits, the Zaha who challenged us to think differently and to do what was not always easier, the Zaha who would call me at 5pm Beirut time from China or Miami to tell me off for not having visited my father (yet) that day, the Zaha who made every minute matter, the Zaha who would text out of the blue at that right moment when you were feeling sad or vulnerable, the Zaha you could talk to about anything: architecture, nail polish … your love life! But mostly the incredibly warm and generous Zaha who showed us that we could do anything we wanted if we worked at it hard enough. The Zaha who always watched our backs and made sure we were loved and protected.

I know that Zaha will never truly leave us, because she has left a small part of herself in each person present today.

Tala Hadid
Letter to Z

in the town in which I live
the seller pushes his cart with
pomegranates the colour of
blood,
it’s the red of the lipstick you put
on my lips as a child
in your studio long ago
where time stood still
and the grey light of those
London afternoons
gave way to eternity.
You painted my face
and taught me that even azure
lines can defy borders.
On the drawing board the
tracing paper with its pencil
marks that reached infinity
held the secret blueprints to
metropolises floating in the air,
compositions that dreamt of
concrete and glass and air.

Emanating light as if from a
close sun
Promethean goddess

you burnt through the darkness
of night
and behind you the trail of gold
dust,
out of which cities emerged
and structures defied space and
time,
reminded us that the horizon is
without end.
In your amber eyes, I saw my
father.
The grit of Baghdad
Sinuous Tigris
made of you beings of exile, iron
and steel.
But you were the one who built
the house.
You laid the foundations
that reached up to the vast
firmament,
and knew no yesterday, today or
tomorrow.
You were the one who dreamt,
and flew, laughter on your lips,
on the back of time.

Hans-Jürgen Commerell and Kristin Feireiss
In Loving Memory

When we think what characterises our memory of Zaha, images and
associations come up spontaneously:

The first meeting at Zaha’s studio in London in 1983: Zaha’s
amazing appearance, Zaha’s ingenious drawings, Zaha’s courage
in pushing the boundaries of architecture, Zaha’s first won
international competition: the Hong Kong Peak project and her first
show at Aedes in 1984, Zaha’s imposing performance, Zaha’s rituals,
Zaha’s warmth, Zaha’s legendary outbursts, Zaha’s commitment,
Zaha’s necklace eaten by our dog Pisa, Zaha’s first building in
Berlin, Zaha’s longstanding symbiotic relation with Patrik, Zaha’s
overwhelming generosity, Zaha’s friend Wave (Sand), Zaha’s
trustworthiness, Zaha’s glamorous fashion, Zaha’s persistence,
Zaha’s mocking humour, Zaha’s 2nd show at Aedes on the Vitra Fire
Station in 1992 (with never-ending changes of installation through
day and night), our first common trip to get Zaha’s models back to
London (where we ended up with our van at a graveyard), Zaha’s
beauty, Zaha’s stunning bouquets, Zaha’s 3rd show at Aedes in
2002, Zaha’s one day Tuscany visit (and the dramatic airport race
with Lukas), Zaha’s anger, Zaha’s funny gossip, Zaha’s unflappable
partners and team, Zaha’s setbacks and glorious victories, Zaha’s
pioneering architecture, Zaha’s legendary parties, Zaha’s infectious
dark laughter, Zaha’s high heels (which got stuck in the Mies
Pavilion), Zaha’s loyalty, Zaha’s deep trust in family and friendship,
Zaha’s voluminous voice, Zaha’s tears, Zaha’s power, Zaha’s
(sometimes ironic) smile, Zaha’s legacy. Zaha’s Einzigartigkeit!
Zaha Hadid had an amazing personal duality: at the same time as being an immensely powerful presence at the pinnacle of her profession, she was also generous and reached out to give encouragement to me and others to keep working experimentally.

It took so many years for her to find a way to build her visionary ideas and then finally, once she began, she seemed to be unstoppably prolific. Creating entirely new visual languages and relentlessly pushing forward the way we think about designing buildings, she made us, other designers, re-evaluate what we were doing, again and again. The sadness and frustration is not knowing what she would have invented and built next in the coming decades.
Edwin Heathcote

Zaha used to say that if she were a man she would never be called a diva. But, of course, she was a woman. And she was a massive diva. The greatest diva architecture ever had.

She was never on time. She’d keep you waiting, threaten to cancel everything, shout at her entourage and then reluctantly sit down, still seething and fuming at everyone around her. But once she got going she was unstoppable. Warm, alive, aware, conspiratorial, and funny and heartbreaking almost simultaneously. It was a ritual you had to go through, a kind of threshold to intimacy although once inside you felt privileged and alive.

She was, in a way, like her own architecture. Striking, overwhelming, surprising, even alienating yet when it wrapped you in its embrace, once you went inside, everything became operatic, a theatrical realm in which you seemed transported to another, higher plane, a possible future. It was a dreamlike utopia, but real. Of course, an actual world of Zaha’s building would be a nightmare but when you saw one building of hers in the midst of a city, it was captivating.

Her early paintings showed a world fragmented, colliding shards of history and energy, yet when she built she created worlds which brought people together, strange, undulating topographies which were utterly original yet which could seem an almost inevitable outcome of the forces and flows of the city.

Zaha’s schtick was to pretend to hate everything and everywhere. She pretended she was the underdog, neglected and rejected. If she was at an opening of one of her own buildings, she’d pretend she’d rather be anywhere else. Who were all these people?

Why wasn’t Rem here? And Frank? Where was Patrik? Of course she was a dame, a darling of the establishment, one of the few architects known by her first name alone, always surrounded by admirers and hangers on, everyone wanted a part of her. But secretly she loved it all. She bathed in the attention and the glamour, she revelled in the recognition. And she deserved it.

Hers was no hard luck story. She was wealthy, self-assured, bloody-minded and brilliant. It just took a while for the world to catch up.

Now we’ve caught up and she’s not there any more.

Zaha found out that my mother had attended the same convent school as she had done in Baghdad, albeit a couple of decades earlier. She’d been delighted by the unlikely coincidence. My mother died two months before Zaha and a couple of days before David Bowie. My mother would have told me, don’t put me in this tribute to Zaha, what’s that got to do with anything. Well, what it has to do with, is that without her the world just feels emptier. And without Zaha the world of architecture seems to me a similarly bleaker place. One which lacks one of the sparks that we now realise was such a critical catalyst of the way things were and the way they should have been. I miss them.
Steven Holl


1976 – 77
The Launching Place—Unit 9, The Architectural Association London: Malevich’s Tektonik was made to sing bridging the Thames… Birds were astonished. Elia Zenghelis, Rem Koolhaas and I lunged forward in our jury chairs.

1978
Undulant ripple of the Museum of the Nineteenth Century climbing up and over. Struggling for independence in new space.

1978 – 80
Irish Prime Minister’s Residence feeling the wall’s deep tendency to fly. Black and celadon green swirl with cobalt blue, making new journeys from painting into architecture.

1982 – 83
The mountain’s stratified layers explode into a suprematist geology; with The Peak, in Hong Kong, Zaha leaves this Earth in astonishing new space. Rhomboids fly towards unreachable centres. Floor plans leap and thrust, making a new right of way. An eye-wide hillside of tomorrow leaps with confident joy.

1983
The World (89 Degrees): An amazing painting summarising Zaha’s seven-year journey. Already leaving our planet via paintings of astonishing architecture.
1986

New York, Manhattan: A new calligraphy of plan departing from Le Corbusier’s Ville Radieuse for Manhattan correcting for the multilayered... compression and density, black with white flying lines, untwined confetti dream-level beginning.

1986

Kurfürstendamm constraints become Berlin IBA Housing sheet-metal wedge-shaped lofts... Stupor of yes and no. Stepping slowly into the physical from the painted dream.

1986

Tokyo Tomigaya and Azabu-Jyuban releasing space in Blade Runner spirit-piercing the Earth, slicing the landscape, toppling conventions... Bird-future aleatory ‘breath light and air into the urban condition’.

1989 – 90

Fire and ice of Moon Soon in Sapporo, Japan. Glacial tables drift across space... A whirling fire swarms above... Orange-red peeling, micro spatial in a self-starred soul spiral.

1990 – 94

Weil am Rhein Vitra Fire Station... The promise of new space in concrete full of inspiring detail! The hope of real joy of realisation! The fire engine’s red lines written on the asphalt. We all attend this special opening. Philip Johnson is amazed and so influenced by Zaha he copies her geometry for a new pavilion at his Glass House.

1992

The Great Utopia: Guggenheim design for an exhibition of Russian Suprematism and Constructivism circles back to Zaha’s launching place with Malevich at the AA in 1977.
Steven Holl and Zaha Hadid in Steven Holl's Office Manhattan, New York, 2005
Photo Credit: Steven Holl Architects
1994 – 96
Cardiff Bay Opera House: A winning competition design: a new bursting open of opera house activities ‘like jewels in a necklace’ bulging and joined together, dismantling taboos of architecture… Flashing before the eyes then smashed by a pitchfork niggling.

1997
Luxembourg Philharmonic Hall: A landscape of volumetric compositions erupting in separate rounded volumes. A precursor of the opera house to be realised in Guangzhou.

1997
Doha, Qatar Museum of Islamic Art: A wholly original imagination of space and geometry… A landscape painting setting a new path for architecture like no other architecture to this day. Fluid and calligraphic.

1997 – 2003

1998 – 2009
MAXXI: Museum of XXI Century Arts, Rome: A turning linear urban texture; vectors of movement drawn in concrete. The competition – among seven – was fierce. At the end of the presentations, Jean Nouvel, Zaha and I met for dinner at one of my favorite Roman restaurants carved into the foundation of a 2,000-year-old theatre. I made a toast prediction: ‘The winner of this competition is sitting at this table!’. I lost the competition by one vote, but made a speech in praise of Zaha at the MAXXI opening in October 2009.
Phaeno Science Center, Wolfsburg, Germany: For science diagonal volumes floating in the shadows... Monolithic curvilinear concrete whorls... Dissolving the block, sliced cone rooms turn inside-out... Spatial wormholes are driven through, taking science for a flight. Architecture? It is a beautiful gift to culture, not a profession.

(P)oetic activity is revolutionary by nature; a spiritual exercise
– Octavio Paz, The Bow and the Lyre, 1973

Zaha was extremely loyal to all her old friends, paying visits to their studios, offering humorous critical remarks: ‘Stevie Wonder, that looks like a watermelon with a stick in it!’

When I walked inside the Guangzhou Opera House I was astonished by the liquid space of this large ‘house’. Photos cannot express the fluid theatricality of this spectacular space. The scala, that stalwart of opera typology models, is nowhere in this rippling golden volume stippled with star points. The space renews the very
idea of opera giving it a 21st-century space of great acoustics and comfort. Instead of a choppy wood of Disney, a golden new fluidity.

2007–12
Heydar Aliyev Center, Baku, Azerbaijan: Curvilinear stitches of landscape rise up, pitching the curves in waves of open space. Everything is joyfully limp. Against the box blocks of Baku, this white cloud flashing with inner light pointing to some new world in the distant beyond.

2007–14
Dongdaemun Design Park & Plaza Seoul, Korea: A blurred zone of park space, plaza space, public space and new spatial space.

2009–13
Serpentine Sackler Gallery: A floating fabric shapes space where light enters at the support structure. A cloud overhead opens through the hole, the sun shines in.

2015
She said she did not really enjoy a big office. Dissipation? The swell and euphoric lift is eternal in the early and middle works. Zaha’s space = a new optimism for 21st-century architecture… The eclecticism launched by Postmodern cynicism is over. She found a new path and forged it. Propelled by her teachers Elia Zenghelis and Rem Koolhaas, she swirled past them in inventive space.

Swept along, inhabiting radical spatial paintings of her own invention, she created in a very different way from the collage-sketch beginnings of Frank Ghery. When I asked her what she thought of Bilbao, she replied, ‘Like a turkey popping out of an oven with foil peeling off’.

