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Research Paper

## Queen of the Curve: Zaha Hadid's Life and Work



Zaha Hadid, Courtesy of CNN

Zaha Hadid's contributions to architecture cannot be understated. Taking inspiration from the Constructivists and the Suprematists of the 1920s, she revolutionized modern architecture with daring angles, dynamic curves and compositions that appeared split space. Part of the Deconstructivist movement, Hadid designed her buildings to create the illusion of structural obscurity, often with swooping bends or jutting shards. Born on October 31, 1950 in Baghdad, Iraq, Hadid went on to become one of the most influential contributors to modern architecture as we know it.

Hadid attended the American University in Beirut to study mathematics (*Pritzker Biography*). From there, she honed her architecture skills at the Architectural Association in London, studying under Rem Koolhaas, a fellow recipient of the Pritzker Prize (*Pritzker Biography*). After graduating from the Architectural Association, she

began working at the Office of Metropolitan Architecture and eventually taught at the Architectural Association (*Pritzker Biography*). Perpetually restless and inquisitive, Hadid's career truly began to gain significant traction when she founded her own architecture firm in 1979, Zaha Hadid Architects (*Zaha Hadid Architects*).



Peak Project, Hong Kong, China, Hadid 1991 (*Moma*)

Clearly bringing a distinctive perspective to architecture, Hadid used her artwork paintings to develop her ideas. These abstract shapes eventually morphed into dynamic buildings with large swoops and sharp angles. Her paintings for the Peak Project in Hong Kong, though never built, demonstrate the beginnings of her creative design process. By starting with an artistic concept or illustration as inspiration, she pushed the long-established boundaries of architecture. This artistic process of using paintings to demonstrate her ideas is particularly evident in her relationship with Suprematism.

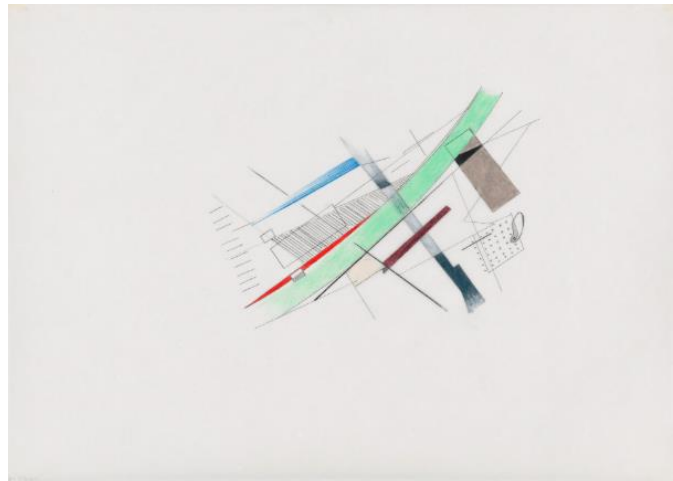
One of the major movements of modern art, Suprematism is characterized by geometric shapes in a pure form, such as triangles, rectangles and circles arranged on a surface (*Tate*). Kazimir Malevich, a Russian abstract artist that pioneered the Suprematism movement in the 19th century, was especially inspiring to Hadid (*Giovannini*). Malevich placed the “pure forms” of triangles, rectangles and circles on an axis or at angles, producing an asymmetrical or skewed composition. Like the

Constructivists, Hadid revived these arrangements as the vision for her designs. But unlike the Constructivists, by not using the T-square or rulers like her architect peers and instead painting and sculpting her models, Hadid created dynamic designs that took the two-dimensional Suprematist style and were transformed it into daring buildings.



Dynamic Suprematism, Malevich 1915

(Tate)



Parc de la Villette Project sketches, Hadid 1982-83

(MoMA)

Rather than using a personal approach to her designs, Hadid believed that her designs were not her imprint on the world, rather pushed the boundaries of modern architecture. Often using glass, concrete and steel, she crafted futuristic curves and sharp angles that look fragmented and distorted. Hadid was part of the Deconstructivist Movement, which challenges the pure form or traditional architecture using squares, circles, triangles in a structured order (*Johnson*). Deconstructivism is a reaction to the International Style, an architectural style developed in the 1920s and 1930s that utilizes simple rectangular shapes (*MoMA*). Traditionally, architecture is stable and harmonious, with little tension or strife. Deconstructivism is meant to challenge that by maintaining the structural integrity, but creating disorder and tension (*Johnson*).

