

National

Viewing gallery

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Shard is the highest climber on Stirling prize shortlist

Oliver Wainwright

A soaring glass tower goes head to head with a swooping grey stingray in the race for the best building of the year, as the Shard squares up to London's Olympic swimming pool. These bombastic signature buildings, by Pritzker Prize-winning architects Renzo Piano and Zaha Hadid, are in the running against Birmingham's vast new public library, a theatre in Liverpool and two higher-education buildings, in a shortlist that sees the return of familiar names from previous years' Stirling prizes.

With odds of 2-1, the £500m Shard is the bookies' favourite, but the tallest building in the EU has divided critics and public alike. It has garnered acclaim, with Will Self describing its jagged presence as being "as exhilarating as Niagara". Others see it as a monument to a city in thrall to international capital.

Zaha Hadid's £269m Aquatics Centre in Stratford's Olympic Park, is the second-favourite at 5-2. Its sinuous style was cramped for the Games by two huge seating stands, which made it look as

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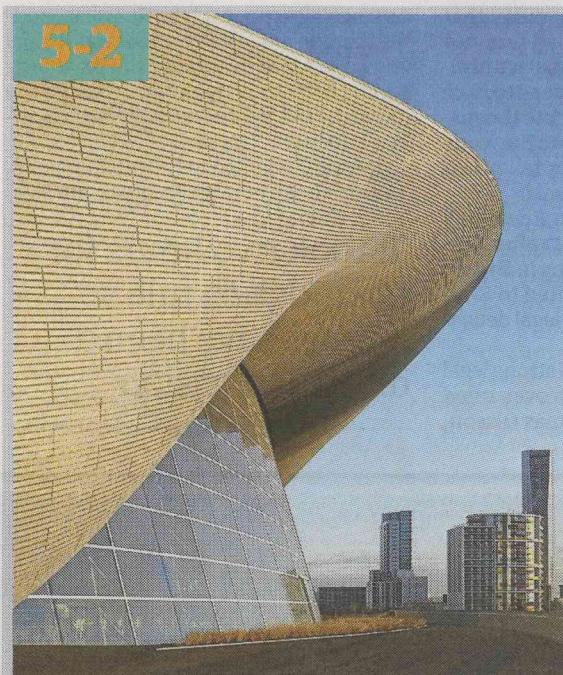
though scaffolding was still in place; it was only entered for the prize once the stands had been removed.

Previous Stirling winners Feilden Clegg Bradley's understated extension to Manchester School of Art is a surprising but welcome inclusion, standing for the imaginative potential of refurbishing, rather than bulldozing, our cities' postwar concrete structures.

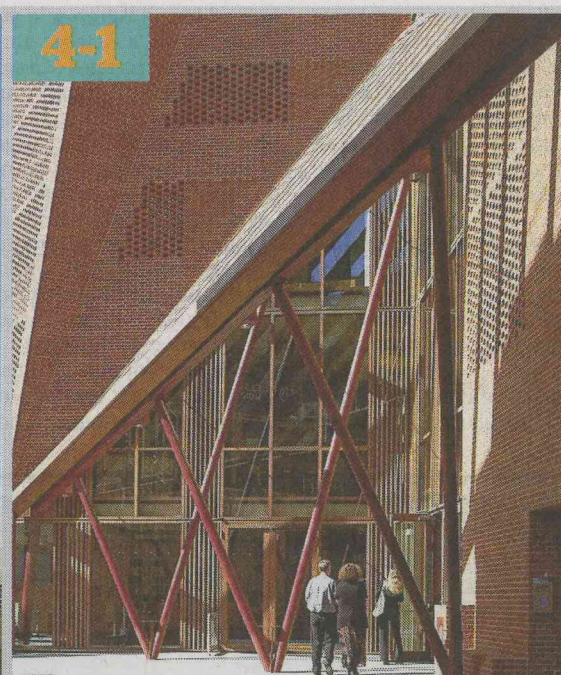
Birmingham's 1970s brutalist central library is one such megastructure facing the wrecking ball now the £190m new library is open, a sparkling cruise liner of a building by Dutch practice Mecanoo. Its loud costume and glistening interiors stand in contrast to Haworth Tompkins's Everyman theatre in Liverpool, which summons the informal spirit of the previous theatre on the site, crafting interiors of a rare tactile quality.

