

Staging the arts, staging the city.

The site of the Mac is characterized on the south by the brutal presence of the ring road celebrating the modernity and vivacity of the city, and on the north by the intimacy of the square Riad el Solh preserving Beyrouth's urban tradition.

From this context the architecture of the Mac has inherited the vitality and the efficiency of an infrastructure as well as the urbanity of the "urban block" typology.

The Mac is not an iconic building but an iconic infrastructure. It reconciles the liveliness of mobility and movement with the enjoyment of urban spatial qualities.

It has the presence of a "staging machine", staging not only visual arts and cultural performances but also staging the city of Beyrouth as a contemporary and essential part of the Lebanese culture.

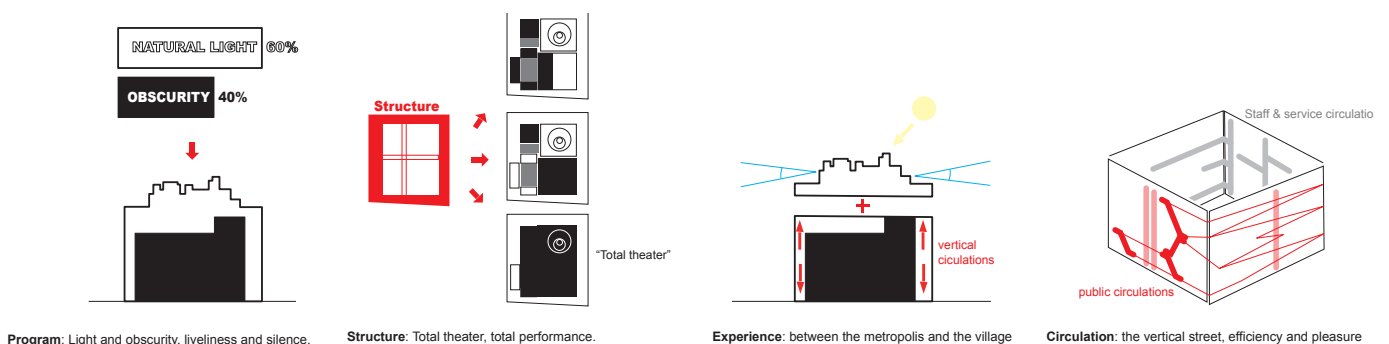


Program: Light and obscurity, liveliness and silence.

The building is organized around two sets of opposed spatial qualities: openness and light versus enclosure and obscurity.

The functions requiring natural light, views and openness such as the exhibition gallery, the library the offices and the circulations are distributed around the periphery of building.

They form a protective shell around a large and obscure void of an exceptional dimension dedicated to the performing arts. It includes theaters and the cinema. Obscurity and silence are essential spatial qualities for performing arts. The obscurity and the silence of the theater is the equivalent the white page for the writer or the empty canvas of the painter: it is a space left open to unlimited possibilities.



