

## **COMMON GROUND**

In the protracted space between the new highway and the old city center, Dar Beirut provides a common ground for people, art, and ideas. It consists of a simple shell that hovers over the art spaces and encourages interaction without imposition. This shell bends and turns to address the city around it and to create passages for pedestrians and spaces for crowds. In so doing, it constructs its unique identity, and like the agent of contemporary culture as described by the Arab poet Adonis, it shows the way from “the fixed to the changing.”

## **THE FIXED AND THE CHANGING**

Urbanistically, the building registers the impact of the surrounding streets and spaces on its surface.

To the north, it bends to draw continuity between the street to the east and the public space to the north creating a public space in front of the building, shaded by a faceted glass façade that hovers over the space like a large *muqarnas*.

To the east, the shell flaps horizontally to cover a pedestrian passage along its glass façade.

To the west, the shell flaps open at the northern corner creating a car drop-off at the main entrance and covering the parking entrance for both cars and pedestrians.

To the south, facing the highway, the building’s glass surface reverberates with the rapid traffic to create a louvered glass facade that displays the building’s internal activities to the city while protecting them from southern exposure and traffic.

## **THE CATALYST**

Programmatically, the building operates like a catalyst, encouraging interaction between the different activities through creative adjacency.

The exhibition spaces (A) are placed between the performance spaces (B). Instead of a cluster of As and a cluster of Bs, it proposes an ABAB rhythm.

The project adheres closely to the proposed program but it compacts it as a way of increasing efficiency and interaction. For example, the cinematheque and documentation

center share many of their facilities. The performance and exhibition spaces share part of their reception area.

It also creates continuity between the educational aspects and performance and exhibition aspects of the program by placing the workshops and training rooms with their related performance and exhibition spaces. For example, the dance and acting workshops are placed next to the experimental theater and the arts studios near the gallery spaces.

## **THE COMMON GROUND**

The ground floor of the building provides a field of interaction between the different pieces of the program, bringing together on the same open surface activities such as temporary exhibitions, performances, social spaces, and spaces for media and publications.

By extending the site's landscape into the building, the project seeks to establish continuity between the city and the building, between quotidian life and the arts.

Surrounding pedestrian paths are pulled into a public space in front of the building and they are extended internally into a pedestrian network which zigzags over the sloping landscape. The varying ground covers and vegetation encourage interaction among a variety of activities on this common ground.

## **THE OBLIQUE AND THE VERTICAL**

The building's circulation system encourages visual and social interaction.

Vertically, a glass 5 meter-diameter elevator affords the visitors views of the main atrium, the inside of the building and the city.

Obliquely, a set of escalators wrap around the glass tower of the elevator and then cascade through the lobby of the theater and gallery up the western wall of the building.

The vertical and the oblique are interlaced with each other in the main atrium where the building's activities converge and where they can afford views through the large *muqarnas* onto the city.

A second means of vertical circulation is located on the eastern side of the building. It is used primarily for staff and educational programs.

Other entrances also provide flexibility for separate after hours operations of the different components of the project.

### **SIMPLE MEANS, MIXED MEDIA**

Dar Beirut is built out of materials and with technologies that have a long and rich history in the modern architecture culture of Beirut but that are here taken to a higher expressive level, particularly as they interact with each other.

The concrete shell is made of white cement but mixed with the reddish sand sometimes used in construction sites in Lebanon, bringing the color of concrete closer to *furni* yellow of Beirut stone.

The wood is that of the local concrete formwork, but it is here cleaned and reused for exposed partitions.

The large surfaces of the public areas are cast-on-site concrete, but the concrete is here mixed with local terrazzo, an artisanal craft that is being revitalized through new techniques.

The glass and aluminum are made of simple, flat surfaces that are locally available but that are here combined to create the complex forms of the *muqarnas*.

The materials of the landscape also follow the same logic: *furni* stone-paving with beach pebbles, sand, and green ground cover, bringing the notion of mixed media that Dar Beirut embodies to the very definition of this common ground.