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ARCHITECTURE

major exhibition of rare paintings and archives honors zaha hadid ten years after her passing

at LUMA arles, early paintings, notebooks and hours of video interviews from the hans ulrich obrist archive celebrate the visionary architect's legacy.

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HANS ULRICH OBRIST ARCHIVES: ZAHA HADID AT LUMA ARLES

'I don't use the computer. I do sketches, very quickly, often more than 100 on the same formal research,' Dame Zaha Hadid once **told designboom**, highlighting the physical drafting process behind her complex architectural designs. Today, a major show at **LUMA Arles** sheds light on the **visionary Iraqi-British architect**'s creative process, looking past the digital tools of her later career to focus instead on her early calligraphic drawings, quick sketches, and the paintings she used to test new spatial ideas long before a computer could generate them.

I Think There Should Be No End to Experimentation marks the sixth chapter in the Hans Ulrich Obrist Archives, a series of annual, archive-based exhibitions at LUMA dedicated to influential cultural figures. This landmark show, curated by Obrist and Arthur Fouray, honors the late architect, Pritzker Prize winner and experimental thinker on the tenth anniversary of **her passing**. Presented in **the Tower**, a building designed by her close friend, **the late Frank Gehry**, the exhibition unfolds in two distinct parts. In the Cherry Tree Gallery, it invites visitors to explore an extensive collection of archival material, previously unseen video interviews recorded between 2001 and 2013, and homage posters created by peers and admirers like **Sir Peter Cook**, **Stefano Boeri**, **Sumayya Vally**, **Iwan Baan**, and **Lina Ghotmeh**. The narrative continues in the Archives Gallery, which offers a physical encounter with her own hand through rarely exhibited paintings, early calligraphic drawings and personal notebooks.

Conceptually, the show explores three intersecting chapters of Hadid's career: her Constructivist origins, her early unrealized projects and their reception in France, and her longstanding relationship with Obrist, with whom she collaborated extensively at the Serpentine Galleries.*'My collaboration with Zaha began in the late 1990s with the Cities on the Move exhibition, co-curated with Rem Koolhaas. Our first major collaboration took place at the Villa Medici in 2000, and our conversations continued over the years, covering topics from utopia to technology,'* **Obrist recalls.***'Our final meeting took place shortly before her unexpected passing in Miami at the age of 65. In her apartment, surrounded by her designs, she revealed her extensive collection of personal notebooks and paintings, which she considered her most important work.'*



all images: Hans Ulrich Obrist Archives, Chapter 6 :Zaha Hadid, 'I Think There Should Be No End to Experimentation', 2026 – 2027, The Tower, Archives Gallery and Cherry Tree Gallery, LUMA Arles, France © Victor&Simon – Grégoire d'Ablon; unless stated otherwise

VIDEO ARCHIVES AND TRIBUTE POSTERS AT LUMA'S CHERRY TREE GALLERY

The enduring resonance of Zaha Hadid is reflected in the first part of **I Think There Should Be No End to Experimentation** at LUMA Arles' Cherry Tree Gallery. The room's exhibition furniture and layout, conceptualized by the acclaimed Japanese architect Kazuyo Sejima, were contingent upon a singular, poetic demand: the inclusion of a window that framed a living tree. This request was fulfilled by LUMA founder, Maja Hoffmann, and Frank Gehry, who designed a custom aperture specifically for the space, creating a contemplative environment meant for lingering and listening. Here, the legacy of Hadid is animated through a deeply personal convergence of audio, moving image, archival material and graphic homage.

At the heart of this installation is an extensive digital repository drawn from the archives of Hans Ulrich Obrist, who recorded an immense volume of interviews and conversations with the architect from 2001 to 2013. Presented across multiple screens and audio stations, these recordings transform the gallery into a living record of Hadid's intellectual evolution. The footage captures her ruminations on everything from utopian urbanism to the burgeoning intersection of design and technology. Viewers encounter rare exchanges, including early dialogues from 2001 that focus on typology and exhibition, a 2007 conversation at her London studio exploring her fluid designs for cultural institutions across the Arab states, and a 2013 discussion between Obrist, Hadid and Patrik Schumacher tracing her trajectory from Russian Constructivism to parametric urbanism. By prioritizing her own voice, the exhibition subverts the traditional, passive retrospective, allowing Hadid to remain the active narrator of her own radical trajectory.