Her spatial horizon was much wider, aching for the light.

Le Corbusier wrote in the last year of his life:

Over the years a man gradually acquires through his struggles, his work, his inner combat, a certain capital, his own individual and personal conquest. But all the passionate quests of the individual, all that capital, that experience so deeply paid for, will disappear. The law of life: death…

Thought alone, the fruit of labour, is transmissible.

— ‘Mise au Point’, 1965

Zaha’s spatial thoughts open doors to a new world… A ferry crossing from darkness … From oblivion of postmodern words… A new journey!

What space Zaha imagined! What cities, what marvellous geometries she invented! The most amazing architect of her day, and with such human kindness she lived her life – now suddenly gone – but her gifts will constantly move us in the new spaces of the transparent future.
A few days ago I attended a school reunion after an indecent number of years since graduation. Having walked into a room of 20 or more people who once formed a group of close friends, I realised that I could not match the faces with names I once knew so well and now could only just remember. Simply put, I hardly recognised any of my old friends. That could not happen to anybody who once – recently or a long time ago – came across Zaha. She had a striking personality, brilliant intelligence, remarkable appearance and unique talent radiating like a beacon, which hit you whether you wanted it to or not. She certainly was, and still remains, unforgettable.

I met her for the first time about 40 years ago at the Architectural Association, where she was a student just about to graduate. I can still see her clearly in my memory, surrounded by a group of students – all of them involved in a heated discussion about what else but architecture. She had massive, dark, curly hair, a deep voice and total determination to have the last word, a feature that she never lost. I was not yet an experienced teacher, but I knew even then that I was looking at somebody who was not going to disappear in the mist of forgotten history among the names of insignificant alumni. I also remember on another occasion talking to her about the Russian Constructivists, of whom I had some knowledge, having come from former Czechoslovakia and studied at a Russian grammar school, and also having seen some of their work as a young student in Moscow in the late 1950s. She was totally passionate about their work and their unfortunate fate under Stalin, and she was trying to recreate their memory. Her devotion to them is clearly detectable in her projects.
When we met again, either in Joe’s café in Knightsbridge, or Peter Cook’s Art Net gallery in Bloomsbury, or a party, we often shared our experiences of having strong encounters with historic sites or past cultures. She was born in Baghdad, which her family left with the rise of Saddam Hussein; I escaped from a Communist regime. She, as an Arabic girl, went to a Catholic School run by nuns in Beirut, the city in whose American University she consequently studied, with an admirable success, mathematics – a very daring choice for a girl, especially at that time. Her mother influenced her interest in art and by so doing, woke in her another dimension of her extraordinarily diverse talent. I first saw her paintings at a celebration of her birthday in the early years after I met her. They were displayed in a large classroom of a Victorian school, and I can still remember the works in detail. They were just beautiful: poetic, elegant dreams, which later on turned into brilliant architectural creations of great competence and remarkable power.

Zaha was a very hard-working person. Her natural way of life was to get up late and finish late. She was so devoted to her creative activities that she never stopped and she expected everybody else to follow her drive. During her travels she used to call people working on important projects late at night and she could not understand if they were unavailable or not even in the office. She spoke to them with an irritation in her voice and expressed her displeasure regarding their lack of responsibility and interest in the project – but when she finished the conversation she would look at her watch and whisper: ‘I suppose it is rather late.’ Many times I heard people saying that she was either too ambitious or over ambitious. I do not think so. She knew she had a great potential to create extraordinary things and she also knew that the talent had to be fed by an inhuman effort. And an inhuman effort it was indeed.

During the years I knew her I witnessed in her the most amazing transformation from a student to a fighting young architect to eventually an architectural giant. After graduation she had to go through a long period of lost opportunities, lost competitions, criticism of her designs, doubts that she was able to build. She was a bad loser, and suffered a lot from others’ deceit and lack of trust in her. I do not think she ever recovered from her first success and tragedy at the same time – the Cardiff story. Having won a competition for Cardiff Bay Opera House, her design was consequently pronounced unbuildable and the project went to another architect. But in the same year as this sad story took place she was approached by Rolf Fehlbaum (owner of Vitra) to design a fire station in Weil am Rhein. That was her breakthrough moment.

This first building (opposite), with its characteristically angular concrete cantilevers and unusual aesthetics, was a success due to the pure fact that it was real rather than unrealised: anybody could touch it and walk through it, and it opened the door to a massive flow of new projects and new buildings. Her competition entries were not just to remain on paper but to become the real thing. The project for Vitra was finished in 1993 and since then Zaha’s office has completed more work than several top architectural practices put together could comfortably match. She no longer had to fight for recognition – the entire world was at her feet. And she did not bend under the load of her commitments. On the contrary, she thrived.

She managed to design more and more complex structures. She did not stagnate. Her inquisitive nature and constant questioning ensured that she climbed higher and higher, as her structures became more beautiful and more and more convincing. She surrounded herself with, and relied on people who worked with
her, and she made them sparkle under her guidance. Her old friend and partner Patrik Schumacher was her solid rock.

Zaha was awarded practically every possible prize that architects can ever dream of, including the most prestigious Pritzker Architecture Prize, in 2004. She was made a Dame by the Queen in 2012. Her work has become so widely known that many people would be able to name a few examples of her creations, from her buildings to her artworks to her designs of everyday objects. She lived the most incredibly busy life, which only a few can imagine; and yet Zaha had lots of real friends and she found time to keep in touch with them, and to help them as need be. And she would remember everyone. If she saw designs of somebody’s project, she would know who had done them, how many children she or he had, and where they last met.

She had as big a heart as she had talent. She was always entertaining her friends – often by vividly detailing the films she had seen (cinema was her great passion too), sometimes simply by telling stories that were witty, sharp and amusing. Her sense of humour helped her overcome life’s disappointments. She knew how to celebrate, whatever the occasion, and never missed the opportunity to gather all of her constantly growing circle of acquaintances. And no need to say, she always sparkled and impressed.

When she was awarded her Gold Medal by the Royal Institute of British Architects in Spring 2016 – which she deserved to receive many years prior to this – she proved to herself and everybody else that even as a woman and a foreigner she could reach the highest of the peaks. She started her Gold Medal lecture with her old sketches – first competitions, first ideas – and slowly the sketches started turning themselves into architecture, monuments, mega-structures.

The audience was speechless. Her ability to turn her buildings into true pieces of art has not been achieved in this magnitude by anybody else in the world.

Her family took her once, she remembered, to see Sumerian ruins when she was a little girl. She told me it was the first time she realised what it meant to create the foundations of civilisation, of cities and the cultural history of the human race. Through her achievements she built superstructures on top of those foundations.
I first met Zaha Hadid 35 years ago when we had both just left art school/architecture school. She was as driven and determined as I was. We recognised this ambition in each other.

We had come from outside the European context and understood that this gave us a different view. Cosmopolitanism in the Britain of the 1970s was a complicated negotiation between aesthetics and politics. But we each found it possible, nonetheless, to corrupt modernism with other poetics.

As we worked in our different fields we recognised that we both had a non-hierarchical understanding of form. All form is good and possible. Form is meaning and does not need interpretation.

Zaha found ways to turn the all-ness of form into architecture. At her best she did this without making caricature, which is always a problem with form at a big scale.

We worked together only once on a project for Crystal Palace. Sadly it came to nothing.

I miss my dear friend Zaha, who had fierceness and warmth in equal measure.
As we look ahead to finishing many projects that Zaha left behind, keeping us busy for at least another generation no matter what vantage point we look at it from, there are many stories I could recall that speak of the language of unconscious imagination and healing, therapy and stories that made an engineer’s rational mind unable to perceive the challenges within her ideas. My mind (though largely shaped by maths and physics) didn’t resist these ideas, and this presented us with new powers of freedom, new ways of seeing structures, thinking about them and responding to them. Paraphrasing the words of Herbert Muschamp (whom she adored and feared in equal measure); when it came to structural solutions for the projects we got to work on with her, she was capable of holding the projection of others and communicating in ways that neither she nor I fully comprehended, much less controlled. That language was well used by many who described her work as conveying the impression of movement and experientially walking through synchronised multiple perspectives. This, as seen and experienced in the realisation of the Phæno Science Centre or the Heydar Aliyev Centre, is a language that put the fear of God into most structural engineers, the best of whom innately rely on seeing force lines and stress patterns and whose sole disciplinary purpose is to stop ‘movement’ and search for ‘similarities’ that gravitational forces can understand. The tension in this dichotomy of existences is why we found our collaborations irresistible, though at times a little painful!

It is difficult to add more to the outpouring of praise for Zaha Hadid without credulous repetition; she was challenging, charming, charismatic, courageous, confident and, more than anything else, full of generosity. She saw in all of us what we couldn’t see for...
ourselves, and in my particular case, she clarified an identity that I dearly hang on to and benefit from every day. We all find it hard not to mention her gender, her ethnicity and a handful of well known projects; and as someone who had the fortune of living up to her expectations of a structural engineer for 25 years, my sense is that it would move her to a level of fierce indignation if she heard us moan about such things. I would prefer to recognise her body of work over four decades (built and unbuilt) as work that pushed technology, design culture and construction as an ultimate goal to unprecedented levels, forcing us to redefine our own capacities and disciplines. It is no accident that many of her clients became lifelong friends and patrons of design, benefitting the industry as a whole and often giving new meanings to architecture and space.

I first worked with her in Strasbourg almost 25 years ago (on a building with no curves, I must add) and never looked back. She was extremely loyal, collaborating on projects in Germany, Azerbaijan, Algiers, US, UK, Morocco, Iraq and so on. In my view, Zaha was ahead of her time when she first put pencil to paper, and left us ahead of her time, but leaving architectural pride and the healing power of design in a better place than she found it. We often heard of those who inspired her and why, both in her public lectures and in private conversations, and it was during such encounter that I learnt we shared an interest in the writings of the 13th century mystic and poet Jalal ad-Din Rūmī. It is befitting to close with some words from him by which she would be proud to be remembered.

You were born with potential.
You were born with goodness and trust.
You were born with ideals and dreams.
You were born with greatness.
You were born with wings.
You are not meant for crawling, so don’t.
You have wings.
Learn to use them and fly.

لقد ولدت بإمكانات.
وقد ولدت بخير وثقة
وقد ولدت بمثل وأحلام
وقد ولدت بالعظمة.
وقد ولدت بأجنحة.
لا يفترض به الزحف، لذلك لا فعل ذلك.
عندك أجنحة.
تعلم كيف تستخدمها وتطير.
Samuel Keller

Her beauty, her intelligence and her style produced an irresistible persona: she was vulnerable and fierce, witty and bitchy, charming and challenging. That she was a cosmopolitan Arab did not surprise or irritate her fellow students at the time: she was welcomed with grateful amazement, a pure concentration of aura, even then. Zaha was without doubt the most charismatic person I ever met.

Teaching was not really teaching then, more a particular version of friendship – a collective adventure where everybody shared their discoveries and insights. Where, as in a human pyramid, you could stand on the shoulders of others.

It was great being Zaha’s friend.

Once, walking on the Champs-Élysées in Paris, with a French philosopher friend, there appeared, walking towards us, a miraculous vision: a shuddering cloud of pink feathers barely contained by a thin golden fleece, the face of a young empress protected by a silver umbrella, supported on two Perspex question marks acting as shoes... It was an incredible feeling to say, casually, ‘Oh that’s one of my students’.

The 1970s were a world before brands, of real smells, real tastes, real differences – full of unmediated experience. Young Zaha had already sampled many of them – Baghdad, Swiss boarding school, Beirut – and she was already an active politician. She came to the AA prepared, at the moment it had become a laboratory where any impulse, inspiration, institution could be tested. Zaha took a 50-year-old substance – Constructivism – and in a triumph of personal alchemy turned it into the architectural language of the
21st century, as smooth and contemporary as if it had come out of a spray can. Maybe the fact that Baghdad and Moscow lie on the same longitude played a role in this transformation from historical relic to futuristic compound, an international ricochet between three cultures, Arab, English and Russian that we are sadly unlearning.

