



Cincinnati's CAC Celebrates 20th Anniversary of Iconic Zaha Hadid-Designed Building

with Group Exhibition of International Artists Examining Her Legacy



The Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati. Photo: Wes Battoclette

Cincinnati, OH – August 2, 2023 – This year, as the Contemporary Arts Center (CAC) celebrates the 20th anniversary of its Zaha Hadid-designed building, the CAC marks the occasion with *A Permanent Nostalgia for Departure: A Rehearsal on Legacy with Zaha Hadid*, a group exhibition that examines legacy through a collection of new commissions by an international roster of artists that proposes a take on Hadid's practice and the CAC building itself. The Lois & Richard Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art, which opened in 2003, was the first U.S. museum designed by a woman and Hadid's first completed building in the U.S. The exhibition, which is guest curated by Maite Borjabad López-Pastor, opens September 22 and is on view through January 28, 2024.

"Zaha Hadid's iconic design of our building is a symbol of innovation and creativity, and it embodies our mission as an incubator for creative expression in the Cincinnati community and beyond," said Executive Director of the CAC, Christina Vassallo. "It only seems fitting to celebrate Hadid's visionary work as an artist by asking a new generation of artists to reflect and respond to the impact she made throughout her life and how her ideas continue to live on and inspire us all."

Through site-specific and all new commissioned works, the exhibition reflects upon the ideas of distance in time, history, cultural background, and landscapes, and how a legacy can become a passageway for

these ideas. Ranging in a diverse set of media that crosses sculpture, installation, textiles, sound, video, or performance and with multiple cultural backgrounds and practices, participating artists include **Rand Abdul Jabbar** (b. Baghdad, 1990, currently lives and works in Abu Dhabi), **Khyam Allami** (b. Damascus, 1981, currently lives and works in Berlin), **Emii Alrai** (b. Blackpool, 1993, currently lives and works in Leeds), **Hera Büyüktaşçıyan** (b. Istanbul, 1984), **Andrea Canepa** (b. Lima, 1980, currently lives and works in Berlin), **Dima Srouji** (b. Nazareth, 1990, currently lives and works in London) and **Hamed Bukhamseen** (b. Kuwait City, 1991) and **Ali Ismail Karimi** (b. Manama, 1989) as founders of Civil Architecture Studio.

Each artist takes a Hadid tenet or structure as inspiration, and reimagines and explores its concepts through different media and approaches ranging from disciplinary architectural revisions to personal stories and encounters. The commissioned works include:

- Deriving from a childhood photograph of Zaha Hadid, a cascading form made of carpet by Hera Büyüktaşçıyan weaves connections with the artist's own childhood through resurfacing waves of urban traces on uncanny foundations. While the piece flows across the "Urban Carpet," a key element of the CAC's building that Zaha intended to be a seamless connection between the museum and the street it sits on, it reimagines the idea of the ground as an accumulation of time and memory;
- A textile work by Andrea Canepa in which the artist wraps the gallery spaces of the building and subverts its geometry, creating a perceptual visual game that challenges a unique understanding of the space. As in Zaha's paintings, lines, surfaces, and volumes stop existing in their corresponding logics of one dimension, two dimensions, and three dimensions, and start to merge, breaking the logics of perception and representation;
- A photography and rammed earth sculptural installation by Rand Abdul Jabbar takes a point of departure from Hadid's graduation project, *Malevich's Tektonik* (1977), treating it as Zaha's foundational intellectual offering, like a manifesto. *Malevich's Tektonik* provides an opportunity to build on a cycle of referential gestures, tracing the emergence of the concept of a tektonik through its origins and exploring it as a proposition for a series of elemental units which gesture at the act of building from the earth itself, bringing into the galleries Cincinnati's soil;
- A spatial sound installation by Khyam Allami that is generated from the architectural proportions and divisions of the CAC building. Khyam's installation renders visible not only the sonic nature of the space but also the organizational logic from which the building is drafted;
- A video and sculptural installation by Dima Srouji that examines three cities that connect through Zaha's life: Baghdad, Beirut, and Cincinnati. This points out how the constant state of displacement that Zaha has referenced as somehow liberating, is undoubtedly simultaneously a state of dismemberment;
- A restaging of Hadid's exhibition design for a Russian avant-garde art constructivist show at the Guggenheim serves Civil Architecture (Ali Karimi and Hamed Bukhamseen) as a backdrop to speculate how a retrospective would look like if Zaha Hadid would to be discussed within the lineage of Iraqi architects Mohamed Makiya and Rifat Chadirji;
- And a fully immersive installation by Emii Alrai that points out how Zaha Hadid talks about the ability of the CAC to carve strange aggregate spaces by nesting one thing inside another. In such

a way, Alrai's installation fully reconfigures the space, its materiality, and the ritual path across it, using the gallery space almost as an archeological dig.

"Each of the new commissioned works by the contributing artists is an exercise to mobilize knowledge that departs from Zaha Hadid and evolves towards the unknown of the provocation. These works resist the idea of a retrospective or monographic traditional exhibition, and with it a monolithic narrative on the architect's practice," said Borjabad.

As the curator highlights, this multi-layered exhibition challenges what legacy means and examines the possibilities of actively engaging with the outcome of a creative action. A drawing, a painting, a building, a text, or an idea—once emancipated from the author—opens up a constantly evolving range of questions, meanings, and concepts that continue to generate an ecosystem of knowledge. This exhibition is a take on architectural legacy that transcends a monolithic approach and uses Hadid's architectural thinking as a source of knowledge that can be activated, transferred, and evolved.

The exhibition also brings a selection of paintings and ephemera by Zaha Hadid that depict the unique aesthetic regime the architect created. These selections highlight the early stages of Hadid's process, bringing back a vocabulary that preserves full potentiality to keep expanding.

About the Contemporary Arts Center (CAC)

The Contemporary Arts Center is a catalyst for dialogue and discovery, driven by the art, artists, and ideas of our time. Through an innovative slate of exhibitions, performances, educational and community programs and partnerships, the Contemporary Arts Center (CAC) provides opportunities for encounter with trailblazing artists both local and global, with cultural thought leaders, and with one's own creative potential. Embedded in the fabric of its community and committed to lifelong learning, the CAC serves as an integral forum where people can reflect, create, collaborate, and connect around a more inclusive and sustainable culture of tomorrow.

Since its founding in 1939, the CAC has been a champion of emerging ideas in contemporary art, hosting one of the first Midwest exhibitions of Picasso's *Guernica* in 1939; mounting an early exhibition of Pop Art in 1963; representing the United States at the São Paulo Biennial in 1975; and presenting—and successfully defending—the 1990 Mapplethorpe retrospective that became a lightning rod in the era's culture wars and propelled the CAC into the national spotlight. More recently, the CAC presented *Art and Race Matters*, the first comprehensive retrospective of Robert Colescott, one of America's most compelling and provocative artists. The exhibition was awarded a Sotheby's Prize in 2018 in recognition of curatorial excellence and its exploration of an overlooked and under-represented area of art history. Today, the CAC occupies the Lois & Richard Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art, the first museum designed by architect Zaha Hadid and the first U.S. museum designed by a woman.

The CAC's mission and work is made possible thanks to ongoing support from ArtsWave, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Ohio Arts Council.

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