

QUARRY: The House of Arts and Culture in Beirut, Lebanon

The quarry can be used as a starting point for both the formal and conceptual constraints of the proposal. The quarry, as a concept, is abundant with association; it brings to mind an image of excavation, the act of harvesting refined objects from nature, the act of stripping the earth, the unintended beauty in what is leftover, and those dramatic agglomerates of chiseled cubes and inverses.



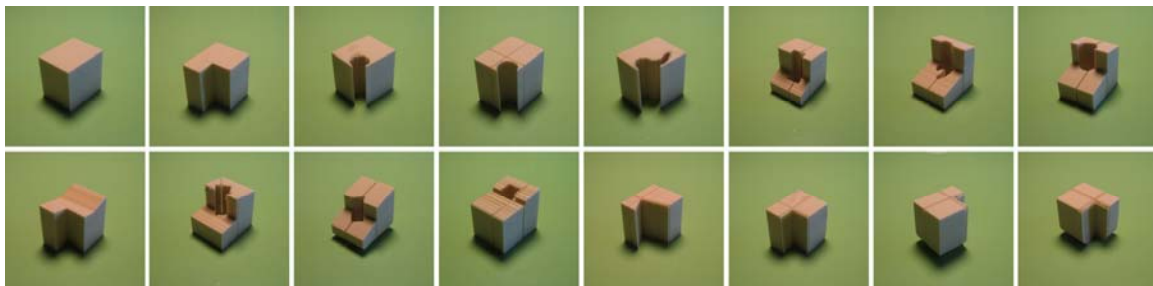
There is a staid and mythic presence to the landscape of quarries; they are ancient sites from which the components of beautiful things are derived. This concept is very closely linked with Beirut, its history and its import. And so, in order to emphasize those associations our project is entitled “Quarry: the House of Arts and Culture in Beirut, Lebanon.”

Architectural Objectives

After an initial analysis of programme requirements, it was concluded that in order for the whole programme to be included within the existing site, the building itself would likely occupy the site in its entirety.

The Gesture:

Beginning with a series of cubes that represented the legal and physical constraints of the site, the cubes were methodically carved away. The focus was on one study in particular, a model with mostly smooth faces and one corner with a heavy cut leaving the face rough and striated.



The Surfaces:

The rough surface signals the entry into the building, while the smooth façades look out and connect with the city.



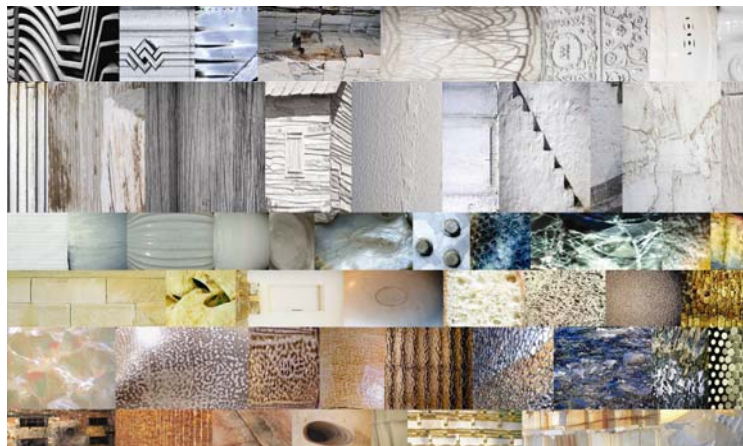
The form of the building was developed from there, through expansion of scale, applying climatic constraints and defining ideal points of access.

The Materials:

Material options were studied, particularly for the building's façade, both for functional and aesthetic purposes. Again, this dialectic of rough and polished, and the quarry, informed the choices that were made. Having been absorbed in mining Lebanon's complex history of artistic production, a prominent story is that of glazed pottery, an art extending back to the Phoenicians. A predominantly opaque façade with functionally organized openings lends itself to the application of locally-fabricated glazed stone tiles as cladding. It is also a productive way of providing cool temperatures during the summer and retaining heat during the winter.



Below is a chart of materials, from the slick and glazed, to the dry and flaking, to the hard and pitted:



The Façades:

The façades of the Quarry are composed of long strips of glazed stone, neatly ordered but appearing to peel open, just as a curtain would pull back at the beginning of a performance. This image refers to the theatrical programs that are performed within. This “billowing” of the stone is deceptive because it is all contained within the plane of the façade and its true intent is to allow or prevent light from entering the spaces behind it. The degree of perforation is functionally tied to the programs that exist behind it.

Spatial Objectives

The Building:

The building appears as a monolithic form with a smooth stone exterior.

A block is cut from a corner of this monolithic form. The base of the stone building is beveled to form an elliptical curve as it approaches the earth. The emphasis is placed on the corner of this building which has been cut out. The cut extends across the length and height of the structure. Its interior surface is the opposite of the smooth interior; it is rough and striated. The cut is used as the prominent axis from which all functional spaces are arranged.

The Canyon:

The building is divided into two parts by a central canyon which frames the sky. Small bridges connect the two halves of the building at strategic points on each floor.

The canyon serves to divide the plan into two functionally distinct parts. The canyon serves to divide the plan into two functionally distinct parts. On the East, there are the theater and the restaurants, the workshops and the studios. These areas imply dynamism, movement and spectacle. They demand a participation of the users that goes beyond merely watching.

On the West side of the building, there are the exhibitions spaces, the offices, interpretation booths and libraries. These are quieter and more personal spaces, designed for regarding and absorbing.

The Cells:

At the scale of individual spaces, the building is a modern reordering of the labyrinthine passages of the Middle Eastern souk. Each function is grouped with its nearest relation into cellular blocks of rooms and

squares, connected and organized in hierarchical relationships with circulation spaces. It is as if the old city is enveloped within the simple stone facade.

The canyon itself is a bustling avenue of activity, an inviting space where the energy of the visitors can be fully experienced.

Urban Objectives

Exterior Circulation, Traffic and Approach:

Parking for visitors is reached from the west side of the building, while deliveries are made on the east side of the building through the freight entrance.

Visitors to the Quarry can deposit their cars in the parking lots beneath the building and rise, via elevator, directly into the reception area. They can also approach the building from the street and wait for friends along the stretch of lawn that fringes the front façade. From here they can watch other visitors traversing the spaces above them.

Interior Circulation, Orientation and Movement:

The reception area is sleek and scaled for grandeur and yet there are strategically located information booths with well-trained staff and discreet signage to help the visitor orient himself. He is drawn either to the left, through a sylvan forest of columns, where he takes his tickets for a performance in the main auditorium, or to the right, to the shops or the bank of elevators that whisks him up to the library or workshops. He hears the blustery clatter of the restaurant up ahead and sees other visitors preparing themselves for a docent-led tour of the main exhibition space. Directly above them, he sees the arms and elbows of theater-goers leaning against the balconies as they wait for the performance to start.

There is a life and urgency to these spaces, a commingling of action and anticipation. It is as if all the elements of a vital, productive neighborhood are layered and inscribed within a chiseled slab of stone.