Zaha cried a lot (I’m afraid I’ve been the cause many times). Her tears would not travel vertically down her cheeks, but come at you like bullets – they did not express sadness, but outrage: her tears were the expression of a steely conviction. There are two ways of becoming a genius: one is by doubting everything, the second, more difficult one, is by doubting nothing. Zaha was clearly in the second category. To be an agent of change you have to be someone who simply cannot imagine that anyone could prefer realities other than the ones you propose. (Anyone who ever heard Zaha lecture knows what I mean).

What can we say about Zaha’s work? Late Zaha? Early Zaha? Maybe this: that we should actually consider it as one single work, fragments of a single, formal utopia, distributed over the world. Zaha has been working on a ‘continuous monument’ – to quote Superstudio, a palace of infinite Zen experiences with the ambition to exhaust – in a single lifetime – all the technique, constructive ability, all the effects of the 21st century.

Zaha’s life has been told many times as a woman’s triumph over the ingrained misogyny of our profession. I see it equally as the result of the West’s crumbling confidence in the idea of masculine leadership. For the first time we are ready to be ruled by powerful women. Zaha is no longer with us, but there are still many buildings to come – more than 30 – evidence of an almost demonic pace and focus, a form of consolation that will keep her presence alive.

If finally, we ask why we are in the world, if not to engage to the maximum with the issues that our times throw at us, seemingly at random, it is clear that Zaha, with her intelligence and her outrageous talent, has dealt triumphantly with politics, globalisation, technology, architecture and friendship – that her life was a wonderful story of our times.
Karl Lagerfeld

Zaha Hadid was a genius. She changed the face of modern architecture. Long before her first project was built, I was fascinated by her sketches. I had never seen anything like this before.

She had a strong and powerful personality and at the same time, as a friend she was very funny.

I worked with her on the Chanel Mobile Art Project and I will never forget this experience. She had a unique position in her field. No women had achieved what she did in the very masculine world of architecture. Her vision was unique. The sensuous harmony of her work was something never seen before.

The world will miss her.

I miss her terribly.

Amanda Levete

As an architect she was brilliant and fearless and shifted the way we experience buildings.

As an Arab her calligraphic fluency inspired the genesis of a remarkable architectural language.

As a woman she was a warrior who took the bullets and we stood behind her.

As Zaha she was my very dear, clever, witty, glamorous and generous friend.
Victor Lo

The loss of Zaha is a great one to the world of creativity. I met her about ten years ago. I was chairman of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and we were planning a new building for our School of Design. We made up our wish list of architects to invite for the design competition, Zaha was at the very top. We sent our then Head of School of Design, Lorraine Justice to visit Zaha in London to invite her to take part in the competition. And Zaha gladly took up the challenge.

We felt Zaha was the ideal architect to do the job. She was no doubt one of the world’s most innovative designers and she had won a prestigious competition in Hong Kong decades ago, but that building was never realised. Who could be more appropriate for the new home of Hong Kong’s most important design school?

Working with Zaha was most inspiring. She was clearly obsessed with innovation. Even when we were having lunch, dinners or afternoon tea, she was thinking and talking about her next innovation.

At the Polytechnic University, we are now really proud to have the only Zaha building in Hong Kong. It will continue to inspire hundreds and thousands of our talented design students in the many decades to come. We really miss Zaha, truly – a master innovator of our times.

Doris Lockhart
Tribute to Zaha

We try with words to bring you back to life, to fill the empty space your leaving leaves in those of us who loved you. But we are mute with longing for your presence.
Thom Mayne

Zana, you paved the way. Your thinking, your inquisitiveness were boundless... infectious to all those you touched. Your inistence, your determination made the so gentle so sweet person I loved. You remain with me.

ZIKA! MARL
I first met Zaha Hadid in 1999, when, as Italy’s Minister of Culture, I promoted the creation of a Centre for Contemporary Arts in Rome. Her project made a deep impression on me from the very beginning and it also won over the independent committee that had been called in to judge it: it was impossible not to be fascinated by her revolutionary idea of defining the ‘directional drifts’ that would become the key stylistic feature of MAXXI. In her own words, this involved ‘a quasi-urban field, a “world” to dive into rather than a building as signature object’.

The most famous architects in the world participated in the competition, but Zaha’s visionary project stood out for its free dialogue with the monuments of ancient Rome and, above all, with its Baroque predecessors, setting the museum in a respectful way in a district already dotted with architectural masterpieces, from Renzo Piano’s Auditorium to the Palazzetto dello Sport by Pier Luigi Nervi, the Olympic Village and other buildings designed by renowned modern architects. Zaha’s challenge lay in fitting into this urban setting, creating a museum space that is above all a place of encounter, open and vital, loved by the Romans because it fully conveys the explosive energy of Zaha Hadid, her volcanic and enthralling power, but also the generosity that distinguished her.

Whenever I cross the square at MAXXI, I can’t help but think of the centre, ‘porous, immersive, a field space’, that Zaha had already visualised in her first draft of the project in 1998. Not had she only redesigned the face of a district in Rome, but she had also defined a space full of life for families, students, children and the elderly.

Anyone who has had the pleasure and honour of encountering the visionary, fluid and enveloping works imagined and created by the Grand Dame of contemporary architecture around the world knows that they never leave you unmoved, but force you to engage with the architectural spaces and materials. At MAXXI, it is a never-ending challenge for the artists, curators, visitors, and those of us who work there every day. It is a challenge that never ends and that, I realise, Zaha posed to us not so that we could win it, but to rouse us, to suggest new paths of research for us.

Zaha had lucid determination, a unique obstinacy that several male colleagues did not hesitate to stigmatise as ‘defensive nastiness’. In a male-dominated world that, particularly in the 1980s and 90s, characterised architecture and engineering, she managed to move ahead and win the most important awards: from the recent RIBA Royal Gold Medal to the prestigious Stirling Prize awarded to her in 2012 for the MAXXI project, and the Pritzker Prize, making her the first woman ever to receive it. But Zaha rejected all labels and categorisations: she did not like being defined as a woman architect. She always said it was ridiculous: ‘I’m an architect, not just a woman architect.’

Seemingly prickly and brusque, she was actually a generous, empathetic, humorous and, above all, very high-spirited woman. She was a woman of great strength and courage, creative and innovative. She was an eclectic and visionary genius whom we will miss very much; I will especially miss our chats in London in recent years and the ones we could have had in the future.

One of the things that fascinated me most about her was her omnivorous curiosity, an enthusiasm that pushed her to embrace all expressions of contemporary creativity, from art to design and fashion, with an unmistakable style. She was always extremely
elegant, as on the occasion of MAXXI’s first Acquisition Gala Dinner in 2013, when she arrived with a silvery coat, as dazzling as her works, that made her big, dark, kind-hearted eyes stand out even more.

Anyone who had the chance to follow the history of this building and this institution from the very beginning was able to learn a great deal from Zaha and about Zaha. First of all, there was her conviction that there are no places – including Italy – where it is impossible to build an architecture of one’s own era, honest and daring, without compromises. Like MAXXI, but also other projects in Italy (the extraordinary Messner Mountain Museum in Plan de Corones, Salerno Maritime Terminal, the visionary Hadid Tower for CityLife, Milan).

In 2017 we will dedicate a major exhibition to Zaha, to the mark she left on Italy and to her intense work with Italian design companies. Above all, however, we will always remember this friend and extraordinary woman who has left traces and indelible signs of her genius and her creativity around the world. We like to think that MAXXI will always be Zaha Hadid’s home in Rome.

Mohsen Mostafavi

Cartographers who drew mountains often had to ‘lie’ with their drawing techniques in order to convey to the eye maps that looked ‘true’.

Similarly, Zaha’s innovative early drawings defy conventions of architectural representation.

The Peak painting, for example, presents an extraordinary ‘relational’ situation. The image it shows is of an architecture that seems to deny gravity through its geometry, yet at the same time is grounded atop a Hong Kong mountain.

As a depiction of the architecture and its situation, the painting is an artifice, a masterly feat of imagination. In the process of developing her ideas Zaha constructed her own conventions of architectural drawing – her own mental maps.


2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.
On 31 May 2004, in an exclusive black-tie ceremony at the State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg, Zaha Hadid became the first woman ever to win the Pritzker Architecture Prize. Never in the Pritzker’s 26-year history had the prize’s jurors found another deserving female recipient. And never, in the 12 years since then, have they recognised a woman architect on her individual merits. In that, as in so much else, Zaha blazed a trail.

Since her untimely passing on 31 March 2016, Zaha has been celebrated around the world, not least in the moving memorial held in her honour at St Paul’s Cathedral. Tribute after tribute has praised her uncommon ability to triumph against all odds. Arguably the greatest odds of all was being a woman.

My first interview with Zaha took place at her London apartment in July 2007. It was three years after she had won the big trophy. Why, I asked, were there no female winners before her? Were other women not good enough?

No, that was absolutely not the case, she replied: ‘When I teach, the best students are women.’ It was rather that ‘everything to do with this profession is male’ – the developers, the building industry people, but also the profession’s very mode of operating. Hours were excruciatingly long, and the key requirement was ‘continuity’: an ability to see the project through, irrespective of the time of day or night. As a lifestyle, it was scarcely compatible with motherhood.

Beyond that, said Zaha, ‘we don’t treat women well in this profession’. She recalled being ‘constantly humiliated’ in her early years. ‘I would say, “Why should I put up with this?”’ And while she herself had ‘graduated from that prejudice,’ she observed, it was still there for other women.

Zaha was certainly not one to put up with prejudice of any kind. She shot down opponents, kicked down walls, and plotted her own course, regardless of the gender, status, or size of the adversary. At times, she could be short-fused and imperious, especially towards those with whom she worked closely and liked the most.

Clearly, the woman was no pushover.

And yet.

Let’s imagine, for the sake of argument, that Zaha was born a boy in Baghdad in 1950, and that his parents named him Zaki Hadid. Let’s picture him growing up (just like Zaha) to be an outstanding student at the Architectural Association in London, displaying talents that put him in a league of his own.

Would Zaki have spent as many years as Zaha in the architectural wilderness, designing one project after another, yet seldom building anything? Would Zaki, having beaten 268 other contestants in the competition for the Cardiff Bay Opera House, watch his project get shot down by pockets of local opposition and never get built? Would Zaki, having moved permanently to Britain as a student in 1972, wait nearly four decades before inaugurating his first London building? And would Zaki inspire a passage such as this, written about Zaha in a British newspaper in September 2013?

‘Hadid isn’t married and doesn’t have children. She lives alone in what visitors have described as a stark and impersonal flat down the road from her office. No doubt it works for her, though it sounds a little bleak.’
Gender was, to be sure, not the only factor affecting Zaha’s career. Until a decade or so ago, her designs were viewed in some quarters as outlandish and impracticable. Had she been a man, those same views might have prevailed.

I put the misogyny question to Zaha again in September 2013, when she was inaugurating the Serpentine Sackler Gallery. By this time, she had been made a Dame. ‘The profession has changed a lot, which is good’, she said. ‘They are more used to women. They are more supportive.’

She acknowledged that it was hard to ‘isolate misogyny. I don’t know if they don’t like me because I’m a woman, or a foreigner, or….’ ‘I do what I do.’

Regrettably, Zaha has now left us. Yet there are a great many women architects in the world today who are busy doing what they do – and doing it extremely well.

Zaha will have been a true pioneer not when a second, third or fourth woman wins the Pritzker, but when we all stop counting.