Such attention to the craftsmanship of building reaches its peak with O'Donnell and Tuomey's new student centre for the London School of Economics, a handmade brick mountain that contains a beguiling sequence of interior spaces within its origami folds.

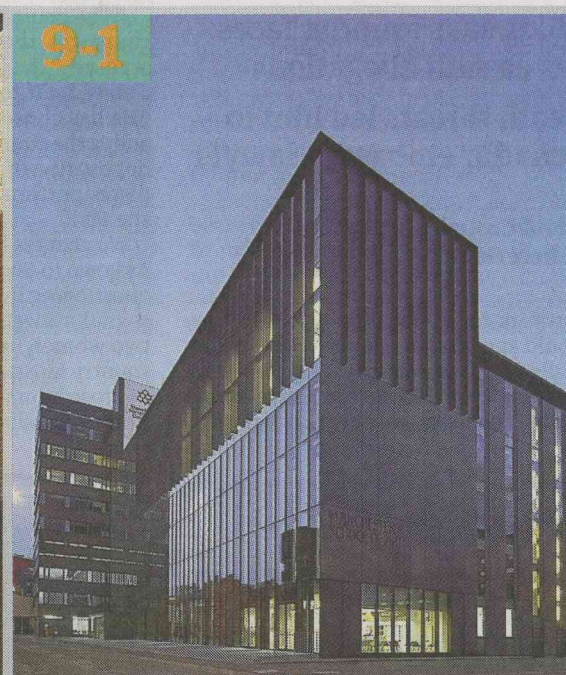
The Stirling prize winner will be announced in October.



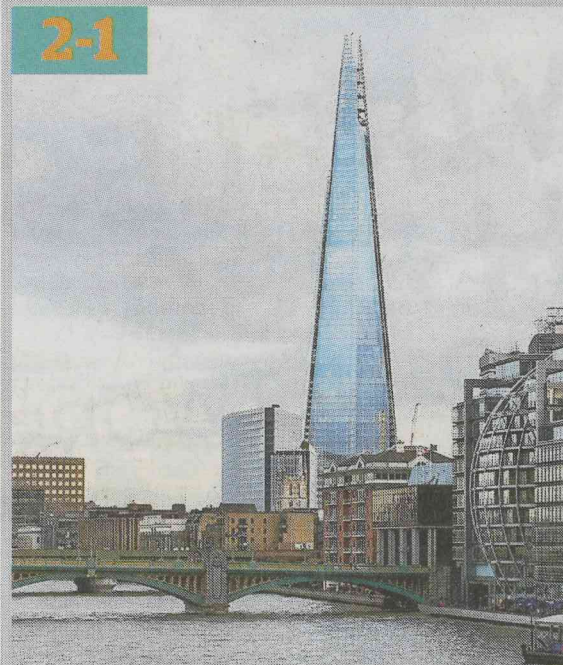
London Aquatics Centre (Zaha Hadid Architects)
 Hailed as the beauty queen of London's Olympic Park, the building ripples into view like a lithe stingray, flexing its muscular fins on the banks of the river Lea. Inside, it is like swimming beneath the belly of a whale, the roof writhing and dipping above your head in a broad ribbed bulge. **Odds: 5-2**



