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### A complicated conversation

By Patrick T. Reardon on Tue., 07/13/2009 –8:15 pm.

“It looks like an alien spaceship,” said Carmel Damazo, a Naperville accountant, as she stood on the ramp of the Ben van Berkel-designed pavilion in Millennium Park, recently installed to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the publication of the Plan of Chicago.

“That was the first thing we thought of --- ‘Oh, something landed here overnight.’ ”



Erica Davis-Holder, a banker who lives in Berwyn, saw the gleaming white structure in the Chase Promenade differently.

“This one is beautiful lit up at night with all the colors. It’s gorgeous,” she said. “Maybe because it was raining the other night, but it reminds me of water flowing --- a water fall.”

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

[Patrick T. Reardon](#) is a Chicagoan, born and bred. He has been writing about the city, its region and planning issues, mainly in the Chicago Tribune, for nearly 40 years. [\[MORE\]](#)



Let's face it, the two-story-tall, bi-level pavilion is an odd duck on the Chicago landscape. It's not a building, and it's not the sort of art that's hermetically sealed in a museum.

It's a sculpture you can walk in and through. One that you're supposed to walk into.

(But not climb on, as some feistier visitors have tried.)

Van Berkel, an Amsterdam architect and co-founder of UNStudio, was one of two international figures commissioned to develop innovative designs for temporary pavilions to inspire the citizens of the Chicago region to dream boldly and creatively about the future. His work is untitled, he said, because he wants each viewer to come up with a personal reading of the structure.



The second pavilion, conceived by London-based architect Zaha Hadid, the first woman to win the Pritzker Architecture Prize, won't be ready until Aug. 1. Right now, it's under a tent with clear plastic sidewalls. Visitors can watch workers finish the structure's intricately curved and delicately positioned 7,000-piece aluminum frame and stretch fabric across that swooping metal network.

Both pavilions will come down after Oct. 31. That will be the end of the van Berkel structure, but the Hadid, for all its delays, can be dismantled and re-erected somewhere else.

### **A conversation results**

The scene now is a reminder that, whenever two artworks are set next to each other, a conversation results. The lines of one complement or challenge the curves of the other. This one's shine drowns out that one's softness.



Visitors to the Van Berkel pavilion gaze at the tent in which the unfinished Hadid structure is taking shape.

In this case --- for the moment, at least --- the interaction of the pavilions is complicated by the unfinished quality of the Hadid work. Visitors have positive or negative reactions to the van Berkel, but everyone I spoke with seemed to be captivated by the mystery and potential of the Hadid.

For instance, on a recent morning, Priya Valenti was keeping cool under the van Berkel roof with her two-year-old daughter Lena while holding Lena's seven-week-old sister Laila.

"We like it," she said. "It's a nice place to sit and get a little shade." What about its looks? "I'm no art critic," she said, but added, "It's not the prettiest thing, but I like it as a gathering space."

Valenti glanced a few yards to the south at the shell of the Hadid pavilion. “We’re interested to see that one,” she said.

“It’s going to be beautiful.”

**"A big circle wave"**

Tonya White, an accountant from Carol Stream, also found the van Berkel wanting.

For her, it brought to mind waves. “It looks like a big circle wave,” she said. “I like the holes, but it would be nice if it had something else in there. It’s neat, but it’s boring.”



Elzbieta Kaczynska dismissed the van Berkel as “too heavy.” But, then, she was more than a bit prejudiced.

A visitor from Poland at the start of a U.S. vacation, Kaczynska, an assistant to her businessman father, had made a special point to stop in Chicago to see the Hadid pavilion. “I’m very disappointed this one is not open,” she said.

Nonetheless, she studied the bare skeleton of the frame’s ribs and examined the renderings of how the structure will look when completed. “It’s going to be amazing,” she said. “You can see the beauty. I’m always looking for the beauty.”

**"You can't engineer art"**

In from Wisconsin, Richard Simonson, a steel fabricator who has worked as an exhibit builder at the Discovery

World Museum in Milwaukee, took a professional interest in the work underway on the Hadid.

He even liked the naked frame. “I could see something like this in Las Vegas where it could be used for a light show,” he said.

For Simonson, the delayed completion of the structure was simply part of the creative process.

“It’s a work in progress,” he said. “That’s why they call it art. You can’t engineer art and say, ‘This is what the “Mona Lisa” is going to look like.’ It’s all about innovating and solving problems.”