1 In 2010, the Pritzker Prize went to
Kazuyo Sejima (also a woman architect) and Ryue Nishizawa, partners in the Tokyo-based architectural firm SANAA.
I first met the lady that I came to know so well, and loved so dearly, 30 years ago. We had lunch together at the River Café, the ultimate repository of dreams and happy memories, providing food for the mind, body and soul in the most sympathetic of settings. We hit it off from the start, and how could it have been otherwise? She and my wife, Hayat, had been contemporaries at the American University in Beirut, where Zaha read mathematics. The two of them shared a dormitory, and struck up a lifelong friendship; to which I was instantly and joyfully inducted. Zaha seemed to me, even at that early stage in her career, to be scattering the gold dust of her genius into the eyes, hearts and minds of those who were willing to look, listen and learn a new vocabulary, and gain in the process an exhilarating and entirely fresh perspective on the noble art of architecture.

During the course of that lunch, Zaha spoke quietly of the influences that had stirred her passion and her creativity: of visits that she had paid as a little girl with her father in Iraq to the great Sumerian cities as old as time, passing on the way ancient, free-flowing rivers in the valleys below, meandering, sinuous and seemingly independent of line; as well as sand dunes constantly changing shape and form through the fierce force of the winds of nature blowing across the desert. She spoke of her time, years later, as a student at the Architectural Association in London under its legendary Director, Alvin Boyarsky; and then the mentorship of Leon Krier, Elia Zenghelis and Rem Koolhaas, from all of whom she learned so much. At about the same time, the work of the painters Arp and Mondrian, the Supremist movement in Russia, in particular, Malevich, and that of the great Brazilian architect Lina Bo Bardi, enabled her to expand the boundaries set by those artists in ways that would have seemed to them unimaginable.

This brief reminiscence gives me no time to speak in any depth about Zaha, her acute intelligence, her singular brilliance as an architect and designer; her role as a standard bearer for the equality of women, particularly those in male-dominated professions; and her staunch and unremitting opposition to prejudice in its many forms, from which she herself suffered as a prime target. In all such matters she received a level of worldwide recognition afforded to very few, but despite the fame and adulation that greeted her wherever she went; despite the honours galore heaped upon her, she always seemed to me to harbour the vulnerability of a citizen of everywhere and nowhere, the classic lonely syndrome of the displaced and dispossessed.

From the pinnacle of this time and place, I shall simply remember the powerful, complicated, contrary, combative and utterly wonderful lady of indomitable spirit and courage, as she was to her friends – loyal, compassionate, gentle, kind, generous and oh, so funny: And, more than I can say, I shall miss her voice on the telephone mimicking faultlessly the cockney accent from the district of Clerkenwell in the East End of London where she lived, for the cockney people embodied the qualities that she most admired – loyalty, courage, wit and a direct approach.

Zaha had been unwell for several years, but she dismissed ill health with the same contempt that she reserved for betrayal or prejudice. The spectre of death never crossed her horizon, or indeed that of her closest friends, perhaps because to the latter she seemed always to wear around her elegant shoulders the mantle of immortality.

A few days before she passed away, she telephoned me. ‘Ello, Peaer’, she said, ‘Ello Zaha, love’, I replied. ‘What’s up?’ ‘Nuffink much’, she said, ‘not feeling too good. Can’t manage them apples and pears any more but hope to see you and Ayat in New York on the fourth of..."
April’. She never made it, of course, but the sea of faces here today to celebrate and give thanks for her life, her unique talent, and the warmth of her all-embracing friendship in St Paul’s Cathedral, the epicenter of spiritual life in the capital city of her adopted country, speak volumes for the love that we feel for her, now and always.

In mid-October, a Memorial Service for the visionary architect Zaha Hadid was held at St Paul’s Cathedral. How telling that even this towering architectural landmark was full to the rafters. People had flown in from all over the world and the renowned sat shoulder to shoulder with the lesser known, men and women crying quietly, as private reveries accompanied a service conceived with enormous care. What became clear both on this occasion and at the other private, smaller events that surrounded it, was how many deep friendships Zaha had enjoyed with people across the globe. Like the supporters of a football team, everyone had their own stories to tell, sharing reminiscences that were often very funny and that revealed private aspects of our friend that we hadn’t previously known. She would have loved to have been a part of it all.

I have recently returned from Beirut, where Zaha Hadid Architects just completed the stunning Issam Fares Institute for the American
University of Beirut, the place where she read mathematics in the late 1960s, and the TSG Beirut Department Store is currently under construction. On the plane back to London I read a two-page article in the *International New York Times* about Zaha’s Port House in Antwerp, which opened on 22 September to great acclaim, and there are 56 more new global projects underway. A Belgian taxi driver said of Port House ‘I like it because it’s by a woman and because I like science fiction. It’s magic.’ Just as she was in life, Zaha Hadid is still very much on people’s minds, whatever their walk of life.

The day before her death on 31 March this year, Zaha was due to attend the Pritzker Prize Award Ceremony at the UN Headquarters in New York, but had rung its chair and her dear friend Lord Palumbo to say that she wasn’t feeling well and wouldn’t be coming. She had recently become the first woman to win the RIBA Gold Medal, the practice was firing on all cylinders and not a week went by without an email from her office announcing a new global project ranging from buildings to exhibitions, football stadia to swimming pools, furniture to retail stores, museums to apartments. When her death was announced on international news channels it came as a great shock. Like many others, I felt unable to accept or believe the news. Zaha is my first close friend who has died and it affected me profoundly. I called Patrik Schumacher, Zaha’s business partner, asking him to verify the information, and similarly, friends in different time zones rang me to ask if it was really true.

Zaha was a street fighter who regularly got into scraps, often on a scale that would have felled someone who was less robust, less brave, less tenacious or simply more risk averse. In the early years, before she was recognised for her enormous and exceptional talent, she won the competition for the Cardiff Bay Opera House, but she was prevented from realising it when the project failed to win financial support from the Millennium Commission. This may have set the dial for what was to follow. Perhaps she needed that grit in the oyster in order to become the singular talent who, at the time of her death, had designed 1,400 buildings and projects, in 44 countries including product designs, which were both realised and unrealised.

Apart from her legendary altercations, she was known for her earthy and irreverent sense of humour – her nicknames for friends and foes alike were hilarious – delivered in her gravelly voice that could be heard from far away. Swathed in beautifully constructed garments that were spectacular in form and material, with jewellery to match, she looked like one of her dramatic buildings. It was no wonder she was a subject of fascination for some of the leading photographers of our day.

A Hadid building is unlike any other. Her architectural language reinvented what architecture could be, predicting a future that is yet to register the full impact of her influence. As the architect Richard Rogers has said, her work ‘comes out of modernity and defines the spirit of the age. Zaha exposed a language and made it her own, testing everyone, sometimes to the limits. Her view was holistic and she created a titanic body of work that was informed, driven and the result of her enormous intellectual powers.’

Her vision left us all open mouthed. When, in February this year, she delivered her lecture on the occasion of winning RIBA’s prestigious Gold Medal, I sat next to the artist Michael Craig Martin. After a short introduction, she showed her images, one after another, with very little comment. It was like looking at a world that existed on another planet: shapes that defied gravity, expectation or familiarity, each more daring than the last, and at the heart of every concept was drawing, which reflected her fascination with Russian Constructivism and Suprematism. At the end of her presentation, Michael and I turned to each other, lost for words at the sheer
brilliance of what we’d seen. So powerful was her presentation that it provided the impetus for the exhibition of her paintings at the Serpentine Gallery (8 December 2016 – 12 February 2017) curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist, who interviewed her many times and who had talked to her about the show just before she died.

Zaha was central to the Serpentine Gallery ever since becoming a Trustee in 1996. We worked together on a range of commissions, from the very first Pavilion in 2000, to the dramatic extension to the Serpentine Sackler Gallery and the installation Lilas, which was recently on view at Chatsworth as part of the Beyond Limits exhibition. Together with numerous public talks and contributions to the Marathons – the Serpentine’s annual festival of ideas focusing on a single topic – I used to joke with her that the Gallery was her biggest client in London, and it is a loss to our city that it cannot boast an array of landmark buildings by her. And yet at her funeral at London’s Grand Mosque, the vastness of what she had achieved was brought home: she had transcended the life that might have been expected of her as a Muslim woman.

One of the most important architects in the world had in death returned to those roots. Her white casket was pushed into a far corner of the mosque during morning prayers, its patina glowing in the morning light. The Imans and other male members of the Muslim congregation stood in the centre of the room, while her male friends were positioned in a wide circle around them on three sides with the women mourners separated upstairs, looking through a carved screen onto the events below. The Arabic frieze, with its swoops and dives, arabesques and staccatos poignantly reminded me of Zaha’s work, reflecting her tremendous feeling for geometry that was unique amongst her peers. Her name was barely mentioned.

When I left the Galleries in July, I asked the Serpentine if I could keep my Blackberry so that I could take with me my many text exchanges with Zaha: the ones trying to persuade me not to leave the Serpentine, the arrangements for the last time we saw each other. I treasure them. They bring to mind her kindness, her loyalty, her love of gossip, her generosity. Struggling to find something fitting to end the interview about her that I gave to BBC’s Newsnight on the day her death was announced, I said of the Queen of Architecture: ‘Long may she reign.’ Of this there can be no doubt.

This piece was originally commissioned by Harper’s Bazaar and appears in the February issue.
Miuccia Prada

Sketch by Zaha Hadid of the Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art, Cincinnati, 1997
Margot and Thomas Pritzker

We remember when Zaha Hadid received the award in St Petersburg in 2004. Not only was she the first woman to receive the Pritzker Architectural Prize, but also the first recipient who, in her acceptance speech acknowledged her colleagues for making her work possible. That generosity of spirit, which led her to bring her colleagues with her to Russia, marked her as the person that we came to know and were proud to call a friend in the coming years.

She was courageous, even fearless, dynamic and a great champion of women and the young who were entering the field of architecture. As a teacher she had great patience in explaining her craft and listening to others, to different ideas. She was always dramatic, sometimes difficult, but also immensely sweet and caring to those many who called her friend. Her view on the world was unique, incredibly creative, but simultaneously sympathetic to history and how it informed what she did even though she was unafraid to push in different directions. We were amazed by her lectures, awed by her buildings and cherished the intimate moments when we broke bread together. She is missed and always will be.

Wolf Prix

Before We Were so Rudely Interrupted

Vor 30 Jahren, als wir alle dabei waren, die Grenzen der damals bekannten Architektur zu überschreiten, tauchte Zaha aus dem Dunkeln der AA-Studios auf und raste mit unbeschreibbarer Geschwindigkeit, räumliche Kalligraphien in den schwarzen Weltraum malend, durch das Universum der Architektur.

Zaha präsentierte ihre Bauten mit Lust am Glamour und sich selbst, als Königin im Schachspiel der Architekturszene und sie trennte nicht Architektur und Kunst. Das die Utopie der Architektur nach Schaffung von neuen Körpern und fremden Gestalten verlangt, die wie Meteoriten von einem fremden Stern in die Vertrautheit einschlagen und damit Bahnen und Räume für Neues, Unbekanntes öffnen, erzeugt Angst. Es ist die Angst der Kleinmütigen und Unbegabten vor der Form von Zahas neuen Ideen und Gebäuden.

Während die politische Rechte mit ihren Neid schürenden und rückwärtsgewandten Parolen immer mehr an Boden gewinnen, betoniert sich der Architektenstand mit seinen kisten-, scheunen- und barackenartigen Architekturen, die mit schießschartenartigen Fenstern wie Wehrtürme aussehen – Angst – in die Zukunftslosigkeit ein.

Es berührt mich eigenartig, dass sich die sehr respektvollen Nachrufe mehr mit Zahas exzentrischen und selbstbestimmten Auftritten, als mit den von ihr entworfenen Gebäuden, Ideen und Konzepten beschäftigten.

Jetzt nach ihrem plötzlichen Tod werden die Stimmen immer lauter, die früher nur hinter ihren Rücken geflüstert wurden.


Immer wieder ist zu hören, dass Zaha sich an diktatorische Regime angebietet hat und vergisst dabei, was sie in diesen Ländern gebaut. Zum Unterschied von Kollegen, die ebendort auch bauen, aber über die niemand spricht – mit Recht – baute sie nicht nach dem Geschmack der Diktatoren, sondern baute was sie bauen wollte. Und diese Bauten sind nicht angepasst- Diese Bauten sind selbstbestimmte Architektur.

