

House of Arts and Culture Beirut

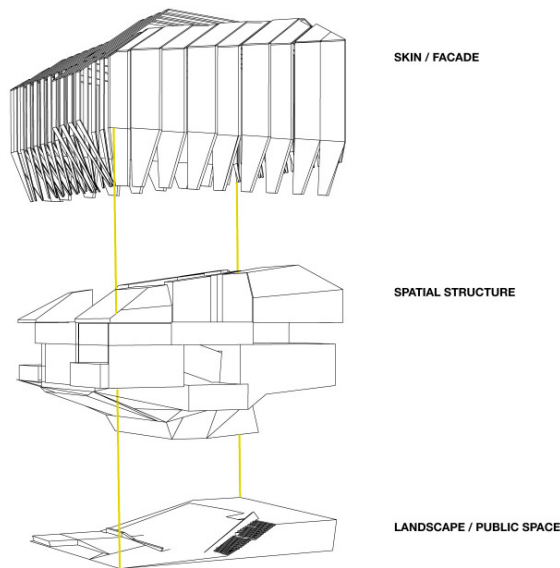
Urban and architectural objectives

The prime objective of the proposed project is to create a unique space for cultural and artistic production and representation and its intertwining with the city. The house should become a landmark that provides highly attractive and functional spaces for artists and visitors, encouraging interactivity between them. It should attract a large and diverse audience and contribute to social communication and interaction. In order to achieve this goal utmost importance is given to the public and circulation spaces within the building that turn the visit of the house itself into a spectacle.

The implementation and the shape of the project are derived from the site's specifications and regulations, following height restrictions, proposed footprint, offsets and built-to lines. The front is oriented to the north with the entrance opening towards the city centre. From this northern side the topography flows through the building, dissolving boundaries between exterior and interior public space. This landscape, rising up from Rue Ghalghoul to the Ring, defines the entrance zone of the house. It flows around a central bole around which the functions are stacked vertically in an interplay of mass and void. The massive volumes accommodate the main functions and their adjoining rooms and are used for performances, events, work or study. The open spaces inbetween become the areas of interaction and exchange. They provide the spaces for foyers, circulation and all public functions. Raising the functions allows the topography to be experienced in the entire entrance zone, entering from the north or passing by on the Ring, and to be used with lounge and resting areas within the "landscape".

The building is not trying to make any references in its outer appearance. It is intendedly avoiding a traditional structure of base, body and roof. Instead, it is trying to create an independent and distinctive space. Reacting to the aim of the project to combine various different elements in one building a double-layer envelope is wrapped around the piled-up functions uniting them under a consistent outer skin.

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Functional and spatial organization

Entering the building from Rue Ghalghoul the visitor arrives in the spacious entrance hall with ticket counter, information desk and other service functions. The entrance zone also hosts the shop and the restaurant which are directly accessible from the outside as well and can be operated independently. The hall – as well as all circulation areas – are not merely transit zones but generous spaces offering different spatial configurations and preceptions inside the building as well as visual connections to the outside. Rising up from the

entrance zone slopes and wide stairs take the visitor to the back where, at the level of the Ring, the foyer of the performance halls opens up vertically. From this spacious hall which hosts the foyer bar and offers views over the surrounding city the visitors are distributed to the performance halls and the cinema and their respective foyers. All halls and areas are also directly accessible through the elevators from the entrance halls.

The central large performance hall is accessible from this level, the small performance hall and the cinema are situated on the next level. Intertwined between the two is the artists level which hosts their small foyer, changing rooms and other service rooms. Providing an independent vertical circulation the artists can reach both performance halls from here without crossing public circulation.

The large performance hall is adaptable to the different desired uses: music concerts, theatre, dance performances and congresses of all types. The main stage with a height of 20 meters is flanked by side stages, back stage and orchestral pit. All stage parts can be combined or separated, stage and orchestral pit can be levelled hydraulically according to the desired use. The rear part of the spectator zone is installed permanently with rising rows of seats and a tier on top of it. The front part consists of flexible elements which can also be arranged sideways and / or in the backstage area providing the possibility to have an italian style theatre, a central stage, a flat

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space or a congress hall. Service rooms for projections, sound and light control, recording, translation booths, etc. are installed in the back of the hall facing the stage. The small performance hall is equipped with completely modular elements for stage and seating allowing a multi-functional use. At the same time it is more intimate than the large hall and enables a more direct contact between the performance and the audience.

