

Background

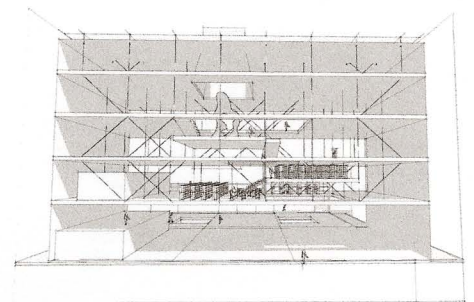
The old and mature texture of Beirut throws many challenges in the process of fabricating a spacial building that would contribute something back to the art and culture of this Middle East country. It is one of the oldest cities in the region with a rich history that spreads over 500 years. During that time it has evolved, grown, been destroyed and recreated, time and times again. In many ways Beirut is chaos to me but I think one thing that has sustained the country through the many challenges is the richness of its art and culture. That is what has inspired me for this design.

Art, culture and music has lived and flourished over the generations among the people of Beirut. Among these resilient beings you can witness hundreds of galleries, countless of venues with live music, theaters and much more. This obviously creates challenges in ways of consolidating them in to a hyper space, a space where the people can share art and culture and be inspired. Displaying your painting or photograph in a gallery, performing your music on stage, or just taking part in a sculpting workshop, is a creative process, an outlet for inspiration and a source of recognition from your peers. Beirut as a city already has this in its people, now its time to give them a central place where they can all come together and share that creativity.

The proposal

The building is an abstract story of Beirut on its skin and structure, with layers of history and culture reflected in the building. We believe it will enhance artists to be more productive as well as encourage the public to be inspired by their work, which is created and displayed inside.

The basis of our design is a structure combining two buildings, tied together by a common basement and ground floor, and an open area in between. Beirut's chaotic history is reflected in the two buildings, signifying the separation of the people of Beirut and Lebanon through civil war and other



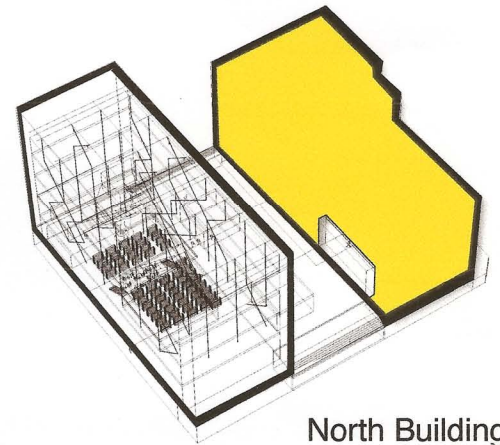
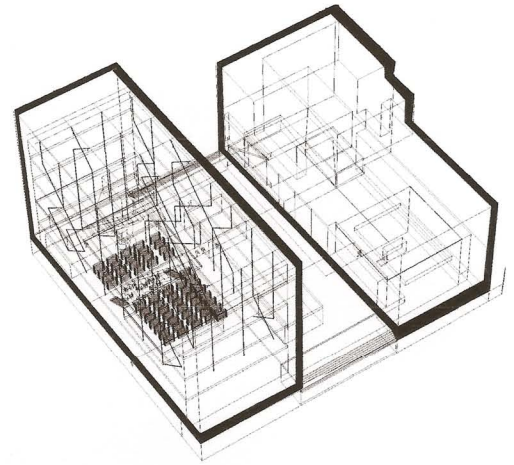
conflicts. We want to bring the two sides together in one joint facility for arts and culture.

The foundation of this is the basement, which is dedicated to education because we believe that is what will bring long-lasting peace and stability to the city and the country. In the basement you will find art classes in photography, painting, sculpting, and more. Beyond education, the ground floor is about displaying the art created by the people in an open and transparent way.

In creating this structure, we have been obsessed with the idea of clean open spaces, yet, to create it, we need an appropriate creative tension or contrast. To address this issue we basically decided to turn the concept of a normal building on its head and turn it upside down.