tribute posters by Madelon Vriesendorp and Shumon Basar, Susan Hefuna, and Hashim Sarkis

Surrounding these glowing screens is a series of tribute posters that envelop the room in a collective memory. *'Posters are commissioned for each archive exhibition, asking artists and cultural practitioners who were friends with or influenced by the subject to create a piece in homage,'* **Vassilis Oikonomopoulos, Artistic Director at LUMA Arles, explains.** *'The beautiful posters on display for Zaha present another perspective on*

her history and influence.' The resulting artworks forge a communal narrative, translating her spatial language into deeply varied two-dimensional forms. Among them are three posters by Sumayya Vally with Arabic words translating to 'horizon, trace, together', a photograph of the MAXXI by Iwan Baan, and an original painting by Suzanne Treister. Contributors also include Madelon Vriesendorp and Shumon Basar, Simone Fattal, Francesco Vezzoli, Mehdi Moutashar, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and more. Together, the video archive and this graphic assembly demonstrate how Hadid's gravitational pull continues to shape the contemporary architectural imagination.



poster tributes, archival material and video footage in the Cherry Tree Gallery

DRAWINGS, PAINTINGS AND NOTEBOOKS IN THE ARCHIVES GALLERY

Long before her extraordinary career and numerous honors, which included becoming the first woman to win the Pritzker Architecture Prize in 2004, winning the Stirling Prize twice, and being named a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 2012, Zaha Hadid spent her early days earning a reputation as a paper architect, using the canvas as a laboratory for radical forms, movements, and worlds. The second part of the exhibition brings together her early calligraphic paintings, drawings and notebooks, described as *'exercises in Suprematist geometry that prefigure her built projects'.*

'This space showcases Zaha's rarely exhibited paintings, which were central to her practice long before she began building,' **Hans Ulrich Obrist notes.** *'During her time at the Architectural Association, she rebelled against the "dead historicism" of Léon Krier. Encouraged by her teachers Elia Zenghelis and Rem Koolhaas, she revisited the constructivist legacy of Lissitzky, Malevich, and Moholy-Nagy to create anti-gravitational reorganizations of space. Growing up in Baghdad, calligraphy heavily influenced the fluidity of her sketches. Her extraordinary paintings are standalone masterpieces.'*



Zaha Hadid's early paintings, including The World (89 Degrees) on the left wall, exhibited in the Archives Gallery

Central to this gallery are two defining masterworks that operate as visual manifestos. The first, The World (89 Degrees), is an extraordinary, standalone canvas into which Hadid attempted to distill the entirety of her spatial experiments up to that point. Equally radical is her presentation for The Peak, the 1983 Hong Kong competition that catapulted her to international fame. Subverting the vertical congestion of the city, she proposed a fragmented, horizontal skyscraper that acted as an intricate information package, signaling the dawn of an architecture tailored for the information age. Though The Peak tragically remained unbuilt due to political shifts and financial shortfalls, it cemented her status as a visionary figure in the architecture world.

'Zaha, an unknown architect at the time, won the competition out of 500 entries, largely thanks to the support of Arata Isozaki, who also championed Kazuyo Sejima early in her career,' **explains Obrist.** *'Zaha was a pioneer in a field with very few female voices. Her influence is evident today as a younger generation of female architects, including Lina Ghotmeh, Sumayya Vally, Frida Escobedo, and Marina Tabassum, win major international competitions. Her career remained challenging until the end; shortly before her death, she won the competition for the Tokyo Olympic Stadium, which, like The Peak, was ultimately unrealized.'*



The Peak, Hong Kong, China, 1982-1983, courtesy of Zaha Hadid Foundation, image © designboom

The exhibition culminates with a deeply intimate look at Hadid's methodology and her profound relationship with the French architectural context. Her ties to France were established early through unrealized competition entries like La Villette and a project in Bordeaux, as well as her inclusion in the Centre Pompidou's 1985 exhibition, Les Immatériaux, one of the first museum shows to introduce digital reality. To illustrate how she developed these complex spatial concepts before the advent of modern computing, this room showcases her personal notebooks, first exhibited at the Serpentine's 2016 exhibition Zaha Hadid: Early Paintings and Drawings. *'Her sketchbooks reveal the development of her practice,'* **says Arthur Fouray.** *'She used layered paper to plan architectural levels, an unconventional method that predated computer-aided design software like AutoCAD.'*