When my wife Lise Anne and I travelled to London to accompany Zaha to the Serpentine for the opening of her elegant Pavilion in 2000, we were accompanied by our then, very young son, Tynan. Zaha had a great affection for Tynan and had immediately bestowed on him a nickname derived from those we had been given by her a few years before. He was from that day on referred to affectionally as the Little Bee. When we met Zaha that morning in front of her home, she was dressed in a bright violet Issey Miyake shroud of geometric madness, and upon seeing the Little Bee, an ear to ear smile capped and overshadowed the billowing dress. As Zaha climbed into the awaiting car we finally set out for the Serpentine.

No sooner had we started, when Zaha tapped on the window divide and instructed the startled driver to quickly pull over; apparently as she had spotted something intriguing on the sidewalk. Opening the window she summoned a startled street vendor to quickly come over to the car and asked ‘How much for that contraption?’ After she had handed the man some cash, a plastic bag was catapulted into her lap and the car started to move again through the traffic. Zaha wasted no time in handing the bag and its content to our son who had been quietly watching the whole craziness that adults seem to surround themselves with. He peered into the bag at the street-side acquisition and pulled out a strange, bulbous, metallic and coloured object that might have been something Jeff Koons would have easily copied and exaggerated. This odd colourful bulbous thing was soon activated, at which point we discovered it was a soap ‘gun’. Within a matter of seconds Tynan the Little Bee proceeded to fill up the cars’ interior space with large glistening, infra-thin transparent, glass like spheres of all sizes. Zaha became absolutely ecstatic about this endless stream of orb geometries taking over the space within which we were all confined. We found ourselves, all of a sudden completely immersed in a world that seemed to be forming not only from the bubble gun, but also from Zaha’s crazy and beautiful imagination. Here we were in a globular ever-changing space of insane colour and forms, ever-shifting, appearing and disappearing all at once; a space of constant flux, filled with geometric flows and impeccable fluidity. This temporary world of beauty and magic was accompanied by both ours and our son’s constant laughter – so memorable that even today we recall it as if it was merely a hallucinogenic dream. It was magical that day to see both Zaha’s and our son’s ever-curious eyes simultaneously lighting up, as if for a brief moment there was no age difference between them, no limit at all to the possibilities of what space could be and no physical or insurmountable boundaries between time, space and form. There they both were, at once explorers, dreamers, philosophers and artists – separated not by years, but by floating, effervescent bubbles. It was indeed a magical mystery tour through London that the three of us will always remember and cherish.
So much has been written about Zaha's accomplishments. I do not want or need to restate what is already well known about this special and truly dynamic woman. I would rather focus on what people are less likely to know about her, what she was like as a beautiful human being and true friend. I will remain forever indebted to my dear friend Kenny Schachter for bringing Zaha into my life. To me Zaha was family, and we shared many memorable experiences together. Along with my wife, daughter and grandchildren, we spent lots of time with one another, making several visits to her apartments both in London and Miami.

For such an admired and celebrated professional, she lived in a warm and almost modest fashion. There was no extravagance, except in the wonderful spreads that she would lay out for us. We both shared a common Iraqi heritage, enjoyed the same food and culture, all of which forged an even closer bond between us. One might think that given my property interests and her leading a large practice and having boundless ambition, that she would have been eager to gain an architectural commission. However, while she was happy to talk about her work, there was never any pressure put upon me.

Having said that, I truly loved and admired her work and did harbour the fond thought that one day the two of us would collaborate on something. While I was impressed by the honours that were showered upon her: Dame Commander, RIBA Gold Medal winner, first woman to win the Pritzker Prize etc. etc., what really got me was the almost spiritual quality of her highly expressive and fluid forms.

She was an unconventional thinker, somewhat of a contrarian, never going with the herd, always setting out in new directions that others first dismissed as extravagant but then hastened to follow.

The first project of hers that I visited was her Mind Zone installation at the Millennium Dome at a time when she was just beginning to get her work built. I remember being amazed by the daring geometry and mastery of form that she demonstrated in that early manifestation of her genius. The London Aquatics Centre is the second project of hers that I had the pleasure of visiting, permanent unlike the first one, needing to meet very specific and demanding functional requirements but doing so in the most unexpected, sophisticated and timeless manner.

Upon visiting the Serpentine Gallery, I was amazed that she was able to produce such an innovative and unexpected work in the middle of a Royal Park, transforming what had been a fairly ordinary and unmemorable historic building into something unforgettable.

And then I encountered her furniture: wonderfully expressive pieces that completely turned my notion of what a chair or a table could be, upside down and inside out. I am a lover and admirer of modern sculpture, and I can honestly say that her furniture is great art.

As I said before, Zaha was family. In March of this year my family and I were together with her in Miami. We were going to have lunch on the 13th, a Sunday. She called to tell us that she couldn’t make it, she was feeling unwell. Joyce, my wife, kept in touch, but we didn’t think it was too serious. We were then informed that she had been hospitalised. When we asked, by email, if she was feeling better, she replied ‘Not really’. On Wednesday we were shocked and devastated to find that she had left us. She was taken away from this world far too soon with so much more to give.
Much has already been recognised and more will continue to be spoken about her achievements. For me her designs were an expression of her boundless spirit and there is hardly a day that goes by without her being in my thoughts. She will always be there for me.

Eugene Rogan
A Zaha for Oxford

Doing a building with Zaha felt like adrenalin sport. There was the rush of excitement, of watching a building being designed, that was unlike any that had ever been built before. But the risk of failure was ever-present. And avant-garde buildings come at something of a premium, which made the stakes high. The big difference is that adrenalin sports are done usually in a matter of minutes. Doing a building with Zaha took years. Nine in our case.

At every step along the way, Zaha and her team and we, the clients, were at the mercy of forces beyond our control – tree officers, planning committees, the global economy, and the price contractors put on constructing the building. You couldn’t afford to contemplate failure. To do a building with Zaha, you simply had to disregard the forces of nature and trust you’d get there in the end.

'Relax!' Zaha used to say when I was getting anxious about the latest obstacle in our path. Not that she was a great role model in relaxation.

We invited Zaha to do our building in 2006. She agreed instantly. Zaha was no stranger to Oxford’s Middle East Centre. Her brother Foulath had joined our community to publish their father’s memoirs and we became fast friends. I first met Zaha with Foulath in the late 1990s, and in 2003 she agreed to give our big annual lecture to a mostly confused audience, unused to seeing space through Zaha’s eyes. ‘It’s going to be funky’, she said, as though in warning. I assured her we wouldn’t have asked her if we were looking for something conventional.
realised. There was the deepening of bonds, as with the passing of years we developed a friendship that I treasured then and the memory of which I treasure still.

In May 2015, the scaffolding came down to expose the sleek, stainless-steel creation that was to be Zaha’s Zaha for Oxford. On opening day, Zaha looked relaxed – smiling, beautiful, the electric pink of her coat reflected in the shiny metal cladding of her design. The excitement of seeing the building reach completion was tempered with a sense of sadness that our working relationship with Zaha and her brilliant team was drawing to a close.

As with adrenalin sport, no sooner do you hit the ground then you want to start all over again. And nothing would give me more pleasure than to do another building with Zaha Hadid Architects.

She liked the idea of building in Oxford. At that stage, the only project she had going in the UK was Maggie’s Centre in Kirkcaldy. She was still smarting from the Cardiff Opera House debacle a decade earlier. A building in Oxford would put Zaha in the very heart of establishment England, and in a city equally known for its rich architectural heritage and its conservatism.

We put two conditions to Zaha. We wanted a building that, like all Oxford colleges, would last for centuries, not decades. We did not want to leave St Antony’s College with a building that would prove a liability over time. Oxford is distinct for having outstanding architecture from each century dating back to the middle ages. We wanted Zaha Hadid Architects to give us a structure that, in a couple of centuries’ time, would be seen as an outstanding example of 21st-century architecture.

For our second condition, we wanted Zaha to put her personal imprint on the building. Picasso always distinguished his more commercial output from those paintings that he did for his own pleasure – Picasso’s Picassos. ‘I like that’, she said. ‘A Zaha’s Zaha.’

With that we embarked on a project that took far longer than any of us could have imagined. There were anxious moments. Planning permission was a cliff hanger, with Zaha calling and texting for updates as we, clients and architectural team, watched the North Oxford Planning Committee deliberate, dividing equally between approval and rejection. It was only by the chairman’s casting vote that we got through – shocking with hindsight to think it all could have ended then with a rejection from the Oxford City Council. There was the glamour of Zaha’s world, a circuit of openings and exhibitions and parties that attracted glittering celebrities proud to call Zaha their friend. There was tragedy, as Zaha’s dear brother Foulath succumbed to cancer before seeing her Oxford building
Zaha was a radical genius, an architect far ahead of her time. Her death, at only 65, is the world’s loss, with her work gracing countries around the globe.

Shockingly, though she founded her practice in 1979, she did not complete a building in Britain until 2006, a small, perfectly realised centre for cancer patients in eastern Scotland. (Award-winning, naturally.)

In 1994, 15 years after founding her practice in London, she finally won what would have been her first British commission, the Cardiff Bay Opera House. Her beautiful plans were viciously attacked in the press and in parliament.

When, after much debate and a show of public support, the project was finally denied funding, Zaha was devastated. She would have given the Welsh people one of the great buildings of the world—but that was lost on the opposition, not that they would have known the difference.

She never gave up, though, as her ordeal over the aquatics centre for the London 2012 Olympics shows. I was the chairman of the judges and believed Zaha had the best design. But some officials and fellow architects could not accept that she might win. Arguments ran late into the night before finally things swung her way: and, of course, she was proved right. That building was the star of the Games and is full every weekend.

It was partly the treatment she faced from the clients in Britain that led her to seek commissions abroad, at times in countries with controversial political systems. Zaha occasionally received criticism for accepting them. In fact she had an immense social conscience and ethics mattered greatly to her. The Evelyn Grace Academy that

Richard Rogers
Zaha the Builder Bulldozed the Boys’ Club

When the news reached me in a remote part of Mexico of the sudden death of my good friend Zaha Hadid, the world stopped turning. We had had lunch together a couple of weeks ago and had planned to see each other in two days’ time at the Pritzker award ceremony in New York.

Zaha and I had been friends for 30 years, but I would say that in the past 10 we became particularly close, propping each other up when competitions were lost, cheering each other on when there were successes and just being there, side by side, when health problems hit us both.

My phone message inbox and my wife Ruthie’s are full of texts from Zaha asking how we were, if we needed anything, promising a visit, sending a present or a letter of support.

If Zaha seemed a fierce character, it was only a product of the hurdles she faced as a woman, an ethnic minority and an Iraqi by birth—in what she rightly called the ‘boys’ club’ of British architecture. In many ways, for all her tremendous success and even the award of a damehood by the Queen, Zaha remained an outsider.

She was professionally demanding, as an architect has to be, but her gender meant that people described her in words they would never have used about men. Where we might be called ambitious, Zaha would be dismissed as pushy. If we were forthright, she was bossy. But she never submitted to being patronised.
Kenny Schachter

Tenacious Z

I’ve never missed a deadline in my writing life. Until now. On a certain level my relationship with Zaha was, more than anything, personal; perhaps better left unsaid. And I have already published articles on the architect and her work. Then I started to think of the writings, sculptures and furniture of Donald Judd and how he determined to live an integrated life in line with an overarching aesthetically principled philosophy.

Arguing against the inherent limitations of traditional painting and sculpture in a 1965 essay entitled ‘Specific Objects’, Judd wrote: ‘The use of three dimensions isn’t the use of a given form. There hasn’t been enough time and work to see limits.’ Zaha took for granted that there was something beyond three dimensions, and beyond even that, did not rest or relent until she shattered the template for conceptualising and effectuating built space. Like Judd, art, design and architecture for Zaha transcended studio practice, profession or mindset, amounting to a cause.