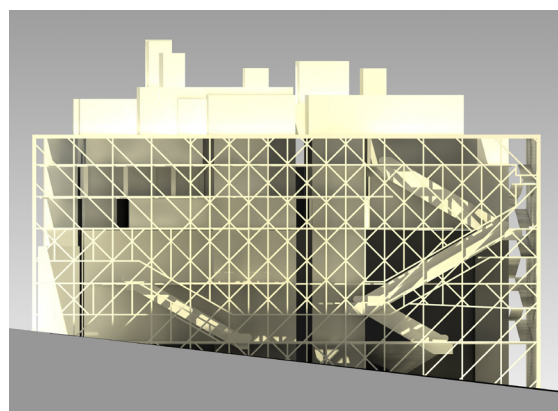
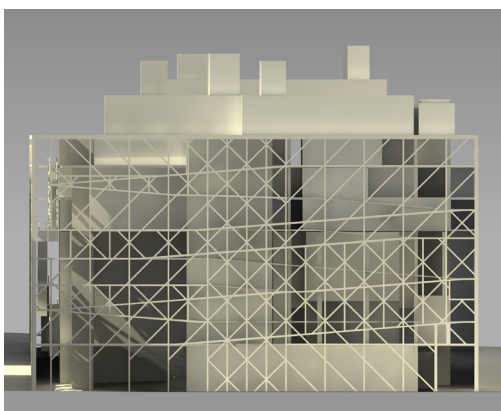
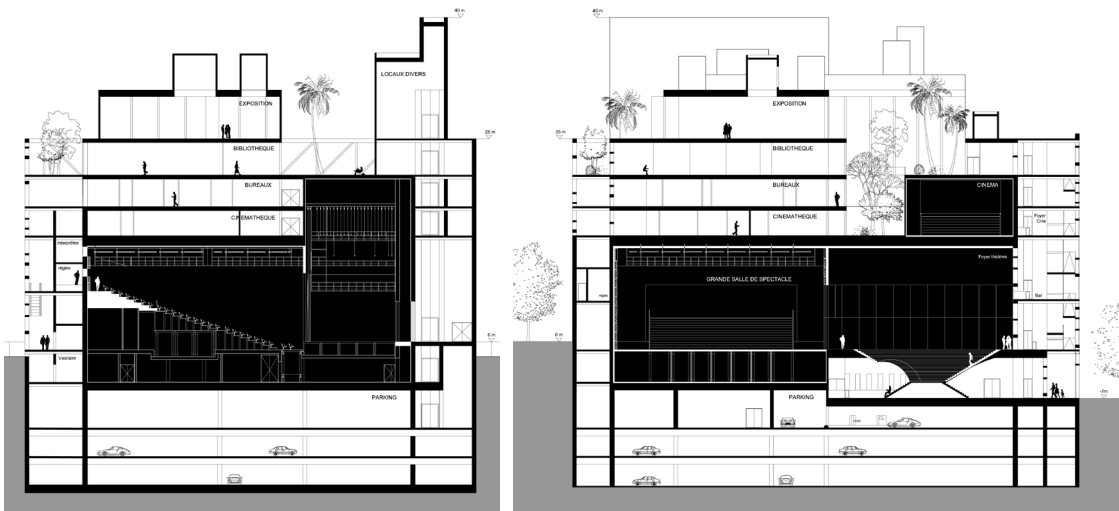
Structure: Total theater, total performance.

The structure of the building consists of two large scale structures a vertical and an horizontal one. The vertical loads are distributed along the periphery of the building through a structural mesh of beams and columns made of white concrete. This concrete mesh forms the sides of the “box”. This concentration of structure and mass on the facade of the building is borrowed from the tradition of arab architecture. It buffers the traffic noise as well as day/night temperature variations. The horizontal primary structure consists two very large vierendeel beams spanning across the box, allowing to close the roof of the “box”. The size of those beams reach such a dimension that one can walk in it and are used as horizontal circulations.

This structural layout allows to maximize the flexibility of the building by two means. First by creating large and flexible open slabs. And second by creating a structural shell around the building allowing to free the partition walls between the two theaters of any structural needs. The two theaters and the back stage area can then be merged together at will to offer the maximum possibilities of configurations for the stage and the audience. Further, this structural design allows to merge not only the two theaters but also the foyer. In this configuration building becomes a gigantic container where one can perceive the central void of the building in its full dimensions. The events and performances can break free from the theater enclosure and colonize and exploit all spaces including the foyer and the circulations. This flexibility allows transforming the MAC into a “total theater”, a space opening to the unlimited possibilities of interpretation between stage and city and between reality and fiction.

Experience: between the metropolis and the village

While the base of the building complies with the strict definition of the urban block, the roof is colonized by a village of smaller volumes distributing playfully solid and voids, patios and terrasses and vistas over Beyrouth’s vivid skyline. Here one can find at the same level the library, the foyer of the exhibition gallery and the restaurant bathed in natural light and enjoying panoramic views. This distribution offers a unique experience of the center and the city: the liveliness and the atmosphere of a “cultural” village but at the spectacular altitude of a metropolitan high-rise.



