

HOUSE OF ARTS AND CULTURE

The building is not intended as a static home for its inhabitants, but a dynamic environment mirroring of the complexity and richness of the wider Beirut cultural scene. The scale of the programme necessitates a building crammed full of complexity. The proposed architectural manoeuvres celebrate this in a dramatic spatial configuration of volumes and internal layering of function.

CITY PLANNING

This project is as much concerned with urban programming as it is with building design.

Architecturally, the centre is treated not as a single building with a roof and walls but as a centre of population, a knitting together of volumes - a reflection of the city as a whole.

The building is arranged as a sequence of focal points, routes, gathering places, a discrete piece of urban landscape design. This is permeable architecture, fluid public space "...structured with nodes, defined by edges, penetrated by paths, and sprinkled with landmarks." [The Image of the City. Kevin Lynch].

NAVIGATION

Unlike a conventional city block, the programme is arranged in three dimensions, with a network of vertical and horizontal routes running through the space. Circulation can either be direct or circuitous, with lifts travelling through the cores and a series of ramps informally connecting each level.

The structure of the site is established by the location of circulation cores. Visible and legible from every entry point, these take the form of vertical passageways, linking the ground plane with the suspended forms above. It is from these dramatic circulation spaces that the architectural interest is revealed.

PUBLIC SPACE

The ground plane is open to the public, and forms a large city 'room' sheltered from direct sunlight by the elevated volumes above it. The sloping site is carved into a public terrace, levelled off in areas to provide seating areas and fluid space for performances.

SPATIAL ORGANISATION

The spatial organisation draws visitors upwards from the street into an immersive cultural environment. Visitors travel up through the building to reach the main event, filtering down afterwards through fragmented public space on their return to street level. Courtyards and light wells are either elevated in the air or sunken below ground level, bringing natural light into the lower levels.

SPATIAL CONDITIONS

I Public Buildings

Each tightly controlled working environment is housed in a highly specified, highly insulated envelope, with each of the six cultural functions visible as a separate volume: Cinema, Documentation Centre, Workshops, Small Hall, Large Hall and Backstage areas.

II Semi-urban space

Foyers, cafés and box offices sit within the circulation cores, in a temperate environment overshadowed by the volumes above. Ramps, galleries and looser, semi-urban public areas are woven throughout the circulation cores, breaking up the massing of the key functions, and animating the building as they are inhabited by a variety of uses at different times of the day.

III Interstitial spaces

Un-programmed interstitial spaces enjoy the most dramatic spatial moments in the building. Negative space between the functional volumes is acknowledged rather than discarded, allowing curated space and empty space to exist alongside each other. As stairs weave between the distinct volumes of the cultural functions, views into unexpected spatial configurations are revealed.

These fissures in the architecture provide opportunities for art and exhibitions of different scales and permanence throughout the building, making use of unexpected spaces between, beneath and amongst the programmed space.

ARCHITECTURAL STRATEGY

The dramatic distribution of the mass is the driving architectural ambition of the scheme; the weight of the programme is lifted into the air, exposing the bare ground surface. The architectural language is a dialogue between the distinct forms of the Concert Hall, Cinema etc. and the resulting interstitial spaces.

VOLUMES

The architecture is as much about routes *through* the building as it is about routes *into* the building; each cut or break through the solid mass lets in shafts of light and exposes voids in the ground below.

The architectural language is one of alleys, courtyards and light wells:

- I From the main entrance at Ground level, the public street is split vertically: the visitor enters at the canopy height of trees planted in the lower ground floors.
- II In addition to the main galleries, each open space in the building has the potential to display artwork. The main circulation core from the car park can be flooded with graphic images by projecting film works down on to the lower ground surface.

MATERIALITY: TWO FACES

The material strategy ties together the elevated volumes. In contrast to the dark matt finish of the exposed outer surfaces, the inner surfaces are clad in highly polished stainless steel. Light bounces off the inner surfaces, reflecting and illuminating the gaps, emphasising the play of light between the volumes. The visitors' gaze is drawn upwards, toward an immaterial world.

ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY

- Programme arranged around overshadowed public space and courtyard areas
- Environmental strategy similar to that employed in Roman/Middle Eastern courtyard houses
- Courtyards create sheltered microclimates within the building
- Cool air drawn in to the programme volumes through the shaded courtyards
- Recycled cement-bonded particle board for outer surfaces
- Dark façade absorbs heat, powering heat exchanges
- Façade conceals solar water heaters, for internal heating in winter months

EXPRESSION OF STRUCTURE

The visual prominence of the supporting concrete structure is lessened by its surface treatment. The substantial structural and technical functions [service cores, lift shafts, risers] held in these columns are concealed behind a combination of transparent and translucent glass. The reflective surface lightens the appearance of the circulation shafts, drawing attention towards the upper volumes.

The basement houses boiler rooms, main plant room and transformers, with rooftop air handling units and chillers linked to the plant room by risers.