

Zaha Hadid First Large Scale Monographic Exhibition in Minaland, China  
At Modern Art Museum (MAM), Shanghai, June 2021

**MOVEMENT** / By Shai Baitel

*There is movement and movement. There are movements of small tension and movements of great tension and there is also a movement which our eyes cannot catch although it can be felt. In art this state is called dynamic movement.*

- Kazimir Malevitch

Desert sand dunes are constantly shifting. They are unique among landforms in that, despite their size, a gust of wind or a rain shower can completely reshape them in an instant. Dunes aren't necessarily towering; they can range from several centimeters to over a kilometer in height. Sand dunes are thus not defined by scale but by their continuous motion and movement. They transform, blend, and envelop one another, never offering a clearly delineated beginning and end. Their folds and curves extend over wide swaths of continents, dwarfing any viewer in both their size and seemingly infinite vastness. Their continual movement give dunes an ethereal quality. Materially they are of our world, but in their form, dunes are alien. In this ambiguous space, dunes open in our imagination an unfamiliar, expansive world of possibility, based in an otherworldly understanding of motion.

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With a brief, turbulent, and illustrious career spanning over 30 years—a relatively short time for an architect of her stature—Zaha Hadid was, until her untimely death in 2016, one of, if not the most commanding voices in contemporary architecture and design. Both in life and after her death, Hadid’s reputation has not been based solely on her works, but also on the relation between the woman and her architecture. Born to a prominent Iraqi family in 1950, writers and critics have often commented—and focused inordinately—on the gravity and significance of such a figure achieving success within the world of architecture. Hadid’s many accomplishments and accolades are remarkable considering the overwhelmingly white and male history of the discipline. To navigate such a world, Hadid developed a brave and spectacularly uncompromising persona for herself that, in part, elevated her to the level of international celebrity. Yet, for an architect whose practice was fundamentally based in fracturing and interrogating many shifting viewpoints, this is only a singular lens through which to view her *oeuvre*.

Hadid drew on her own identity and personal history in her work, but also incorporated disparate architectural and art historical debates in a revolutionary fashion. Yet, what exemplified her practice—and united the distinct aspects of her identity—was an obsession with movement. From a fraction of a second to an infinite gesture, movement, and its many turns and folds, defined Hadid’s architectural legacy. Her movement as a student from Baghdad to Beirut and then to London, her movement as a woman through a man’s world, her movement as a researcher and builder through various geographies and histories, all contributed to

architecture and design at once in perpetual and suspended motion. The result of these various moving curves, edges, lines, and folds was the dissolution of subject and object—of person and building—which opened up a new space that Hadid boldly defined in her architecture.

Over the course of her career, Hadid constructed movement across all timeframes and sizes. Her early built work, characterized by the 1993 Vitra campus fire station commission, was influenced by the abstracted motion of shapes in the work of Russian Constructivism and Suprematism<sup>1</sup>. Specifically, the geometric abstract painter Kazimir Malevitch (1879-1935) had a strong impact on Hadid during her studies at London's Architectural Association (AA). For her AA graduation project, she objectified his non-objective geometric forms in a project proposal called *Malevitch's Tektonik* (1976-1977), in which Hadid took his Suprematist forms as literal building blocks for a hotel suspended on a bridge above the Thames in London. In doing so she harnessed the infinitely suspended motion of Malevitch's paintings in an architectural style that gave form to abstraction by giving form to movement. While *Malevitch's Tektonik* was never built, it influenced her Vitra fire station, which was constructed out of various jagged, geometric forms that captured a brief moment of motion from a human-sized perspective. Invoking

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<sup>1</sup> Originating in Russia in 1915, *Constructivism* was a modernist philosophy first proposed by Vladimir Tatlin and Alexander Rodchenko that sought to reflect modern society and space by rejecting decorative stylization in art and architecture in favor of an abstract austerity.

The term *Suprematism* refers to an art based upon "the supremacy of pure artistic feeling" represented by abstract art rather than on visual depiction of objects. Suprematism was first proposed by Kazimir Malevitch in 1915.

multiple viewpoints on multiple planes, the fire station created a permanently frozen potential for action.

In her more recent work like the 2012 Heydar Aliyev Cultural Center in Baku, Hadid reformed her use of movement and perpetuity to create a type of contemporary, secular Baroque architecture. Gilles Deleuze writes that “the characteristic of the Baroque is that the fold goes onto infinity,” and within these folds the individual can be subsumed and convene with the divine. In Hadid’s later work, sharper lines and angles gave way to sloping curves, and the sheer scale of this project, as well as many others from the 2010s, exceeded human scale in relation to their movement. These more recent projects took direct reference from non-Western sources, often from Hadid’s youth. The Heydar Aliyev center is, in part, inspired by Islamic calligraphy, while other works reference the intricately woven rugs from Hadid’s Baghdad childhood home. These sources, however, are never the sole inspiration behind her architecture. They are decorative mechanisms for Hadid to achieve her own version of what the Baroque sought to communicate. Using worldly materials and sources, Hadid’s architecture creates a transcendent space where the individual and the structure become incorporated together in her design’s movement towards the sublime.

While many of Hadid’s final projects, including the Beijing Daxing International Airport, were crated on a grand scale, she also brought her vision of movement to smaller design objects, including furniture, centerpieces, shoes, and kitchenware.

These objects brought her jagged lines and infinite curves to domestic settings displaced from Hadid's own architectural works. Formalistically, her designs might feel unfamiliar, but their origins are certainly not vague. Various, fractured geometries, histories, and experiences are rewoven and suspended until a user or spectator intervenes. Like her grandiose structures, Hadid's smaller objects speak to the "dynamic movement" proposed by Malevitch, "which our eyes cannot catch but can be felt." Her designs, large and small, intimate movements that, structurally, will never happen, but forever feel possible. Indeed, Hadid did not tell anyone the direction of the movement her architecture and designs were taking but suggested infinite possibility. She was much too prescient to let her work be defined by a prevailing influence or inspiration. As her friend and architecture critic Aaron Betsky once wrote, "Hadid does not give us the plot; she sets the scene."