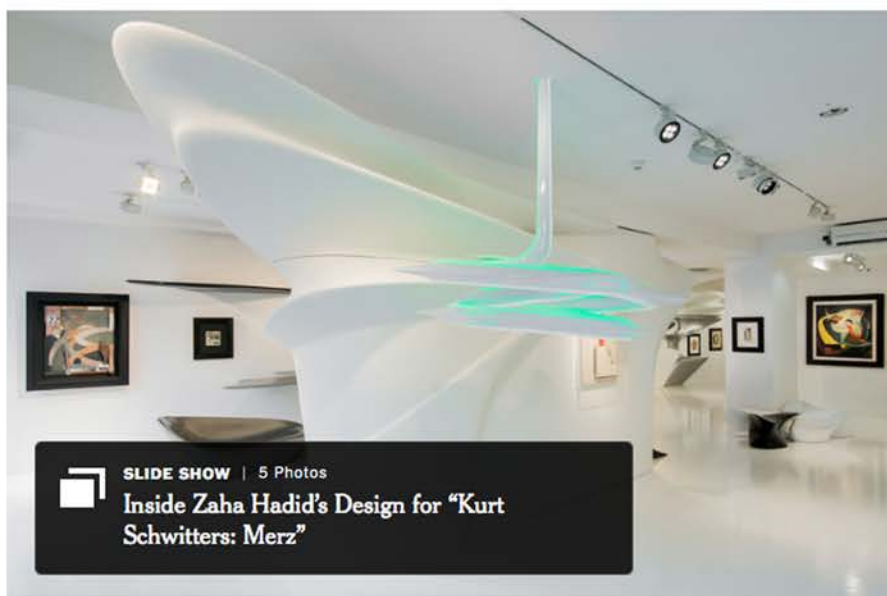


Zaha Hadid's Last Project: A Tribute to a Dada Master

By HETTIE JUDAH JUNE 14, 2016



Courtesy of Galerie Gmurzynska

Cocooning the entire lower floor of Zurich's Galerie Gmurzynska, an installation conceived by Zaha Hadid opens this week that is part iceberg, part cave and part shrine, created in homage to the influential Dadaist artist Kurt Schwitters. Inspired by Schwitters's destroyed "Merzbau" (1923-1937), an ever-changing collage sculpture that consumed his entire workspace, Hadid designed an all-encompassing grotto on which to show the artist's works. As with the "Merzbau," Hadid's structural collage includes artworks as well as "readymade" furniture and architectural features. Here, the artworks are assemblages and reliefs from across Schwitters's career, as well as a selection of illustrated and often surreal personal correspondence. They're offset by Hadid's furniture: undulating marble tables, modular seating elements and hybrid shelving systems that swoop and curve like melting glaciers.

Hadid worked on the show, which is timed to coincide with citywide centenary celebrations of the Dada movement, with the gallery director Mathias Rastorfer before her untimely death in March. “Obviously she died before it was finished: all the ideas were there, the concepts were there, we had talked about every detail, but it hadn’t been realized,” Rastorfer explains. “It’s literally the last project of Zaha, finished by her team.” Patrik Schumacher, senior designer and director of Zaha Hadid Architects, led the studio in completing the project, following an emotional conversation with Rastorfer at Hadid’s funeral.

Schumacher had worked closely with Hadid since 1988, and sees the architect’s deep interest in modern art as having played a formative role in her vision. “Zaha Hadid’s most radical expansion of design repertoires for architecture and urbanism is inspired by an

explosion of possibilities through early abstract art movements at the beginning of the century,” he explains. Schumacher identifies a number of signature elements in Hadid’s design vocabulary that can be traced back to Dada and allied art movements, from the manipulation of perspective, through the explosion of shapes away from a fixed point, to the concept of a building as a single flowing landscape. He also sees Hadid’s appreciation of chance and chaos as coming directly from the thought experiments of the modern avant-garde. “Every now and then we need radical brainstorming mutation sessions where we have to give ourselves up and allow ourselves to be thrust and pushed out of that space of preconception,” he says. “I think that’s the profound message of Dada.”

This is not Hadid’s first collaboration with Gmurzynska. Seven years ago, she designed a Kazimir Malevich exhibition for the venerable gallery, and her relationship with director Mathias Rastorfer was apparently both close and forthright. During the planning stages of this project, Hadid contacted Rastorfer requesting that he intercede to rescue the only Schwitters structure still in existence (the “Merz Barn” in England’s Lake District). He dutifully obliged: “I made a donation of £25,000 to have ‘Merz Barn’ restored — it was all Zaha’s idea.”

“Kurt Schwitters: Merz,” designed by Zaha Hadid is at Galerie Gmurzynska, Zurich, through September 30.