Zaha had a democratic, non-hierarchical approach that didn’t differentiate between art forms: her towers could be filled with her art, furnishings, housewares, clothing and even vehicles (she designed car and boat prototypes). Judd didn’t just preach his reductive, analytical, simplified approach to art and design, but built and lived it. Similarly, Zaha resided in a modest flat that might have been mistaken for a studio showroom, or a portion of a lobe of her brain.

Zaha fought for distinction in herself and those around her, pushing and prodding to an unprecedented extent; whether you worked for her or happened to cross her path, she thought you could go...
to another level and often had ready ideas as to how. Yes, she could be imperious and wouldn’t countenance what she perceived as a lack of focus or direction, but she set a high bar.

Her achievements were unparalleled and always entailed tenacious battles, till her last days, but because of that she became a model the likes of which history has rarely witnessed. I have seen people dodge traffic and run across streets to thank her for instilling in them the confidence with which they too could accomplish what they wanted, whatever that might be; she didn’t break through barriers, she exploded them.

Selfishly, exceeding the professional loss to the world at large, is my sense that a gaping hole has been left by losing the closest, most considerate and loyal friend I’ve known. A significant amount of the time I spent outside my family was with Zaha. For years she scolded me for not being serious and questioned whether I spent my days watching Oprah. I was too busy being grateful, soaking up the aura of Zaha, to bother her with the details, or maybe fearful of the ensuing critique. Yet when I was recognised for my writing, she was the first to congratulate me. I was moved.

I Google Alert those who interest me and not a day goes by without a beep on my screen announcing Zaha’s latest, whether a new commission, exhibition or accolade; the notices are incessant. Forget Jeff Koons or Damien Hirst, Zaha beats them all. Saddened as I am, and the tears still come, I take solace in the fact that I’ve elected to ignore her (wildly) premature passing and let the voice ring loud and clear in my head – she made me laugh as much as reach.

Patrik Schumacher
Remembering Zaha

When I first encountered Zaha’s drawings and designs as a young student, my rather reluctantly chosen field – architecture – (initially chosen by elimination rather than positive enthusiasm) took on a new, unexpected, exciting dimension. Wow, architectural design could be such an adventure! More than anybody else, she expanded architecture’s universe of possibilities. She gave herself and all designers who followed her a new level of artistic freedom and through this an expanded problem-solving tool box that has made our field more adaptive, versatile and resourceful in adequately addressing the complexity and novelty of our contemporary urban world. Zaha changed our field and changed everything for me.

But this note is about her rather than about her work. We all miss Zaha so much, we all loved her so much: her beautiful personality, her warmth, her generosity, her passion and as those of you who became her friend know – her fierce loyalty. I certainly felt her unswerving loyalty that survived and was certain to survive all diverging interests, conflicts and disagreements we had or might have had in the future, and she inspired the same loyalty in me. I think Zaha was unique in this way. Anyway I had never experienced this before. Her ‘sociology’ was unique, in a way very traditional; loyalty was the key category, so her students, her staff, her clients often became her friends, receiving her friendship in return. Standing in the world mattered very little.

Zaha’s friendship was not easy to win; she was unusually shy, and rather vulnerable. She was sceptical about new people and it often took a long time to gain her trust; or was this only the case with me? (I think it was especially the case with me.) In this too, I think she was more traditional rather than contemporary. When I was hired
we were only 4 or 5 people in this single room: Studio 9. Yet, Zaha managed to avoid talking to me – not even a simple hello – for the first four weeks I was working there. She just ignored my presence. I guess she was suspicious of my presence. Only after seeing me working with my head down, day in and day out, till very late, did she start to lose her suspicion and scepticism. Only when the competition we were working on took on steam and pace and she got more and more involved, taking over the design leadership, did she finally start talking to me in connection with the work she expected to see. Only after many late working sessions, including all-night charettes, and after an unforgettable early morning trip to Berlin to present the work, did I become part of the group with which she was easy-going (mostly her former students). But this nice familiarity had its costs: lots of teasing and ridicule and much more intense pressure to deliver the humanly impossible perfection she wanted.

For her friends, including her staff, Zaha had a very big, forgiving heart, and intense work-related moments of frustration and anger – even if super intense – usually evaporated on the same day, forgotten and forgiven. I very much miss Zaha’s probing, teasing humour, although it was not always easy to be on the receiving end of, but at least it meant one was the focus of her attention. Zaha was the ultimate master of the trenchant nick name – for instance Licky, or Sleazy, or Teppische Dealer, or Yawn or Suffering. But there are also many endearing nicknames: Woodstock, Charlie Brown, Stevie Wonder, Woof, Breitsky, Blinky, Lik lok, Sushi, Sci-fi, Lucy, Hunni Bunny, Tomato, Rizzo, Neo Geo, Clinton, Jimbo, Gilli, Mudji, Kermit, Mello, Rogere, Minion and Lulito. Anybody new would at first be referred to as Pupsi, before a more fitting nickname was found. I had quite a few nicknames over the years. I guess some of them became known to some of you: Potato, Cappuccino, Fluffy, Sinkapu and Tschu-tschu.

Zaha had a huge zest for life and curiosity, going out nearly every night, weekdays and weekends, always keen to meet new people and maintaining old friendships. She was a text messaging and email virtuoso, using 3 different phones at any time to stay in touch with so many across countries and time zones.

Zaha achieved widespread recognition and respect; she became a Dame and she deeply appreciated this as well as the more general recognition but she had been a target of often unfair and uninformed criticism. She remained very vulnerable. She cried a lot, in recent years, especially after the devastating and humiliating loss of Tokyo. The RIBA Gold Medal came to the rescue. Thank you RIBA!

Zaha lived an intense, physically draining life that took its toll, but she coped gracefully and bravely with this, never complaining, just focussing on her missions large and small, soldiering on, in good humour. As if in defiance of these physiological limits, new expansive plans were forged all the time, like the plan to move ZHA to the river front into the recently acquired former Design Museum. Her passion and urge to do ever new and fresh work remained relentless to the last minute. It was in these very recent times that my love and admiration for her – for her silent, graceful heroism – was stronger than ever before. What a wonderful beautiful person and fighter. Zaha, I miss you so very much.
Zaha Hadid died and the world lost more than a visionary architect. She was bravely innovative in her structural dreams and fearless in her revolutionary abstractions. I have admired and followed her work over the past five decades. The times we met, we discovered a shared passion: our love of Islamic geometric design, the foundation of our work.
Zaha Hadid, *The World (89 Degrees)*, 1983, Acrylic on Canvas

Brett Steele  
*Anecdote as Evidence: Zaha’s World*

My most persistent memory of doing improvisation, stand up, is of my mouth being in the present, and my mind being in the future.  
— Steve Martin

Zaha’s most important, improvisational early masterpiece is a 6 × 7 foot acrylic painting that she made to coincide with her first-ever one-person exhibition, held in the Gallery and Front Members Room of the Architectural Association 18 November to 16 December in 1983. It is titled *The World (89 Degrees)*. I first met and began working with Zaha while still a student the following year, and she introduced herself to me with this picture, which was exactly what she had done for everybody else the year before – painted, titled and displayed as if anecdotal evidence of her simultaneous discovery of a new architectural world.

What’s very sad is that thousands of years of perfecting drawing disappeared in the past twenty years.

This painting is one of the most startling architectural images of the 20th century. It is one that (in her mind especially) was conceived at a crucial moment in the history of architecture, when architects found themselves moving away from long-established drawing conventions (including those conventions’ baggage) towards new, unknown and even alien techniques (to which would soon refer with the arcane term ‘digital’). For Zaha, the purpose of making this painting was more immediate and urgent. For her, *The World* was a 20th-century image needed to allow architecture to begin work on the one thing she cared about above all else: the building of the 21st. That so much of its Suprematist, stylistic energy is derived from nearly a century before in the (by then, fading) nomenclature
of Malevich, Leonidov and El Lissitsky; that it was hand-made by means of a mid-20th-century medium like acrylic paint hand-mixed with what even some assistants at the time thought was Perrier water (the paint applied with tiny, eyeliner-sized brushes over a tedious period of weeks on end); and most especially, that it was conceived by her deliberately as a projective *œuvre complète* before her career had even got going, are but three of this painting’s many graphic paradoxes.

My drawings are not the building. They are drawings about the building. They are not an illustration of a final product. You have to look at them like a text – they are a language. 

The painting to which I am referring, and which she and her collaborators forever after simply called ‘her world’, was just that: hers. And hers alone. It depicts an aerial view from above the earth, as if recorded by some untethered astronaut floating away and invoking Ridley Scott’s great poster advert for his 1979 sci-fi masterpiece *Alien*, which declared that, ‘In space no one can hear you scream’. Zaha’s warning goes much further, reminding architects of something even more unsettling than scary aliens chasing astronauts around a space station: that in space, thanks to zero gravity, there’s no longer even any way to tell which way is up. Let alone out. Or down. Or left, or right – or (judging by the picture’s many different perspectival vanishing points) right or wrong. This is a picture made by an aerial architect of the most extreme kind, for sure, but of the rare sort who tries to envision what future worlds will look like before actually getting there (defying the more everyday architectural habit of simply trying to map a route or write a theory about how to get there). By contrast, this picture silently screams its alienating affect by putting architects themselves within its point of view, looking across at the arrival of a new world.

I think that through a set of drawings one discovers certain things which would not have otherwise been possible. 

The World (89 Degrees) literally rotates that architect’s vantage (note the precise degree specification in the parenthetical title of the picture itself, a nod towards the ‘zero degree’ sensibility of Malevich and his avant-garde co-conspirators), in order to then try and rattle loose architecture’s modernist underpinnings. Along the way many of architecture’s rational, Euclidean conventions are turned inside out. I intend this less as metaphor, than as a reminder of the trajectory of the career that this painting pre-figures, already on a path that led architecture swiftly away from geometry – stable form, figure and dimension – and towards topology as a means for the making of form. Topology, unlike geometry, invokes complex higher-order mathematics and their capacity to array, rearrange and then redescribe a constant transformation of space as well as form, creating mental habits and working routines that would become commonplace soon after this painting (in the kinds of software platforms for which Hadid’s studio would quickly become renowned only a few years later). The key to The World is its premonition of this shift, recorded by its simultaneous, elastic portrayal of not only built forms as well the ground upon which they are set, but also the sense of angular momentum created by the released view of an astronaut-architect looking down (or maybe better, sideways) at this new universe.

What I think was extraordinary was that drawing technique became design technique. And that then became building technique. 

That the imagery of this re-ordered universe inhabited by skewed viewers/slanted objects is as precise and calculated as it is, while being so effortlessly improvised and immersive (there were, in fact, a very limited number of preliminary sketches or instructions of the
painting made in advance – it emerged as a large-format drawing nearly fully formed prior to the painters’ application of light and colour), reminds us anew that it was the study of mathematics in Beirut that had led the young thinker to London, where she went on to study architecture by creating pictures of the very experience of that flight – the kind of aerial views that planes themselves make inevitable.

My second year was disastrous . . . There was a very English situation – landscape, Milton Keynes, etc. I was seen as a wealthy Arab lady, waltzing in and out.  

At the time of its painting The World (89 Degrees) provided a comprehensive career record of early interests, as it does of the shattering in a single and youthful, zealous and expressionist rant the architectural habits of old-fashioned, genteel Euro-centric modernism. Including the polite nostalgic, analytic and representational conventions that Zaha so instinctively rejected (as also occasionally the case with her own English AA tutors).

Observation is not a project. History is not a project. These are layers of a project.  