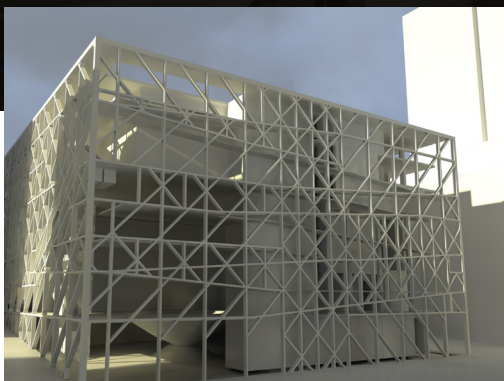
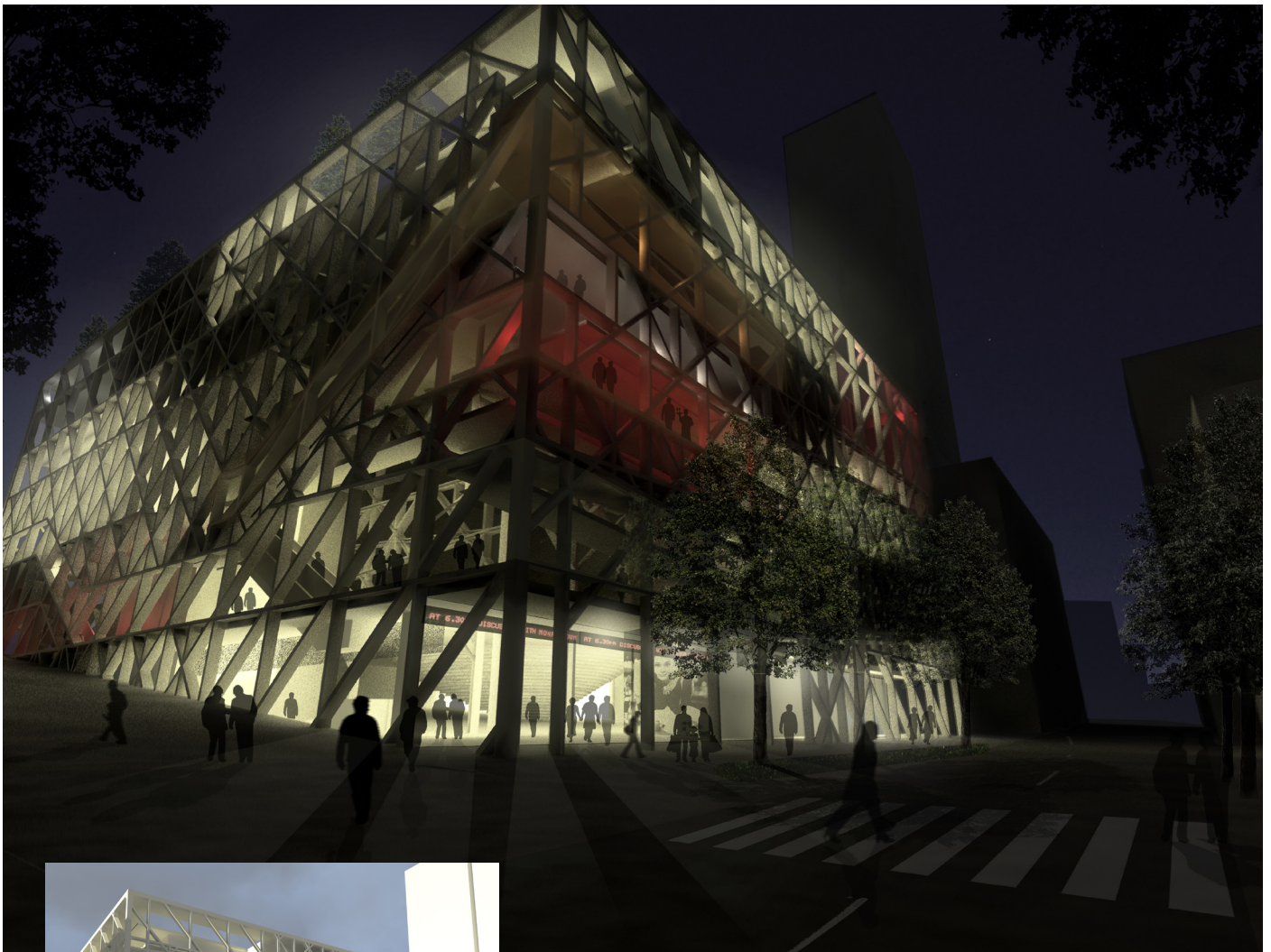
Circulation: the vertical street, efficiency and pleasure

