

**Cincinnati**

**Zaha Hadid**

Lois and Richard Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art  
Zaha Hadid, born in Iraq in 1950, earned degrees in mathematics and architecture, then worked with Rem Koolhaas and Elia Zenghelis before starting her own design firm in London. The Lois and Richard Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art is one of several recent projects responsible for skyrocketing her work into the major leagues. Is it art?

The façade is transparent at street level, with a two-story glass window, and glass seems to wrap around much of the six-story building. The rounded concrete frame of one front window is perfect for skateboarders, whom the police discourage, and the street-level concrete floor curves up one back interior wall, creating what Hadid calls an "urban carpet." How did the architect engineer this steel and concrete building in which glass seems to support cantilevered block-like elements? One answer seems to be interior piers and columns, which are alternately round, square, and triangular. Elegant, elongated diagonal stairs down one side of the building and other diagonal features may offer structural support, in addition to giving viewers well-designed sweeping diagonals and sight lines.

The opening exhibition, titled "Somewhere Better Than This Place" after a work by Felix González-Torres, features 66 works by 35 contemporary artists (including Cai Guo-Qiang, John Armleder, and Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle) and shows the versatility of the 87,000-square-foot building, which has 25,000 square feet of gallery space but no permanent collection. Big windows on one side of two upper levels, a large skylight, and low walls in some spaces provide natural light and mezzanines to look up or down to other floors. Other spaces may be darkened, such as the galleries for Lorna Simpson's *Easy to Remember*, a video of lips, and Shirin Neshat's



*Fervor*, a video about forbidden desire in Iran. The flexibility within the spaces permits other varied uses—from a tropical wind tunnel to a 12-sided teak room to an installation of a Thai kitchen serving food. Janet Cardiff's *Forty-Part Motet*, on loan from MoMA, is installed in a room that is not exactly square; 40 speakers in an oval each present one singer's part of a Renaissance composition by Thomas Tallis. As listeners go from speaker to speaker and sit on the signature creamy-white M-shaped benches in the center of the room, the acoustics are excellent. Unlike many museums, this one makes room for aural art.

The color scheme alternates light and dark spaces to create geometric games for the eye. The natural pale gray of the concrete exterior blends well with the sky on an overcast day and generally suggests transparency in this busy urban location. A long black irregular rectangle juts out from a middle floor; in the right light, this, too, seems effortlessly suspended. Hadid has managed to make a heavy building look and feel light,

inside and out. The rhythmic interactions of variously sized spaces, along with subtle changes in elevation—even on the same floor—keep the viewer engaged and in motion.

Corners and smaller spaces are used in provocative ways. In one end room, the shadows on the walls and ceiling and the triangular pillar attract more attention than the work on display. In a narrow end gallery, Patty Chang's four extraordinary video installations have a Frida Kahlo feel, especially the one in which she is dressed exotically, wearing a blindfold and shaving her own pubic hair. In a video dealing with loss, Chang talks nonstop as she cuts

off what appears to be one of her breasts in a huge bra; inside is a cantaloupe, which she eats with a spoon as she talks. This corner had plenty of viewers. On the second floor, there are two levels. A high-ceilinged space features a Chinese healing installation with herbal bath, huge figurative rocks, and live song birds. Down a few stairs, a two-part installation,

**Above: Installation view of (left) Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle and Douglas Garofalo, *Cloud Prototype for an Edition of 3*, 2003, fiberglass and titanium alloy foil; and (right) John Armleder, *Untitled (Global v)*, 1998, six mirrored disco balls with reversible motors. Right: View of Zaha Hadid's CAC building as it neared completion.**



TOP: TONY WALSH / BOTTOM: PAUL WARCHOL

*Badge of Honor*, by Pepón Osorio features a spartan jail cell with a video of a father talking to his son; next door is a larger space—the son’s rococo dream bedroom crammed with sports equipment, a bicycle, and colorful toys. The boy’s video tells his father how much he misses him: things cannot replace love.

Finishing touches round out Hadid’s concept for the space: ceilings have interesting grille or grid patterns, floors are inlaid with lights or fine wood in adjacent bone and black hues. The members’ lounge is formed from two four-sided shapes that meet under a large window. The top floor is an Unmuseum, an interactive play area for all ages. It features objects that make weird sounds, a robotic tree that moves and sheds water in a kinetic response to viewers’ movements, and a “complex colors” room with plaid wallpaper, where one may sit in overstuffed chairs and watch the live video feed from the robotic tree room. The museum, by design, invites participation, and it even provides crayons and chalk. Since many of the objects are fragile and within touch, there are about 32 security cameras, just to be safe.

Cincinnati is proud of its architectural gems, old and new. The new CAC works on every level. If you believe art serves no function and has no use value, then a building is not art. Otherwise, Hadid’s CAC is a masterwork.

