

House of Arts and Culture

Geographically positioned as a crossroad linking the Mediterranean Basin with the great Asian Hinterland, has conferred on Beirut, a cosmopolitan character and multicultural legacy. This plateau sits on a long coastal plain edged by a tormented mountain range. Borrowing from an invasion of groups has resulted in an evolution of Lebanese culture. Here lies a juxtaposing architecture of legacy versus contemporary. In this seductive yet at times erratic city lies The House of Arts and Culture.

The building was conceived as a timeless monolithic structure that rises from the urban surroundings. Prominent in its location the porous monolith is cut by an urban stair which invites the users and the public to transverse through the rising stratospheric volume. Interaction between inside and out is both visual and physical. This extending urban gesture creates an event in its location. It is a destination. Proceedings begin and end on this upwardly sweeping stairs. Users are gradually led to each level and function of the project. The stairs visually reaches a height in the cantilevered volume and physically ends on a green rooftop exhibition space. Additionally passersby can pause or alternatively pursue an upwardly moving landscaped garden. It further capitalises on the context through an array of integration of planting and vegetation. This brings to life this solid building, as these interstitial spaces become hybrid living spaces. An extension of the functions within.

A mega structure of main core and cantilever support the wrapping skin. This is added in tune to an orthogonal system of simple columns and beams. The two storey cantilever is supported by this grid. The main Hall plays a main role in reinforcing the structure as well as counterbalancing the cantilever.

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The facade wraps itself fluidly around the structure. It encloses where necessary and opens up to meet the surroundings where relevant. The stacked stone appearance is reminiscent of an eroded rock that has held a presence since the creation of a culture in this region of the world. This reading reinforces the monolithic intention. In this case the eroded structure has met with an urban stairs both of them sweeping up together and creating interplay of functioning spaces as well as green areas both horizontally and vertically placed. The stone provides adequate solar protection. In places the stone has eroded greatly to where the internal glazing skin becomes apparent. Larger openings are allowed for in the entrances both on the Ghalghoul Street road and on the inclined access.

The spaces enclosed in this dynamic rock, have been distinguished vertically from each other. Provided for on the lower floors are the entrance to the main halls and cinema areas. Visitors are filtered into the double height space where there is direct visual access to the main performance areas. Additionally a second access point lies just above off the main urban gesture of the project. Here there is direct interplay between inside and out. Access to the spaces above is through the vertical core. The ground floor, first and second levels host the larger auditorium and the multimedia and cinema halls with their ancillary spaces directly accessible. Smaller office spaces are located above with an introduction of a central atrium that brings light deep into the volume. The volume is capped by the cantilevered exhibition space which carries the open rooftop terrace and outdoor exhibition spaces above.

The attitude towards the city creates a dynamic long term vision that positions this building not only as a reflection of present, marks of past, but as a monolithic structure which encapsulates the change from present to future.

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