These sketchbooks, when viewed alongside her early drawings and sweeping canvases, serve as a comprehensive testament to a mind that continuously defied gravity. They prove that for Hadid, the act of drawing was just as monumental as the physical act of building. Her legacy is not simply one of finished structures, but of relentless forward motion. As she reflected in our 2007 interview,
'there are some very similar moments in the early work where the focus was on drawing, abstraction and fragmentation. Then it moved to the development of ideas. Lately it has become what architecture should be, which is more fluid organization. There has not been so much of a change but a development.'



the final room offers a deeply intimate look at Hadid's notebooks and her relationship with France



her personal notebooks were first exhibited at the Serpentine's 2016 exhibition



exhibition view, Archives Gallery



Zaha Hadid Architects, Victoria City Aerial, Blue beam, Berlin, Germany, 1988 © Zaha Hadid Foundation



exhibition view, Archives Gallery



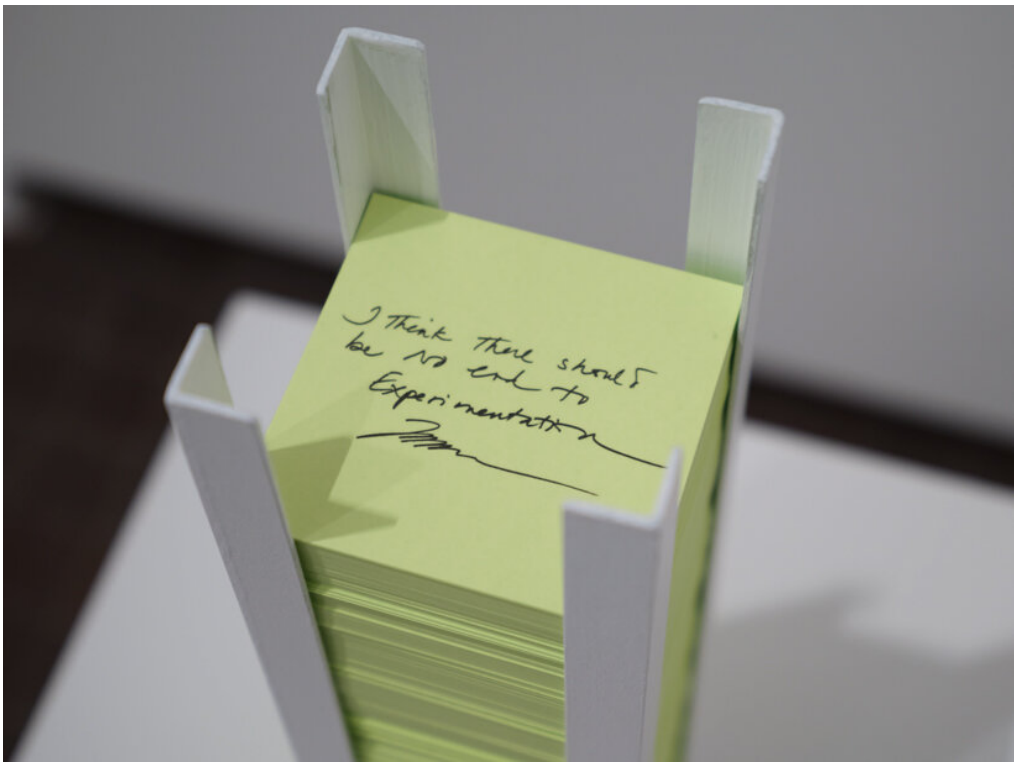
Zaha Hadid Architects, Victoria City Aerial, Aerial perspective, Berlin, Germany, 1988 © Zaha Hadid Foundation