Zaha’s painting takes aim at a trio of modern architectural crutches: geometry, function and reason. It was the enduring presence of this tripartite structure that had allowed modern architecture to erect the appearance of stable (seemingly upstanding) architectural belief and representational systems – all of which went out the window, like the architect’s own disinterested gaze, with The World. In mechanical, technical terms, The World was sketched, laid-out, drawn, traced, copied and enlarged to its final form without use of anything other than pieces of tracing paper taped to a table-top, filled in with hundreds of 0.35mm thick ink lines drawn with pens following the hand-held edges of small, see-through plastic straight-edges and curves. Scalpels were used to ‘sharpen’ the intersections of those ink lines when traced a final time upon the frosted film used to make the final, original drawing. The technique demanded crisp corners terminating the various vectors that in turn described the boundaries of the shapes filling the final picture. All of this was then hand-transferred, by tracing with pencil over carbon-backed paper, to a large prepared canvas one final time, providing the setting for its eventual colourisation.

We used drawing technique to match ideas in a project. Superimposition in drawings became a way to test superimposition in the projects and buildings.  

Everything was done by a team of student assistants and painters with minimal prior instruction or set sequence, and was the result of the studio’s already considerable tacit experience with the medium and its ways of working. It was a studio, by the way, that forbid the use of parallel rulers or T squares, 90 degree triangles, scale measures or fixed angles. Which is one reason the painters’ relentless displacement of conventional architects’ drawing habits that can be seen to have been such a prodigious basis for shaking familiar architectural problems, like the making of orderly figure-ground relationships; the truth of perspectival space; a consistent, presumed realism of rendering, etc. – all of which in Zaha’s case became unglued (if not unhinged) and broken apart to then allow their re-wiring into entirely (eerily) new formal repertoires.

The most exciting thing about the Russians is not that their graphics are interesting. It’s that their experiment was never finished. There was no conclusion.  
What this painting records in Zaha's thirty-third year is a sweeping rejection of architectural worlds around her, and replacement of those with her own. It’s a declaration of late (as she called it, ‘unfinished’) modernist upheaval, accompanied by a renewed plea for the enduring necessity of anti-realism as the basis for moving a field like architecture forwards again. Zaha’s scepticism regarding the known depictions of reality around her invokes Anaïs Nin’s great surrealist mantra regarding the ultimate intention of her writing: ‘The monster I kill every day is the monster of realism’. Looking back at Zaha’s painting now, we see one of the most unexpected of all possible 1980s forms of architectural conservation: a return to manifestos delivered in the form of a single, coherent, architectural image. That such an effort was struck, one brushstroke at a time, from the heart of darkness that was that decade’s post-modern historicism flourishing across the capital city in which she then lived (recall this was the year of Prince Charles carbuncle attack on modern architecture, and even hardened modernists like Harry Cobb had softened their instincts in efforts to curry architectural favour at the National Gallery) makes the effort even more remarkable for its audacity.

These drawings are a kind of graphic research. Only by looking carefully at The World can we fully notice in various locations across the curving surface of its planet what appear as half a dozen or so deformed, exploded buildings (they’re hard to count up, since figuring out where they stop and surrounding forms start isn’t straightforward thanks to subtle colour-coding and surface sub-dividing). Some of the strange structures are cut into the ground. Others appear to be slipping, sliding or breaking away. There’s one showing something resembling a project done at The Hague in the Netherlands with her former tutors (and briefly, partners) at OMA. There’s another that looks remarkably like Zaha’s competition-winning Peak (won the same year as this painting) although weirdly, some of its slabs and stilts have been re-arranged, and the structure itself positioned as if falling off the flattened twisted, bent landscape fading in and out from greys to primary colours and back again. Here and there across the expanse we see occasional muted green patches, suggesting something like pieces of a cultivated, artificial landscape (‘I hate nature’ was a phrase one heard from the architect, whose outdoor time rarely strayed far from a swimming pool’s edge). Across the surface of this alt earth we see planes, shadows and blocks; what appears to be a river (likely the Thames, but, here drawn as a perfectly straight, a wide blue line shooting straight out of the upper-right corner of the canvas). There’s even a swimming pool or two, inexplicably appearing to float (like many other things in the picture) above the vast, constructed ground; micro chips of water shown as if miniaturised versions of entire oceans are then turned into perfectly hewn, rectilinear, watery blue shapes.

It was 1972 when I joined the AA . . . a time when the school was anti-drawing, anti-design, anti-architecture. It was about other things . . . Some of us protested and decided we wanted to design and learn buildings.
edge of a faraway horizon (in direct and defiant contradiction to the circumstances of its original position, carved deep into a mountainside far above Hong Kong). In some of the other jaggedy buildings, arcing surfaces or curving pathways seem to just touch the ground, next to volumetric primitives that look like little more than monotone placeholders awaiting their own future embryosis. By contrast, one of the exploded buildings depicted in the tableau has carefully-drawn stairs and a grid of windows and doors, bundles of columns and other features, all shown with more detail than most architects’ working drawings. One or two other buildings only lightly register in the field of vision, and a few appear to levitate above the scene, as if waiting before being given a signal by their architect that it’s okay to land. Shadows, like various (multiple) vanishing points within the picture, go every which way, less suggestive of three dimensions than of a simultaneous presence of several different, fractal, two-and-a-half dimensions. As was the case with so many of her early paintings, what is rendered here is as much the architect’s own ability to bend space itself, as it is imagine the strange structures and surfaces inhabiting this elastic archive of a space.

There is this amazing flow between the land and the water and the wildlife that extends to incorporate the buildings and the people. I think that perhaps what I am trying to do is capture that kind of seamlessness and flow in an urban architectural context for the contemporary city and its users. 17

Only the most knowledgeable of her early followers would have been able to work out at the time of the painting’s arrival that these strange, distorted views of oddly irregular buildings included in The World were actually depictions of Zaha’s entire 1983 œuvre complète. The painting in fact includes every project she had ever designed, going back to her student days at the AA. It’s worth noting that this

*projective retrospective* landed in a larger architectural world only 15 years after the conclusion of the 20th century’s last monumental, maniacal effort to do the same (which happened the year that Zaha began her university studies in Beirut, with the 1969 publication by Le Corbusier’s estate, four years after his death, of the 8th and final volume of his *Oeuvre Complete*, a project that began 40 years before with the release of Volume 1). What we see in Zaha’s painting, however, is literally the opposite of modern architecture’s serial, editorial approach to a manifesto delivered in the form of a published architectural monograph. Instead, we get its topological inversion in everything from it reverse-chronological relationship to its author’s career (released here before the fact of that career itself), to the painting’s colourful singularity (a solitary, totally one-off original picture), to its format (a wall-sized illustration taking the place of many smaller, reproduced books).

I actually think things changed a lot with the arrival of computing. Something was lost, maybe related to scale, but something was also gained by letting architects see space as more complex. 18

Looking again at the painting now I find my attention drawn to a single point in its frame: the apex of a tilted yellowy-amber plane heading off-earth (‘off-world’ was one of the extra-planetary references that abound in Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner*, another of his contemporaneous filmic analogues to Zaha’s own work, released the same year as her painting) coming up to and gently kissing the mid-point of the picture’s left edge. This yellowish figure is perfectly composed and carefully calibrated in both shape and position so that this surface is seen as if a giant, continent-sized wedge (‘Beat the Whites with a Red Wedge’ is a 1919 El Lissitsky piece of revolutionary propaganda that Zaha knew well). By being rendered yellow the element itself completes a three-part primary colour scheme already filled with various blues and reds (while
also suggesting an illuminating search-light shining on this newly-discovered, extraterrestrial world – think Scott’s much-later Prometheus). Underneath this yellowy wedge, as if we’re staring into deep space (or, for that matter, into other equally strange architectural worlds, like Saturn or Neptune) we see nothing but shadowy Piranesi-like darkness; the world gone almost completely inky black and silent. Above the wedge towards the top of the picture, darkened outer space gradually gives way to medium and then the lightest of atmospheric greys, creating an overcast, London-like wintry afternoon sky of the kind routinely seen by her assistants looking up from their drawing boards every so often, out of one of the high windows in the Victorian Schoolhouse her office still inhabits today.

I think if you look at all the work of this period, which led to Vitra and Dusseldorf, you can see that it became more layers of volumes as opposed to layers of planes. I think that this was an important transformation. 40

Anybody who knew her well was aware that Zaha loved making up all kinds of things, from the nicknames she gave collaborators and friends (I was called ‘Bletzsky’ for so long and with such regularity that once a collector in New York asked me if I was Russian. ‘You are mies-taken’, she once snapped jokingly, and in a flash, when a friend of ours at a dinner one evening in New York once confused my surname with Glass). An entire year was once spent in which everyone in the office referred to everyone else only by reverse names – she was Ahaz Didah. Historical affiliations in the form of false conspiracy theories supposedly connecting one famous building or figure to every other were a common game, as was the rolling of the I Ching, whenever things got a little too quiet. She invented strange words for the parts of her drawings (‘tic tics’ were small x-shaped crosses on her drawings, etc.) and gave strange names to projects and their parts (‘confetti’ programmes, ‘slabettes’ and ‘sperm’ tables) that only those in the studio could understand. The resulting world was one in which every architectural fact converged, Alice in Wonderland-like, with what seemed an equal number of alternative realities; unexpected forms of fiction. The effect was to reinforce the architect’s own ability as that of a gifted novelist, able to convert even the most ordinary, anecdotal and ephemeral details of experience into a form of evidence able to prove the reality of an entirely new, unknown world 20.

Some drawings weren’t about graphic presentation, they were about a story line; objects floating in space, walls falling flat, like plans. 21

Late in 1997, 15 years after making the painting, Zaha returned to the school at which it was first exhibited, on the occasion of an Evening Lecture devoted to her recent work. Somewhat surprisingly, she began the evening with a slide of The World, and offered what seemed then, even to her, a late realisation of the discoveries it afforded beyond those it was originally intended to document:

I made this painting to have a record of what I was thinking at the time. That’s why I decided to call it ‘The World’, because that’s what it was for me – a world of projects I had designed by 1983. I originally thought that the subject of the painting was the buildings it showed. The strange thing is, looking back now much later, I realise that it’s actually the surface of the ground, everything between them, the shaping and building and manipulation of the ground, the arranging of a continuous surface, that became for me such a big project for many years since. Worlds are like that – sometimes they just pull you in. 22

Zaha’s most consistent quality was her own architectural confidence. Not in herself, so much as her capacity for improvisational
invention, discovery and learning achieved by going back and reading into something a quality not observed or recognised the first time around. It was no small feat, you could say, for an episodic discipline like architecture, obsessed as it is with not only planning every detail of the worlds around us (including for architects, their own carefully curated careers) but also doing a project and then relentlessly moving on. For Zaha, architectural knowledge was something more worldly, if not off-worldly. For her, architectural learning was more iterative and recursive; more open-ended to our own intervention, invention and reinvention. For her, projects were never really finished, let alone their lessons ever really over. Recall that this was an architect who never worked in another architectural office (a year or so with her two AA tutors learning to draw or express themselves at the time hardly counts); who never stopped teaching (so that she could continue, she once told me, to learn from her own students as much as the other way around); who never passed up an opportunity to enter a competition (even when her own successfully career with innumerable contractual building obligations made finding time for making other drawings and models costly and nearly impossible); and who routinely re-drew and re-rendered even her own completed buildings and projects, so as to try and unlock ideas not previously seen.

It is this unshakable belief in an architect’s self-determination and self-meaning that is the legacy of *The World (89 Degrees)*. So too is its proof to us today, as it once was to its author, that architectural worlds are only ever learned like, just as they are first imagined, one project – one architectural world – at time.

