



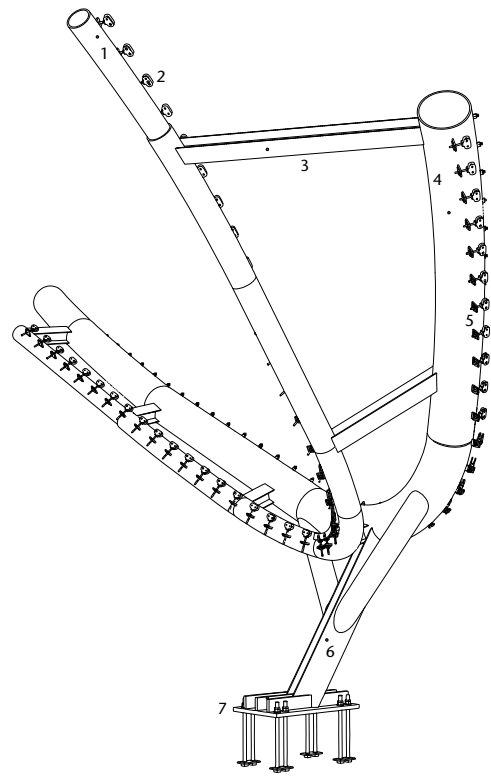
Piers Taylor is disappointed to find no surprises in the Serpentine Sackler Gallery

I have no doubt that Zaha Hadid is a great architect, but we want more from our great architects than a project that doesn't develop their thinking, and gives us what we already know. Call me greedy, but I want to be surprised and delighted by great architects. I want them to be steps ahead of the rest of us, and bamboozle us with their clever thinking. Sure, we also need great artists to fail sometimes – but the Serpentine Sackler extension isn't that; it just isn't really trying.

The Sackler was a lazy commission by the Serpentine Gallery, where Hadid is a long-standing trustee. Presumably the logic was that a signature building would attract popular attention. But it had greater obligations, and a gallery should know better than to allow itself to be a passive recipient of genius. All projects result from a conversation between architect and client, and it strikes me that this conversation wasn't very inspired.

When a major architect takes on a comparatively small project, it can act as a piece of research or polemic, but the Serpentine Sackler does neither. Given the relative freedom of brief, the extension doesn't work any idea hard enough, and doesn't move the game on. It's a building that might have happened any time in the last 20 years of Zaha-dom.

Ring beam isometric 1 Outer tube, 2 cleats (fixing for inner membrane), 3 cross member, 4 inner tube, 5 cleats (fixing for outer embrane), 6 column, 7 base plate.



Formally, it is what we might expect – no more and no less. Once, Hadid's relationship with the advanced geometry unit at Arup was her calling card, but now that has gone, what is there? I'm not a shape fascist like many architects, but of all the things this extension could have been, why this?

To my mind the Sackler doesn't work especially well in terms of its connection (or lack thereof) to the existing building, or what it achieves for its occupants. It expects us to marvel at its formal genius, and indeed, if it allowed us to sit in the landscape beneath a glorious folded handkerchief roof and achieved nothing else, great. Instead, we're contained in a sealed box with no direct connection to the outside.

This is the sort of project for which a young architect would give their eye teeth. Does the old guard, of which Hadid must now be considered part, have the equivalent burning hunger to excel? Ultimately, this feels like a building from another time, one when we were all a little more naïve. So what next Zaha? Where now? To keep your status you need to continue to be a game changer. Next time show us a glimpse of something we didn't already know. Something new.

Piers Taylor is founder of Invisible Studio, unit master at the AA and presenter of the BBC television series 'The House that £100k Built'.