exhibition view, Archives Gallery



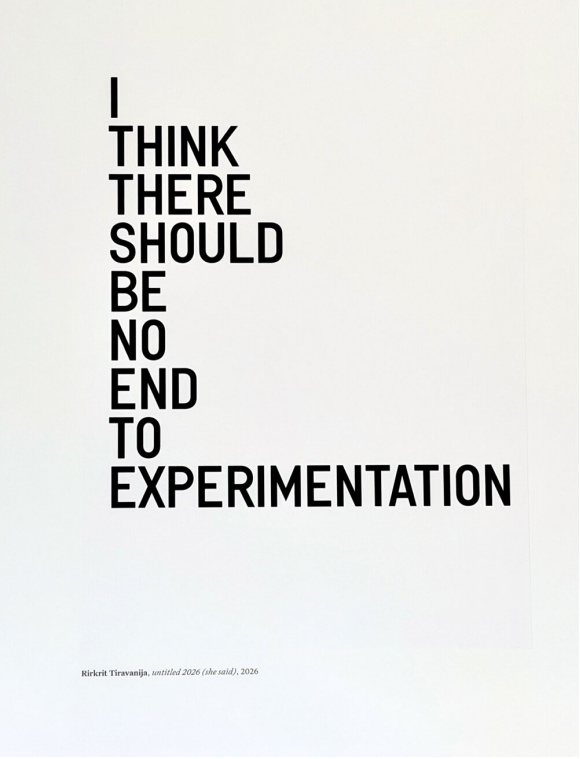
Zaha Hadid Architects, 59 Eaton Place, Aerial perspective of master bedroom and library, London, United Kingdom, 1981-1982
© Zaha Hadid Foundation, image © designboom



visitors are welcome to take post-it notes featuring Zaha Hadid's own writing



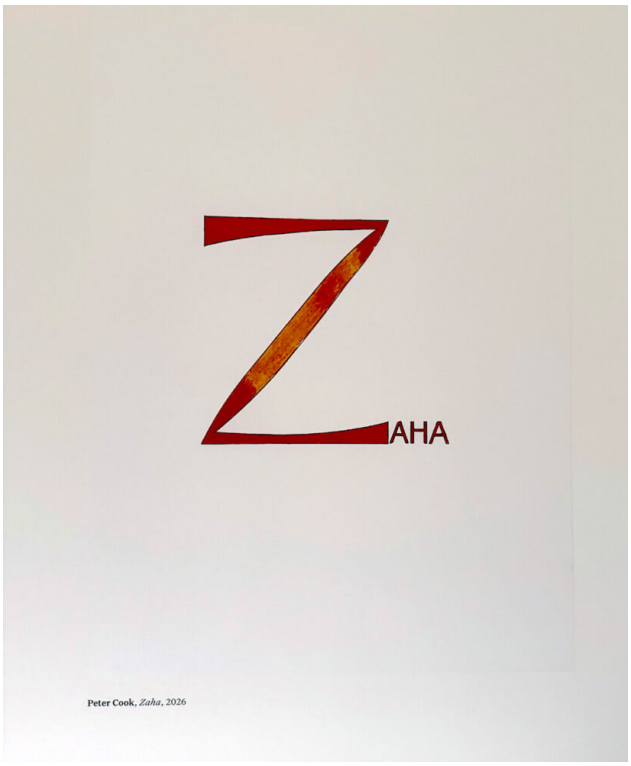
Zaha Hadid © photograph by Brigitte Lacombe



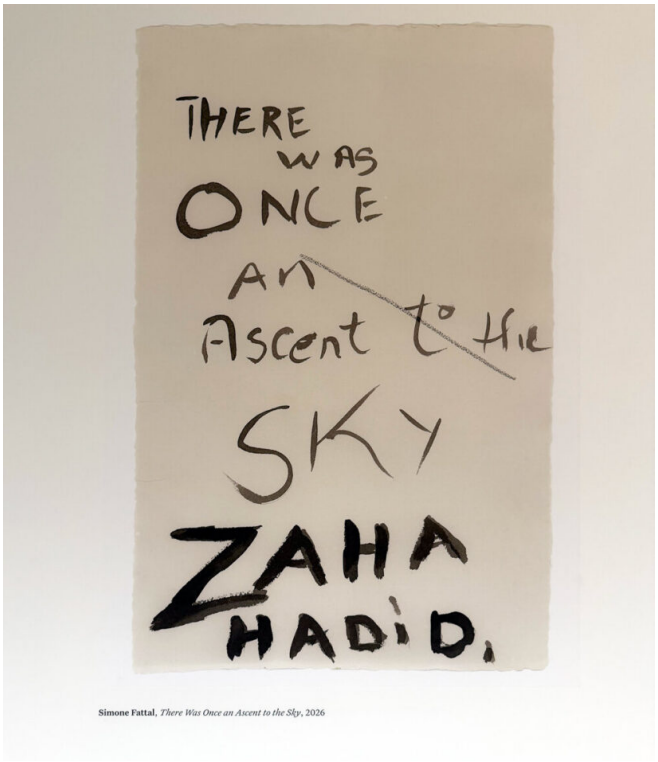
Zaha Hadid homage posters: Rirkrit Tiravanija | image © designboom



