

Painterliness

Zaha Hadid's Hoenheim Nord terminus and car park

The brief for the Hoenheim nord terminus and car park, on a suburban site outside Strasbourg, suggests a quintessential Zaha project - it is all about movement. A terminal building connects various forms of transport: trams, cars, bicycles and pedestrians, and the design seeks to dynamically articulate this.

In addition to the terminus, the scheme provides surface parking for 800 cars; it is after all, effectively, a Park and Ride stop. Where certain of Zaha's schemes, like the Hong Kong Peak project, strive to escape gravity and seemingly fly off the page, here the concern is with the ground, and the transformation of the earth's surface.

The parking spaces are demarcated by white lines that are painted on to black tarmac. These lines gently rotate with the curve of the site, evident in the rhythmic strokes of the project's paintings and drawings. The ubiquitous rectangular markings of a parking space are here abstracted, with simple dots suggesting the end of each space, such that the overriding sense of purposeful movement is not compromised. These lines are accompanied by a series of pencil-like lampposts, angled as if swept back by their trajectory. This treatment absorbs the car park into the terminus project, extending it far beyond the built envelope.

Somehow the elements that make up the project are not spectacular, but instead a little mundane – paint, asphalt and lampposts – and so one feels that rather than trying to invent a brave new world, this world has become the architect's canvas. And yet the translation from painting to project seems to me one of Zaha's most successful, maybe because the project is so close to two dimensions in its realisation.

I think that because of this, and perhaps also unexpectedly, the project is formally indistinct. In place of a singular, albeit complex shape, the project suggests a marking out of the ground into a series of overlapping territories within the wider landscape.

In their text for the project the architects describes this effect of a shifting whole as a 'magnetic field.' And, like an artists canvas - tarmac, painted lines and angled light posts - are built up as layers to the ground surface. In contrast to a formally unifying strategy, the project comprises distinct elements that are brought into relationship with each other. And so for me, this project suggests a slightly different Zaha architecture, one where the issue of form is peripheral.

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