The board rooms are located in direct proximity to the small and the large hall on the north-western edge, overlooking the access zone. The meeting rooms are positioned on the opposite north-eastern side, connected to the large performance hall. The two top floors host the exhibition area and the functions dedicated to the creative production: the cinematheque, the studios and workshops, the library etc. as well as the administration. The exhibition hall which is a flexible zone adaptable to different spatial needs as well as lighting configurations. It allows various possibilities from small units to large open exhibitions, from natural lighting to complete blackout.

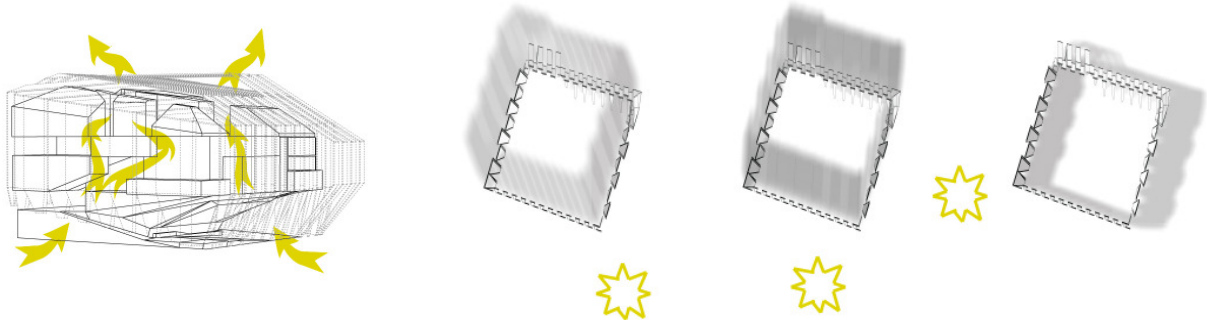
Above the entrance and on the top floor on the western side the space between the two façade layers widens up, creating zones of visual interaction with the city. Above the entrance it provides a showcase-like balcony as an extension to the foyer of the large hall. On top it offers a shaded roof-terrace connected to the lounge with views in all directions.

The circulation is divided into different, independent elements reacting to the needs of the specific functions served by them. The main circulation via the ramps and open stairs provides a continuous open space through the entire building which is mainly used for the performance halls. A secondary circulation way for the public is provided by elevators and staircases in the front half of the building serving mostly the functions on the top floors. Independent elevators are provided for the artists, as well as a service elevator and staircase in the back half of the house connected to the service zones. An additional escape route is placed on the outside between the two layers of the façade.

Using the topography of the site, the service entrance, delivery zone, technical and most service functions are “hidden” in the back part of the ground floor. A service access is provided in the least visible and public corner on the south-western edge of the plot. Trucks can unload their charges here on a service ramp from where it can be directly forwarded to the storage, the workshops or the performance halls by the nearby service elevator. From the same corner the

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visitors can access the two underground parking levels which are connected vertically by elevators and staircases to the entrance hall.



Technical and building solutions

The building consists of a concrete structure core surrounded by a double-layer façade envelope. The stacked volumes executed in reinforced concrete constitute the structural system. As the volumes are protruding from the core the inner shell of the façade envelope becomes structural and discharges the forces to the ground. It is a glazed concrete structure. The outer façade layer functions as a curtain wall made out of light metal bands.

Beyond the structural function the double-layer façade also serves for climatic purposes providing shading and ventilation to enhance the building's energy efficiency. Both layers are cut into stripes in a north-south orientation and slid against each other in the same direction. This means that direct light can enter the building during sunrise and sunset while the most critical zenithal light is blocked. Therefore, this layout reduces the cooling demand while allowing enough natural light to penetrate the building. In addition it creates a unique façade for the building providing different views and insights from all points. After dark the activated areas are becoming visible outside, giving the building an equally strong identity at night.

Applying contemporary and sustainable building techniques, the building should be ventilated naturally as much as possible to reduce energy consumption and thus maintenance costs. The continuous open space meandering through the building can create a draft from the ground floor to the roof. Given the climatic conditions of the region photovoltaic elements should be installed on the unused roof surfaces for the same purpose.

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