

ZAHA HADID'S ARUM INSTALLATION

Amadeo G. Galdino

Abstract

The present study analyzes the Arum Installation by architect Zaha Hadid (1950-2016) exhibited at the 2012 Venice Architecture Biennale. Therefore, we divided the installation in five sections with distinct subjects, with the aim of discussing its proposals and plastic aspects, since Hadid's work is marked by a distinctive aesthetic quality. According to its official description, the installation had as an objective to insert the Zaha Hadid Architects in a research lineage, succeeding architects from the twentieth century, pioneers in structural research; thus, a part of our research discusses in what ways the installation is successful in exposing and reaching this objective. Finally, we point to the tension that occurs between art and architecture in Zaha's work and career, parting from considerations about her paintings, exhibition designs and curatorships, and the readiness with which some of the commentators of her work call her an "artist".

Key words:

Zaha Hadid, Arum Installation, Architecture and Art

Introduction

Iraqi architect Zaha Mohammad Hadid (1950-2016), winner of the Pritzker Prize in 2004, has been notorious for her works such as the MAXXI Rome and the London Aquatics Centre (which held the 2012 Summer Olympics), which bear distinctive aesthetic qualities that point to Hadid's early studies of Russian Constructivism in her own paintings made for architectural projects.

The 2012 Venice Architecture Biennale featured Hadid's ARUM installation, which intended to present her office's work at the time as part of a "historical strand of research" which traces back to structural pioneers from the 20th century¹ such as Frei Otto and Heinz Isler, whose works were also displayed in the installation.

The present study aims to investigate the installation's content and visual qualities to understand how Hadid's visual expression relates to architectural demands. At a more theoretical level, we discuss if the claim of historical lineage from the ZHA is valid by comparing Hadid's architecture displayed in the installation with the work of the pioneers Frei Otto, Heinz Isler and Felix Candela. Finally, we approach her study of Suprematism as well as her involvement with exhibition design and curatorship to comprehend at which extent the artistic element is at play in her work and career as architect.

Results and Discussion

While conducting the research it became clear to us that the installation had quite different contents that could be better investigated if approached separately. Thus, we divided and analyzed ARUM in five different sections:

1. Central polished aluminum piece;
2. Display of the work of pioneers in material-structural research (Felix Candela, Heinz Isler, Frei Otto);
3. Display of the work of students of Zaha Hadid's 2011/2012 Master Class at the University of Applied Arts Vienna, concerning ideas for sport venues and auxiliary buildings for the Rio de Janeiro Olympic Park in 2016's Summer Olympics;
4. Exhibition of 8 architectural models of Hadid's buildings;

5. Exhibition of the work of contemporary architect Philippe Block with masonry structures.

This analysis was followed by research on the pioneers works and form finding processes through tests with materials such as fabric and soap they conducted to find optimal and beautiful architectural form and structure with less possible material. We compared their ideas with those of Parametricism, ZHA's current line of research and architectural style developed since 2008 that employs rule-based computer scripts to achieve architectural formal results by inter-articulation of existent social, topographical and urban elements.

Through use of primary sources such as interviews and discourses by Zaha and gathering information about her exhibition designs for Russian Avant-Garde, Henry Moore and Kurt Schwitters exhibitions, we could develop a better grasp of her involvement with the visual arts outside of her own pictorial practice.

Conclusions

Regarding plastic, theoretical and technical aspects, both the works of the pioneers and Parametricism tend towards curvilinearity and organic form, make use of form finding processes and make parallels with natural phenomena; but are distinct in purpose and concretion because the first aimed at optimization for material and cost reduction, and the second aimed first and foremost to create spatial order for better human navigability in the urban environment.

On Zaha's relation with the arts, it became evident that plastic aspects from her work, albeit very defining and related to many affinities with art works and artists, cannot be separated from the architectural concerns of transforming urban space, even at the design stages.

Acknowledgement

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¹ ZAHA HADID ARCHITECTS. Venice Architecture Biennale – Common Ground (s/d). Site oficial dos Zaha Hadid Architects. Disponível em: <<http://www.zaha-hadid.com/design/contribution-to-2012-venice-biennale-theme-%e2%80%98common-ground%e2%80%99/>>. Acesso em: 12/07/2018.