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3. ZH commented more than once on the cramped circumstances of the making of this large-format painting, which barely fit into the tiny room where it was produced, in the ‘barrel vault’ on the third floor rear of the Architectural Association. The mixing of acrylic paints required a ready source of water, which was taken to the studio via Perrier bottles re-filled at the AA Bar downstairs. Some people in the school, watching the delivery of an endless stream of the green bottles, mistakenly thought the painters were using the fizzy water itself – which Zaha noted in a lecture years later briefly became something of a fashion at the AA.
6. Space here doesn’t permit time a sketch of the genealogy and aerial sensibility of the modern architect as pilot, recorded in everything from the strange flying machines circling like drones in Wright’s pictures of his Broadacre City, to Le Corbusier’s 1925 book on airplanes; 1960s photographs of Gropius exiting a helicopter; or Norman Foster photographed standing on the wing of a 747 and declaring it, in a BBC television show made near the time of Zaha’s painting, as the building of the century. Suffice to say, Zaha embodies this aerial sensibility in ways that extend to working methods, and not only travel habits.
9. Interview with Zaha Hadid by Alvin Boyarsky, op. cit. A reinforcing view is found in the anglo-antagonism of her school director Alvin Boyarsky’s often-quoted proclamation that the AA ‘fought English mediocrity with the drawings on the wall’.
10. Zaha’s own written commentary on the painting is limited. In a talk in 2010 she described the picture’s making: ‘The team that made it included architects and painters, many of them textile designers. Textile because they can
really do color and that was for me very important. They also had very steady hands and are very precise, and so could draw very carefully, which was very important. The people that drew it were extremely precise, it was almost like being done with a computer: no crossing of lines, no smudging’. ZH remarks, in ‘Rendering Speculations’, op. cit. A short text accompanying the painting in her archive includes: “This painting represents the culmination of a seven-year exploration into architecture’s unchartered territories”. In a short, two-paragraph summary she notes ‘technology’s rapid development’ and ‘exciting new lifestyles’ as the backdrop of her exploration at the time, which she said was not intended to ‘resurrect’ aborted, untested or unfinished modern experiments, so much as to ‘evolve new forms of building’. My thanks here to Manon Molland at Zaha Hadid Architects for sharing this archival description.

ZH, Remarks on Alvin Boyarsky, op. cit.

ZH, in ‘Rendering Speculations’, op. cit.

Interview with Zaha Hadid by Alvin Boyarsky, op. cit.


ZH, Remarks on Alvin Boyarsky, op. cit.

ZH, in ‘Rendering Speculations’, op. cit.

Interview with Zaha Hadid by Alvin Boyarsky, op. cit.


ZH, Remarks on Alvin Boyarsky, op. cit.

ZH, in ‘Rendering Speculations’, op. cit.

Deyan Sudjic

Zaha Hadid’s legacy is her architecture, her paintings and drawings, the torrent of design work from furniture to silverware that poured out of her office, and the impact that she had on the lives of so many of the people that she met.

She has left us with a family of soaring swooping buildings that seem to be slipping away from the reality of gravity. You can find her work in London and in Beijing, Abu Dhabi, Rome and Hong Kong, and a score of other cities around the world. Her designs are immediately recognisable, but never repetitive. In Glasgow, her Museum of Transport sits like a lightning flash on the banks of the Clyde. Her first realised work of any size, the Fire Station for the Vitra company in Germany, is a series of razor-sharp planes slicing through space. Later, her work turned more voluptuous, like the complex double curves of the roof of the Olympic swimming pool in London.

Zaha was a brilliant manipulator of form, but there was more to her work than sculpture. She saw architecture as a means to bring cities alive by animating spaces in the way that her MAXXI centre in Rome transformed a sombre barrack block. She was a brilliant conjuror, seamlessly blurring landscape with architecture, walls with roofs, interior with exterior.

Zaha was a genuine star. Heads turned when she made her way gingerly down onto the crowded flight deck of the aircraft carrier Illustrious moored on Istanbul’s waterfront for a cocktail party to meet the Queen of England. A bus full of enthusiasts stood up and applauded as, travelling through the anonymous suburbs of Baku, they got their first glimpse of the Heydar Aliyev Centre at its opening in 2014.

Zaha was a star but also a collaborator. Her close association with Patrik Schumacher enabled her to accomplish so much in the too few years that were allotted to her. By the example of her work, by the force of her personality, by the intensity of her commitment to the art of architecture, and of course by dint of her remarkable talent, Zaha Hadid established herself as first among a new generation of architects.

destined to occupy a critical place in the history of early 21st-century architecture as it will be written.
She was able to create one of the world’s largest and most impressive architectural practices, not just through the force of her personality. Zaha had a remarkable, restless talent and a determination to do things on her own terms.

Revolutionary is a word to be used as sparingly as possible, especially when it is applied to architecture. But Zaha’s astonishing, and exhilarating work fully justifies its use. She allowed us to experience space in ways that never seemed possible before.

Architects make their mark on the world through their work. But in Zaha’s case it is scarcely possible to make a distinction between the architect, and her work. It is not that she was working to create personal monuments. What made her stand out from when she began her practice, at the start of the 1980s, was that she had the courage to risk the vulnerability that came from her determination always to be herself. In the early days it meant that she refused to make the compromises needed in order to turn her remarkable drawings into physical form. Later, when she had started to build, that same determination sometimes made her the subject of an uncomfortable degree of criticism, one that often descended to the level of personal abuse from those who could not accept her work for what it was. She would never hide the intensity of her ideas about what architecture could achieve behind a conventional language. She made buildings that remain full of her conviction.

She found her own voice in the 1980s at a time when architecture was in the midst of a period of exceptionally fluid uncertainty. The fact that she was taught by both Rem Koolhaas and Leon Krier when she was a student at the Architectural Association, apparently the Alpha and Omega of the architectural spectrum, reflects just how fluid that moment was. She was able – through her sheer force of personality – to realise what once looked like the dreams of an artist as an architect. She had the personality that could convince those who commissioned her – from Rolf Fehlbaum, Vitra’s chairman, who invited her to do that first Fire Station in Weil am Rhein, to Zhang Xin the businesswoman from Beijing – who gave her the chance to realise high-rise architecture and mixed use complexes for Soho China. But it was also the kind of personality that had the strength to deal with the messy reality of a construction site, and perhaps most essential of all, to inspire the young and gifted from all around the world to come and work in her office. She was always curious, always fascinated to spend time with the young, as witnessed in the amount of time and energy she poured into teaching, always looking to the next project, and the next possibility.
Zaha Hadid’s lifetime of work speaks for itself. Its voice is as dynamic, singular and unashamedly powerful and feminine as she was herself. On both a personal and professional level paying tribute to her memory is a daunting task.

Zaha was first and foremost a true artist and a multidisciplinary talent whose work spanned many fields, touched many lives and leaves an enduring aesthetic legacy. Her flair, dynamism, kindness and wit were evident from the moment we first met, and I feel extremely privileged to have known her both as a friend and as a creative collaborator.

I was fortunate to work with her first in 2007 on Fade, her pavilion at the Serpentine Gallery, then again in 2008 on the stunning Light Sculpture chandelier shown at Salone del Mobile as part of Swarovski Crystal Palace, and on the unique Swarovski Gem Couture jewellery she designed for Swarovski Runway Rocks in the same year. Zaha soon became a regular creative collaborator and an integral part of almost all our major design initiatives, with projects ranging from her jewellery collection for Atelier Swarovski in 2010, which set our crystals in clear resin, to the Prima tabletop pieces we crafted in solid crystal to celebrate the 20th anniversary of her Fire Station building at Vitra Campus in 2013.

Earlier this year, Zaha created a sculptural piece for our debut Atelier Swarovski Home collection. Fittingly, her designs for Crista were the first to use our Wave Cut technology, allowing curved forms to be cut in crystal for the first time. There is an explosive expression in her final work with us, yet there is also something very feminine in its sweeping curvaceousness. It is a true reflection of Zaha’s spirit, and a reminder of what an honour it was to know her and work with her. Zaha was challenging in the best way possible: she always pushed us beyond our comfort zone and the results were consistently impactful and inspirational.

Her passing was a personal sadness, and an incredible loss for the design community. Zaha was a truly global figure, and it goes without saying that as the first woman to receive the Pritzker Architecture Prize, her pioneering spirit as a female in a male-dominated industry was truly groundbreaking. She has been an incredible mentor to me, and will forever remain so. I am grateful for her friendship and her creative partnerships with me. With the mountains that she shifted, she left the world a better place. I miss her, but know her spirit lives on.

Nadja Swarovski
Rirkrit Tiravanija

I
JUST
WAKE UP
AND
GO
TO THE
SUN

Zaha introduced gold to our family.

Whenever she arrived for dinner, we would all go to the window and look at her getting out of her golden taxi. I asked her ‘Do you order these golden taxis?’ ‘No!’ she said with a broad smile and twinkling eyes, ‘They always come to me spontaneously’.

When she had been on holiday in Morocco we all gasped because she had turned entirely golden brown.

She loved the children and would take off her extravagantly sculptural jewellery for Charlie to try on, while Tomas would study the ring(s) on her fingers, which to him looked like miniature weapons.

When she was in high spirits she would be fantastic fun to be with and loved to tease. She especially enjoyed nicknames. Rem was called Woodstock because he had luscious and unruly hair, and she continued calling him that even after he shaved it all off. But once, in the evening when he stormed off before midnight to get his much needed sleep, she said ‘Ahh, Cinderella is leaving!’ From then on he was Cinderella. After Ricky B had been called ‘Licky’ in Japan, he was forever lovingly called ‘Licky’; for her, this was a token of affection. More love? more nicknames!

To her friends she was enormously generous and deeply concerned for their happiness. When I was not doing much of my own work with our house taken over by OMA, she bade me to come and work in her office; she would give me a room entirely to myself. I never did act upon it, sadly, in retrospect. She proposed to take

Francesco Vezzoli, *FOREVER ZAHA (HER TEARS AS BULLETS)*, 2016. Laserprint on canvas, metallic embroidery, paper. 28.5 × 28.5 cm – Unique. Courtesy of the artist

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ZAHA, Gold & More Memories

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ZAHA, Gold & More Memories

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me shopping because she didn’t think my clothes, which I believed to be my particular ‘style’, were up to scratch. When I expressed admiration for her jacket she bought me not one but five garments in the same style for my birthday.

When we went with a group of her students to Russia, there was a dance in the evening with a lot of Georgians attending. Suddenly she was surrounded by admiring men, who recognised a beautiful, feisty, real woman! They couldn’t wait to dance with her. I was overcome with sadness by the realisation that she lived in a completely alien culture to her own; one in which the ideal woman is demure and slim.

She danced, as she did everything, with passion. She was pure gold.
No one would believe she had another side, a softer side. Zaha and I became the closest of friends and we remained very close over the years. I considered her a soulmate.

When we look back at Zaha’s legacy, I think we will remember her as a modern Gaudí. I like to fancy myself as a patron of the modern Gaudí, as a patron of Zaha Hadid, whose legacy has truly touched the world.

Zhang Xin

From the very first moment I met her to the very last, she was the brightest star.

She was never meant to be normal. She just stood out – the way she dressed, the way she talked, the way she interacted with people, the way she appeared. And none of it was made up. It was authentic. The strangeness was the most authentic thing about her; just like her architecture, it was Zaha.

The very first time I saw her was when she came to visit a site for a potential project. She had a handbag shaped like a golden bottom. She had trouble walking and her partner, Patrik Schumacher supported her as she went. I remember thinking, ‘Who does she think she is, shuffling all the way over to China, with this Patrik and this golden bottom?’ That was the beginning of our working together.

What Zaha had, was amazing design. She showed us her master planning design for Singapore. It was simply out of this world. In 2001 she still hadn’t built anything. She was a paper architect. We would go on to build over 1.3 million square metres together in China.

She was a tough person. It wasn’t always easy to work with her. But no matter what, I always loved her design. In any competition, we always ended up choosing her design. It was just meant to be.

There is a fearless presence in Zaha’s work, and in her person. Most people found her intimidating. People just didn’t know what to make of her. I don’t think she was fearful of anything. She was the one person who always spoke her mind.
Reflections on Zaha Hadid (1950–2016)

Published on the occasion of the exhibition Zaha Hadid: Early Paintings and Drawings (8 December 2016 – 12 February 2017) at the Serpentine Sackler Gallery, London.
I think there should be no end to experimentation.