Zaha Hadid homage posters: Lina Ghotmeh | image © designboom



Zaha Hadid homage posters: Sir Peter Cook | image © designboom



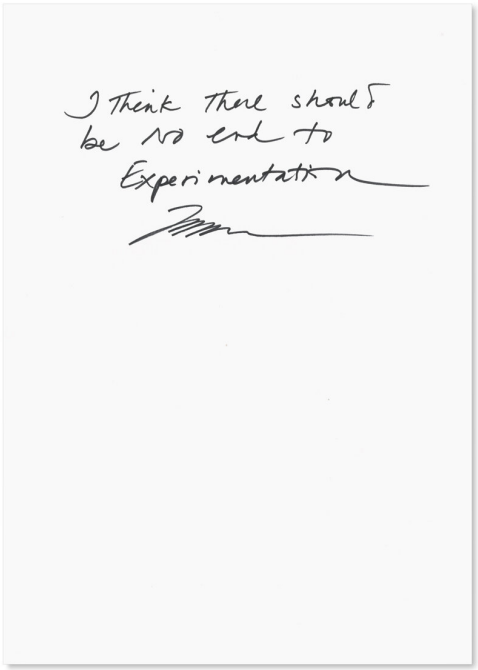
Zaha Hadid homage posters: Simone Fattal | image © designboom



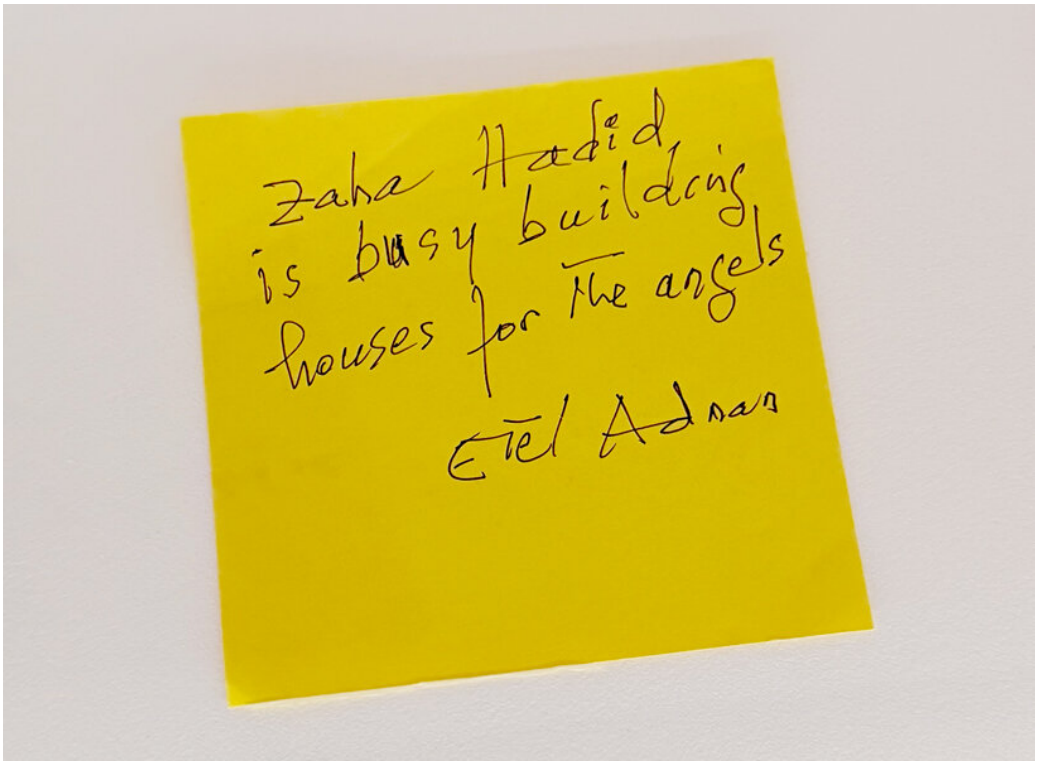
Zaha Hadid homage posters: Francesco Vezzoli | image © designboom