Apparent flaws are an important part of the buildings in the Deconstructivist style (*Johnson*). Just as Hadid was influenced by the Russian Suprematists, the entire Deconstructivist movement took inspiration from Constructivists Kazimir Malevich, Vladimir Tatlin and El Lissitzky with overlapping shapes and minimal balance or hierarchy (*Johnson*). Hadid's Deconstructivist peers included Frank Gehry, Daniel Libeskind (2003 plan for reconstruction of the World Trade Center), Rem Koolhaas, Peter Eisenman (Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe), Coop Himmelblau, and Bernard Tschumi.



One of Hadid's most iconic and notable works is the Vitra Fire Station in Weil am Rhein, Germany. Completed in 1993 for Vitra, an avant garde Swiss furniture company, it creates suspense through an explosion of geometry (*Monchaux*). She appeared to cleave the sky in two with the jutting shards. Hadid used cast concrete and glass to juxtapose the rolling hills and nature surrounding the structure (*Monchaux*). The Vitra Fire Station is one of the first examples of bringing Supremacist art to modern architecture. Much like Malevich, the Fire Station appears to have multiple perspectives that do not converge into one vanishing point, rather protrude into space. While the Vitra Fire Station is one of Hadid's most famous buildings, it is also one of her earliest designs and just scratched the surface of her extensive portfolio of work.



Later on from 2009 to 2016, Hadid crafted another remarkable design that combined the history of Belgium with the new age of architecture. The Antwerp Port Authority head office is an example of transforming an existing building into a Deconstructivist design that pushed the boundaries of adaptive reuse. Hadid insisted on keeping the existing brick fire station that the city no longer needed and reimagining it into something new and different (*Lewis*). Adding an angular, jutting steel and glass structure on top, the new Antwerp Port Authority head office consolidated the port's 500 employees into one building (*Zaha Hadid Architects*). The modern new extension almost doubled the working area, allowing for growth for the city of Antwerp. The existing fire house was 6,600 square meters and Hadid's extension added 6,200 square meters (*Zaha Hadid Architects*).

While these are only two examples of Zaha Hadid's significant contributions to modern architecture, she contributed not only innovative buildings but elevated the standards and aesthetics of modern architecture. One of the pioneers of the aforementioned Deconstructivist movement, she and others paved the way for a groundbreaking new era of architecture: the appearance of tension and disorder in a

structurally-sound edifice. While most of her peers in the Deconstructivist movement (Frank Gehry, Daniel Libeskind, Rem Koolhaas, Peter Eisenman and others) were males, Hadid was one of the only women. Because of this, Hadid inadvertently influenced more women to join the male-dominated field of architecture. Tariq Khayyat, the head of the Middle East region for Zaha Hadid Architects said, "She's the Queen of the Curve, she's the Queen of the Straight Line, she's the Queen of Everything. She is the Queen of Architecture. Her ethos and methodologies of architecture are still inspiring generations to come" (*Lewis*).

Personally, Hadid is particularly inspiring to me for her fearless designs that transformed architecture as we know it, as well as her success as a female in the male-dominated architecture field. Prior to Hadid's work and the Deconstructivist movement, architecture was meant to look strong and solid. Hadid intentionally strived to create structures that made you question if it would collapse. Not only is it an engineering feat, but the buildings are unlike anything seen previously. The Antwerp Port Authority head office is especially inspiring to me. As interior designers, we often work within an existing structure or space. Hadid embraced this idea and rather than demolishing and wasting existing materials, she transformed the fire station by juxtaposing it with her signature style of sharp angles and a weightlessness in its proportions. Her limitless thinking challenges me, and so many others, to follow her legacy and defy the norm.

Although Hadid's life was cut short at the age of 65, her legacy remains as a pioneer in the Deconstructivist movement and a decisive leader in architecture. With overlapping shapes and opposing perspectives, Hadid and her fellow Deconstructivists challenged the old International Style. Drawing inspiration from the avant-garde Russian

Suprematists in the 1920's, Hadid transformed architecture as we know it, creating silhouettes that will influence architecture for generations. The Vitra Fire Station and the Antwerp Port Authority head office are just two examples of her contribution to the field. Known as the "Queen of the Curve", Hadid's legacy lives on in her many designs across the globe.

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