—Jan Garden Castro

## San Francisco

### Rainey Strauss

364 Hayes Street Gallery

One of the trickiest aspects of appreciating much recent art is understanding how its theoretical underpinnings dictate artists’ material and ideographic choices. While many of these choices appear to be a natural outcome of the performative and conceptually based art explorations that began during the 1960s and ’70s, a growing shift in art practice during the past decade has resulted in

an arguably “new” aesthetic, presently given various names including “relational art.” As Nicolas Bourriaud maps out in his *Relational Aesthetics*, written in the early 1990s, such art includes an expanded range of methodologies and forms that emanates from the synthesis of human relationships and their social context.

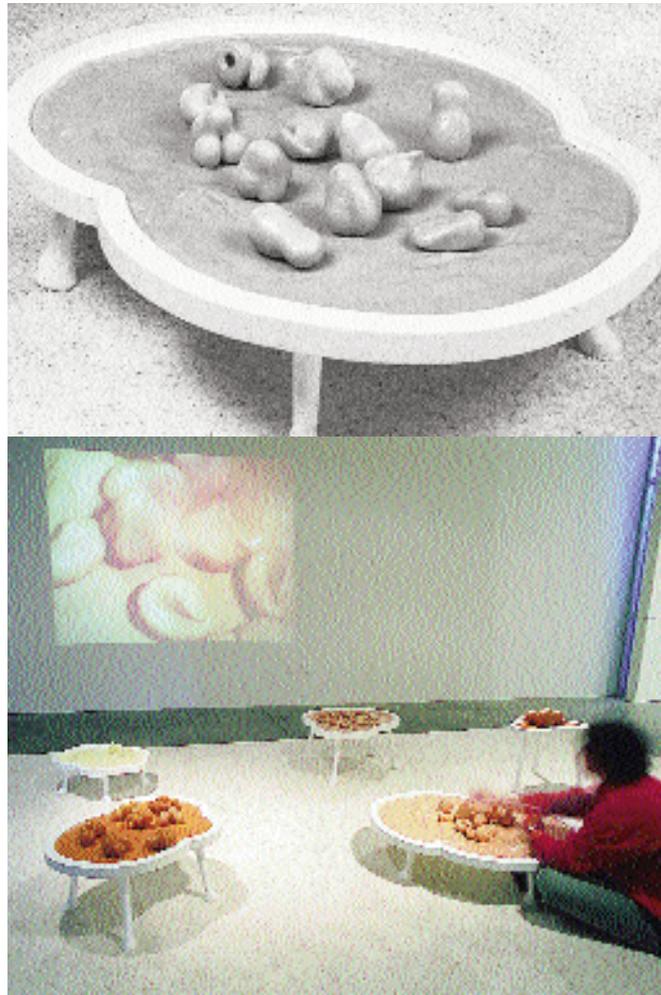
experiments, which abound in museums and galleries. Rainey Strauss’s installation *F.L.E.M.A. (Fluid, Language, Experience, Manifest, Attributes)* is an example of one such inquiry. Consisting of five low table-like forms, filled with beds of rubber or latex and soft fleshy forms that are intended to be tangibly explored, Strauss’s

and the very primal experience of holding and squeezing them. Intensifying the participatory, scripted, and self-referential nature of the art, while sitting on the floor on a soft gray cushion at one of the organically shaped tables and playing with Strauss’s “body parts,” viewers also have the experience of witnessing themselves engage with the body parts in the live feed video projection. The duality of the experience raises questions concerning our role in relation to the work. Am I audience or actor as I watch myself play with the blobby bionic forms?

In some ways, *F.L.E.M.A.—Station #1* is the richest, because in addition to witnessing yourself experience the sculpture, you also feel and hear a sound piece by Paul Scriver that emanates from speakers on the floor under the work, on the wall, and overhead in the center of the gallery. The spacey, primal tones, which are reminiscent of chimpanzee babbling (and are actually the synthesized sounds of human sexual encounters and insects recorded in Australia), reinforce the science fiction/filmic qualities of Strauss’s work.

It is ironic that Strauss named her exhibition “Aphasia,” because when I put aside the underpinnings and intent of the work, my experience of it was as a slow, somewhat meditative reconsideration of the body/self from surface (skin) to essence (intimacy). Strauss suggests that art needs to be more playful, and that one needs to reconsider and re-vision the experience of it. The project was successful in raising questions about and providing a model contradictory to consumer and technological freneticism—central artistic and social issues today. Perhaps nostalgic aesthetics and a retreat into the body are the only way to combat—or embrace—our aphasia, and slowly move forward into uncharted territory.

—Terri Cohn



**Above: Rainey Strauss, *F.L.E.M.A.*, 2002. Mixed media, installation view. Detail: *F.L.E.M.A.—Station #1*. Mixed media, 15 x 35 x 25 in.**

Artists exploring this mode of operation share an interest in claiming interaction and inter-human relationships, alternative social models, and collaboration as the essence of the work.

With the notion of representation up for grabs, artistic praxis has become fertile ground for somewhat self-conscious social

curious exploration of the body is propelled by her sense of the human inability to fully express the experience of corporeality. The effect of her work is both sensory and somewhat sensual; the flesh colors and sweetish smell of the organic forms augment their visual presence as an assortment of body parts