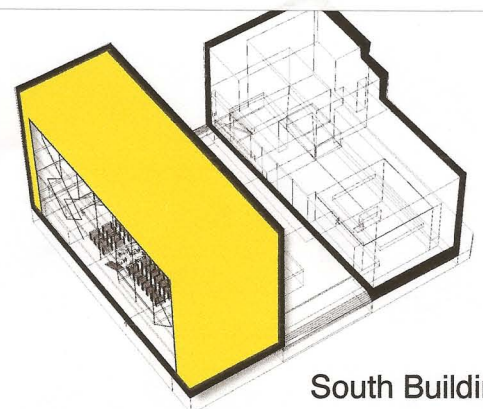
The ground floor of the South building is free of any structure as all the slabs above are being suspended from the roof with a huge truss. Each slab is suspended with a thick steel cable that runs from the fifth floor. The x-bracing gives a better stability to each floor. In addition to the side structure, which contains elevators, bathroom facilities, etc. it gives a lateral support to the slabs. In a way, we wanted to represent the identity of people in Beirut and their open, free, transparent, and welcoming attitude. With high ceiling, the ground floor is welcoming from the street view, as passers by can see through the open, column-free space. This is a "graffitti-space" where anyone should feel comfortable enough to display their work of art. It's an attempt at getting away from the traditional formal, often bureaucratic process and view of art and culture, reserved for some imagined "elite". Anyone, even someone just passing by outside by chance, should get a chance to display their work in this space.

Looking at the floors above, a complex web of cables describes how Lebanon survived through the tough times and keeps reinventing itself and even thriving in between the periods of unrest. This is symbolized in the open and stable



North Building

C 8853 AWM



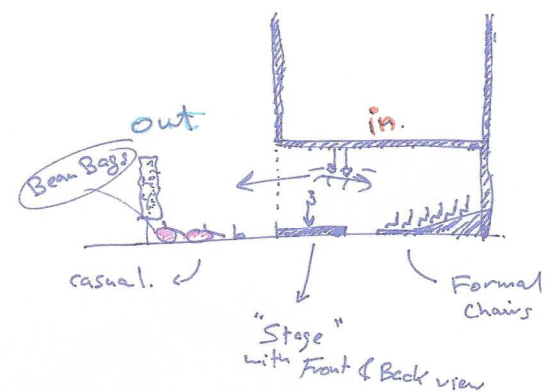
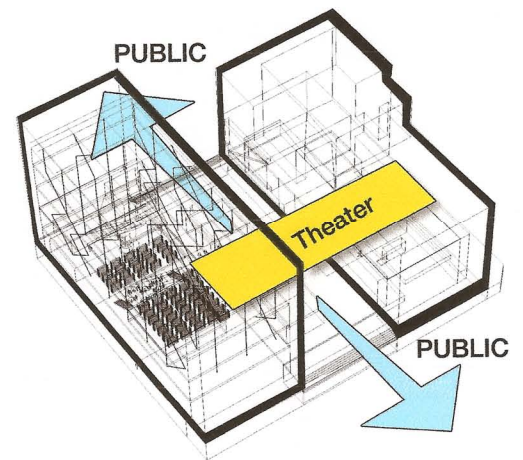
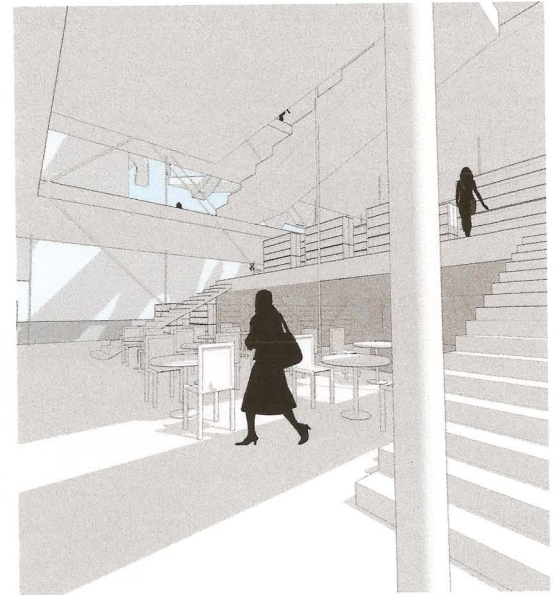
South Building

foundation on top of which the upper floors hover.

Each floor is dedicated to a certain activity, e.g. Library, Exhibition offices etc. and held up by a set of cables. The suspended cables are connected to a i-beam with a grid of six meters. Administration is placed at the last floor, between the truss blocked from side view but open to the sky. Hiding the administration is intentional, as to give creativity as much as possible exposure, and to minimize the politics involved in registering or signing up for the activities on offer.

