

LIFE & STYLE | JULY 24, 2009

PUBLIC ART

A New Monument—For a Few Months

As star architect designs for a Chicago park, costs and delays build

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By KELLY CROW

Zaha Hadid's new pavilion in Chicago looks a lot like a futuristic camping tent, with a dome of aluminum rods covered in gray fabric. If only the project were as easy as a tent to put up.

Intended to be a summer-long fixture of Millennium Park, the architect's Burnham Pavilion is now scheduled to open by Aug. 4, after a string of design snags and costly delays more commonly associated with a new museum or concert hall.

As more cities and companies recruit star architects to design temporary landmarks, they are discovering that portable art often isn't any easier to build than pieces that aim for timelessness. The temporary, often ornate, public works are increasingly seen as popular ways to attract tourists and boost a city's art world clout.

The pavilion in Chicago was supposed to open June 19 to mark the 100th anniversary of architect Daniel Burnham's reworking of the city's street grid. Yet this week, more than a dozen workers were stitching and fitting 1,600 yards of gray fabric over the 70-foot-long undulating form.

A mid-gear swap in materials and contractors also drove up costs, turning the \$500,000 privately funded project into a \$650,000 work. Organizers used funds from their advertising budget to make up the difference, says Emily Harris, executive director of the Burnham Plan Centennial, a civic group that commissioned the work along with another pavilion designed by Amsterdam-based Ben van Berkel of UNStudio.

Originally slated to open on a Saturday when the park would be packed, the opening was just pushed to midweek so officials will have a few, low-traffic days to gauge the potential wear and tear of visitors. "Will people go in and try to climb all over it?" Ms. Harris says.

With costs often spiraling into the tens of millions for permanent cultural structures, temporary pavilions are an increasingly popular alternative. London's Serpentine Gallery asked Ms. Hadid to create its first summer pavilion nine years ago. It proved so popular it became an annual commission later taken up by architects like Frank Gehry and artists like Olafur Eliasson. Luxury goods company Chanel recently paid Ms. Hadid to create Mobile Art, a 700-square-foot container that looked like a coiled white snake and exhibited artworks inspired by the company's quilted handbags. The reinforced plastic and aluminum container unfurled in Hong Kong, Tokyo and New York last year but Chanel later canceled plans to take it to other cities due to cost cutting.

For decades, groups like the Public Art Fund in New York have commissioned artists' projects like last summer's towering mechanical waterfalls along New York's East River. Mr. Eliasson's "The New York City Waterfalls" brought in \$69 million to the city, the mayor's office says.

Ms. Hadid, the first woman to win architecture's Pritzker Prize, was born in Baghdad in 1950 and set up her London-based practice in 1980. For years, she struggled to convince institutions that her sinuous designs were possible to build. Her Phaeno Science Center in Wolfsburg, Germany, for example, looks like a spaceship hovering above ground but is, in fact, supported underneath.

Smaller assignments like her temporary pavilion in Chicago let her experiment with materials or theories before trying bigger, permanent projects like the London Aquatics Centre for the 2012 summer Olympics or the Guangzhou Opera House in China.

"The pavilion is a classic vehicle for architectural manifestos because their function is not as restrictive as that of a museum or other building," Ms. Hadid says.

For Chicago, she says she thought about how tension alters the look of fabric as it is pulled taut or twisted. The result: an elliptical building with strategic gashes to let in light and pod-like openings that people can pass through. Her design includes diagonal lines, a nod to Burnham's 1909 city plan which famously laid out a fanned grid of streets diagonally from Chicago's city center out into the suburbs.

The physical complexity of the project quickly overwhelmed local contractors. Aaron Helfman, president of TenFab, an Evanston, Ill., company that designs trade-show booths, says it took nearly five months and several structural engineers. The addition of a 400-pound projection screen, for example, upset the math because the whole structure was so lightweight.



Burnham Plan Centennial

Zaha Hadid's pavilion, before the fabric was attached, in Chicago's Millennium Park.

Eventually, Mr. Helfman says he told the committee that the work was taking longer than expected. Days before the planned opening in June, it was more than half finished but it looked like a dinosaur skeleton, its metal ribs not yet sheathed in fabric. Soon after, the committee replaced them with another local company, Fabric Images, to finish the work, Mr. Helfman and Ms. Harris say. Fabric Images couldn't be reached to comment.

At least 16 million people have visited Millennium Park since it opened a few years ago with additions like Anish Kapoor's mirrored bean sculpture, "Cloud Gate." Ms. Harris says Ms. Hadid's contribution has the added upside that it can be dismantled and reassembled in less than a week's time.

After the work comes down Oct. 31, the committee plans to deed it to the city to lend or rent out to other cities. It doesn't plan to extend its stay in Chicago.

"We don't get a lot of park traffic in Chicago during the winter," Ms. Harris says. "Besides, it's not made to withstand snow loads."

Printed in The Wall Street Journal, page W12

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