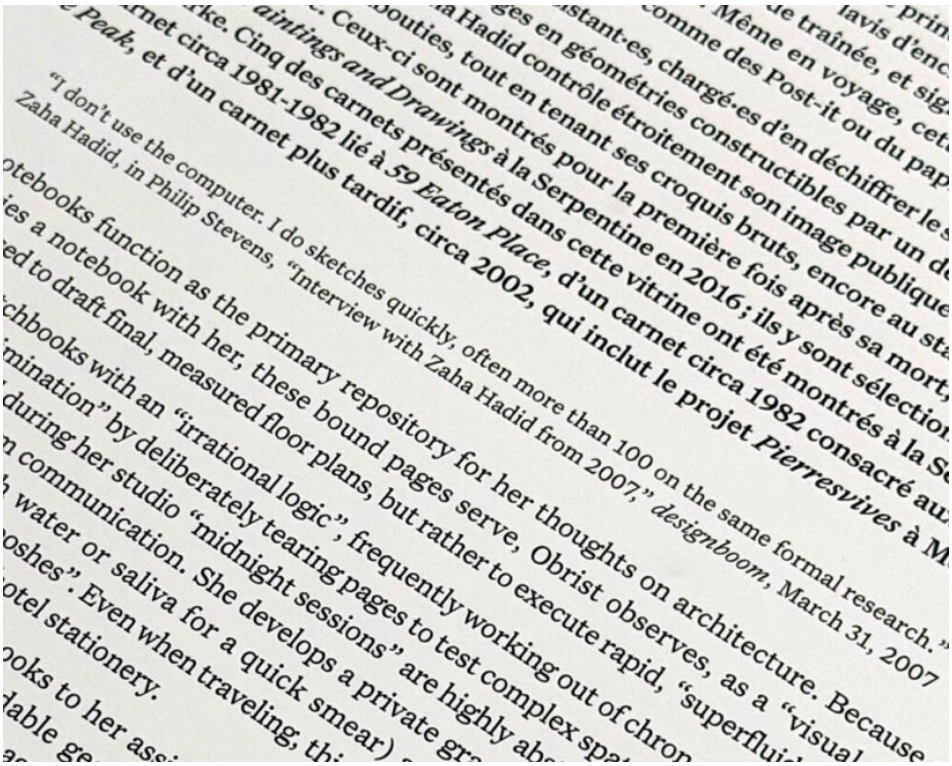
Zaha Hadid homage posters: Hashim Sarkis | image © designboom



Zaha Hadid, I Think There Should Be No End to Experimentation, 2013, Feltpen on paper, 21 x 29.7 cm, Courtesy of Hans Ulrich Obrist © Hans Ulrich Obrist



Etel Adnan Post-it note from the Hans Ulrich Obrist archive | image © designboom



designboom's 2007 interview with Zaha Hadid quoted in the exhibition | image © designboom

project info:

name: Hans Ulrich Obrist Archives | Chapter 6: Zaha Hadid | 'I Think There Should Be No End to Experimentation' **dates:** May 1st, 2026 – March 31st, 2027 **location:** LUMA Arles, The Tower, Archives Gallery & Cherry Tree Gallery, Level -2, France | @luma_arles

organized by: Vassilis Oikonomopoulos, Artistic Director, LUMA Arles **curators:** Hans Ulrich Obrist, Senior Advisor | @hansulrichobrist | Arthur Fouray, Curator and Archivist **with the assistance of:** Lucas Jacques-Witz, Curator and Archivist Assistant in close collaboration with the Zaha Hadid Foundation | @zahahadidfoundation