The North Building encapsulates two large open space theaters. In total there are seats for approximately 1000 people in the two venues, with one being about twice the size of the other. The larger theater is of a traditional nature and dedicated to major shows and events. In contrast, the smaller theater is designed to encourage young artist and actors to show off their work and blend with the public that are passing by. The back drop, spanning floor to ceiling functions as wall to wall doors that open to the outside and a new space is created. The back wall stage is actually open to public and people passing by the site. This is meant as a space for spontaneous activities where perhaps young talented people who can not afford hiring the main theater can invite the public to be a part of their show and connect with them. On one side is the formal show with the normal seating areas, while in the backdrop it becomes very interactive. You can have one show with two views: formal and casual. Formal has the normal typical seating positions and the casual side is outdoors under the sky with participants laying down on beanbags as shown on the diagram. With these two different theaters we feel this project will break with the traditional way of viewing theater and bring a new twist to the acting and cultural scene in Beirut.

Above the open area between the buildings, Arabic text will spread the calligraphic shapes onto the ground and the sides of the buildings as patterns of shade. The text, composed by local or international arabic calligraphers. It's an opportunity



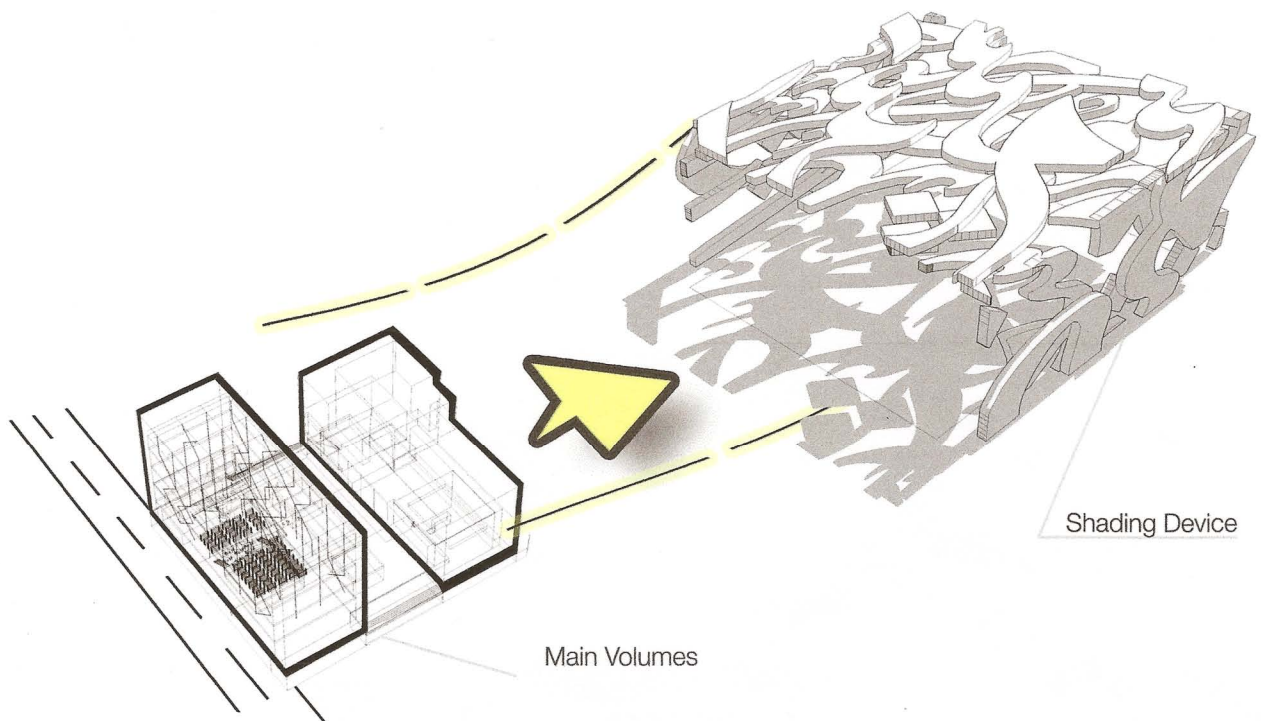
to welcome people into the shade in a very relaxed and informal way. By using this unique texture to display Arabic art in the form of calligraphy it gives the building a very unique texture and in practical terms it also serves as a shading device for people gathering in the space between the buildings. At night, the space and the text will be lit by built in LED lights thereby showing off the calligraphy even without the sun light shining through.

Conclusion

We propose an exciting new building for Beirut, which reflects its history and heritage as well as show a way into the future. For a people and a culture that has been through chaotic times, our two-building structure turns concepts upside down to form an inviting and collaborative center for the arts. It's a place where anyone can learn new skills, create and display their art, and meet other people. We believe our design reflects the true values of Beirut and look forward to the possibility of taking this project further.



Shade created by Calligraphy



C 8853 AWM