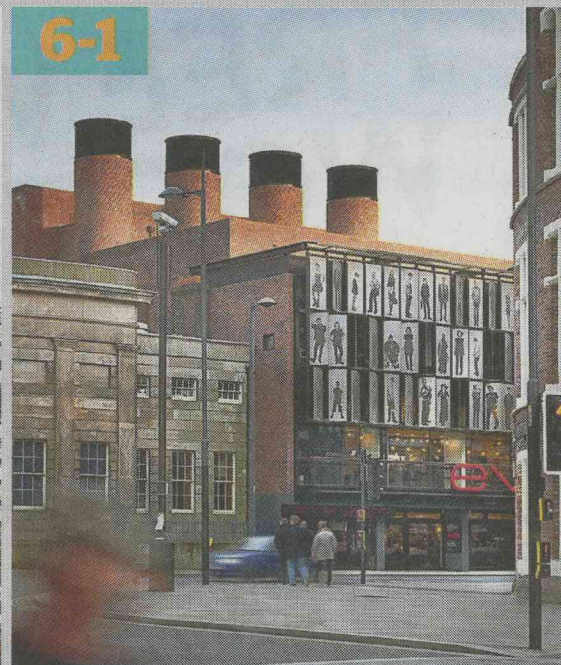
LSE Saw Swee Hock student centre (O'Donnell & Tuomey)
 A twisting, tumbling mountain of bricks, the LSE's student centre rises out of the streets behind Aldwych as a striking red mountain. The contorted envelope houses a promenade of diverse functions, while a generous staircase charts a wayward journey of spirals and switchbacks. **Odds: 4-1**



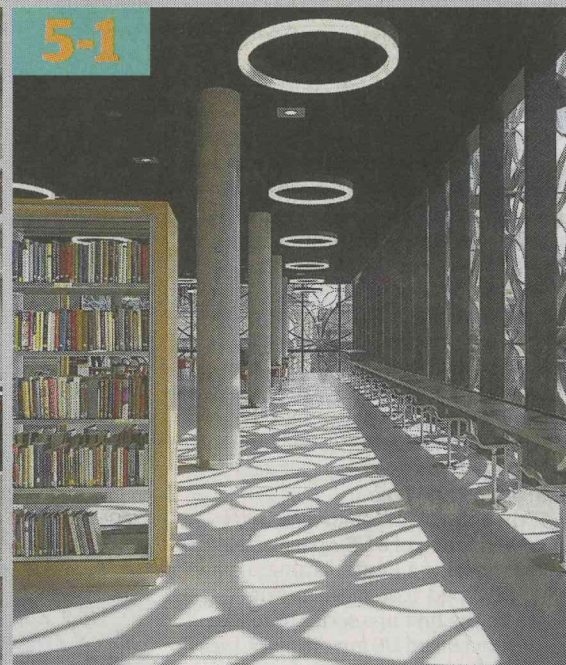
Manchester School of Art (Feilden Clegg Bradley)
 Perhaps the least glamorous of the bunch, the refurbishment and extension of Manchester School of Art is one of the most important. As unloved 1960s buildings continue to be needlessly demolished, it provides an object lesson in how they can instead be revived with thoughtful intervention. **Odds: 9-1**



The Shard (Renzo Piano)
 A divisive 306-metre presence on the London skyline, the Shard thrusts above London Bridge station as a crystalline spear. Its faceted facade of fractured glass planes gives it a constantly changing appearance that oscillates between glowering grey hulk and shimmering apparition. **Odds: 2-1**



Everyman theatre, Liverpool (Haworth Tompkins)
 Already accomplished masters of theatre refurbishment, this is the first newbuild theatre by Haworth Tompkins. Replacing the converted Victorian chapel where Roger McGough and Willy Russell started out in the 1960s, the new building summons the spirit of its much-loved former self. **Odds: 6-1**



Library of Birmingham (Mecanoo)
 Towering above Birmingham's Centenary Square as a pile of boxes wrapped in a filigree screen, the £190m new central library continues the city's recent vernacular of big sheds covered in sparkly wrapping. Escalators shuttle visitors through interlocking atria and stately rotundas. **Odds: 5-1**