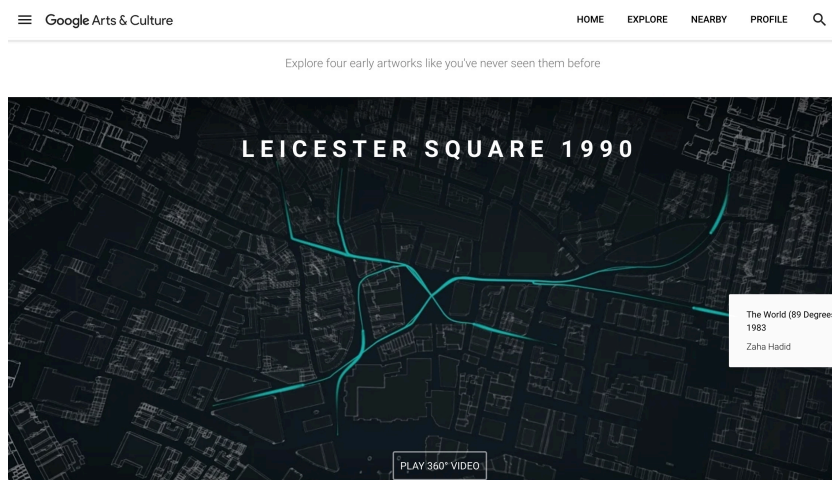


Zaha Hadid at Serpentine Galleries

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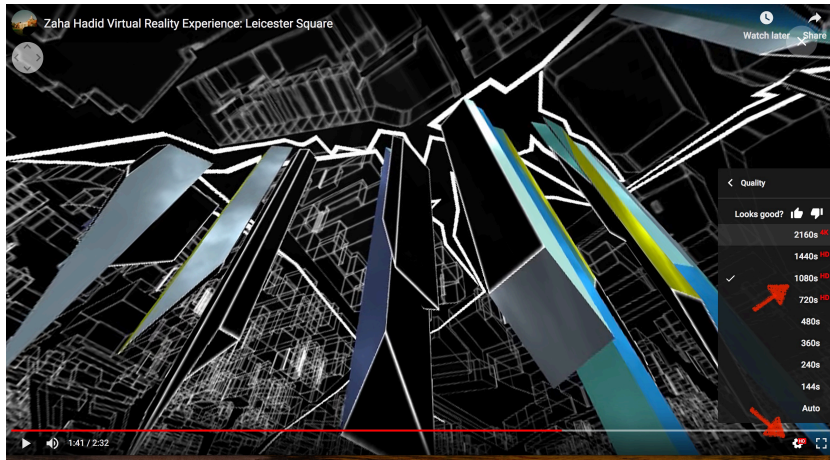


Zaha Hadid at Serpentine Galleries offers a web-based experience of Zaha Hadid: Early Paintings and Drawings, a retrospective of the architect Zaha Hadid's artworks shown at the Serpentine Sackler Gallery in 2016-2017. The experience, curated by Google Arts & Culture and Zaha Hadid Virtual Reality Group, introduces public virtual audiences to Hadid,

her early paintings and drawings, and some of these works as reimaged in 3D VR. The webpage is a "theme" in Google Arts & Culture, a compilation of brief online exhibitions and multimedia content that provides access to artists' works, histories, and contexts.

Following current design practices, the experience is presented in a single scroll webpage with embedded media and minimal text accessible on a range of devices. (This reviewer tested in Firefox and Chrome on a Mac laptop and in Chrome on an Android mobile device.) With its actionable language and clear navigation, the webpage invites interaction.

From the title and tagline at the top, viewers move down the page to two online exhibits that provide contextual information about the artist and the Serpentine exhibition. Images of Hadid's artworks are paired with brief textual descriptions that engage students, scholars, and Google Arts & Culture's "culturally curious" alike. The experience's core is located in four 360° Youtube videos embedded in the webpage.

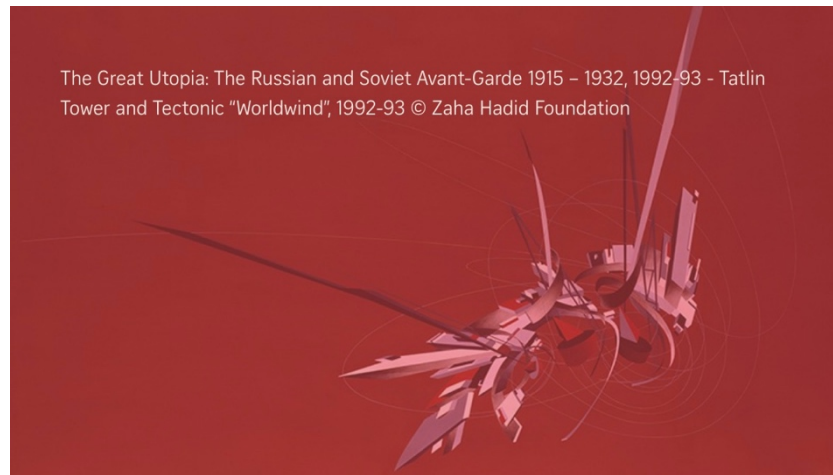


These brief time-based displays facilitate remote exploration of the artist's early works as they were digitally reinterpreted for the Serpentine exhibition. While the animators control flythrough motion in the renderings, viewers control where they look from a first-person perspective. It is as if with a click-and-drag of the

mouse or a tilt of the mobile device viewers can turn their heads to reexamine Hadid's creations from a seemingly infinite number of angles. In this medium, viewers can look beyond the canvas, playing with their own viewing perspectives just as Hadid bends perspective in her original 2D designs and 3D recreations. This form of interaction makes each view a fresh experience, even as the animation remains the same. The immersion is enhanced by an ambient soundtrack that gives listeners an expansive sense of the space they have entered, drawing them forward into Hadid's futuristic imaginings.

The use of 360° video, as opposed to a web-based VR viewer, also enables viewers to access the VR experience without a headset. All that is required is an internet connection. Those with stable internet connections can also choose their video resolution in Youtube's viewer. The resolution can be set as high as 4K, but 1080s is sufficient for a high-quality viewing experience.

Despite the commendable choice of accessible VR technology on the part of the VR Group, the videos and the Google Arts & Culture theme overall may remain difficult to engage with for differently abled audiences. While the majority of the theme's content is static (image or text), there is little provided in the site's architecture by way of image or video description for a screen reader to capture--a not insignificant setback for audiences who might need this information for optimal interaction.



Still, “Zaha Hadid at Serpentine Galleries” invites fluid, exploratory engagement for a variety of audiences who can dip their toes lightly into the site’s content or take a deeper dive into Hadid’s works. The Google Arts & Culture theme widens the Serpentine’s audience considerably and provides continued access to a kind of digital repository for the exhibition, which may be used for future teaching and research. Whether viewing Hadid’s works for the first or fortieth time, virtual visitors will come away with a strong sense of the architect’s unique and evolving artistic practices as they span Hadid’s life.