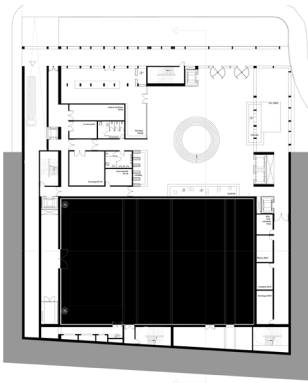
All vertical circulations are distributed in the four peripheral walls of the building. The South wall and the West wall contain service, staff and artists circulations.

The North wall and the East walls contain the Public circulations enjoying the best views over the Riad el Solh square and the constellation of landmark buildings populating this part of the city.

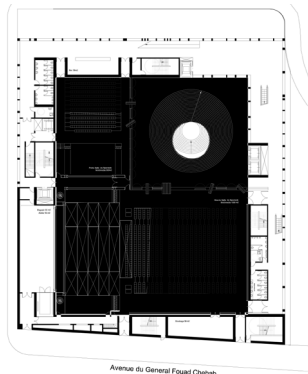
The public circulations are divided in two categories, fast and slow circulations. The fast circulations include a group of escalators lifting the public to all levels excepted of the staff level. They propose an efficient yet a pleasurable and mechanized “architectural promenade” strolling along the façade on the edge between the foyer and the city. Those are complemented with series of scenic lifts serving all levels and allowing the restaurant at roof level to function even when the rest of the center is closed.

The slow circulation consists of a system of ramps slowly descending from roof to street level. The alternation of slopes and landing, the variation of view angles, of light conditions and passing by all the functions of the center transform the circulation in a vertical street. It creates a traveling staging cultural activities and the city from skyline to streetscape. This transition space is used as an informal exhibition and performing space suitable for single pieces, videos, or music seeking to escape the demanding context of the large exhibition room and requiring an immersion in the urban context with a closer relationship to its public space.

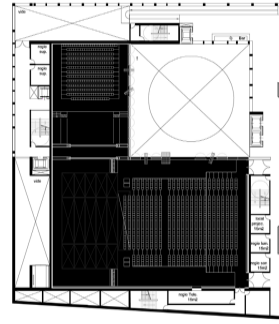




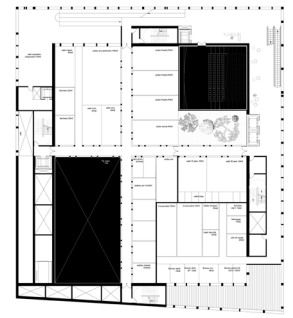
ground floor north



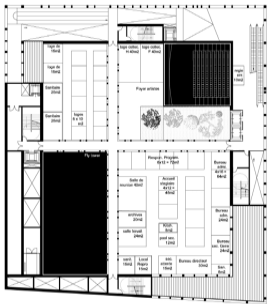
foyer, level of ring road



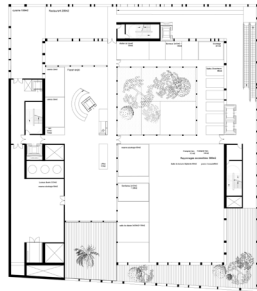
level 1



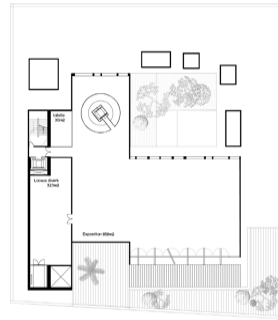
level 2 cinema



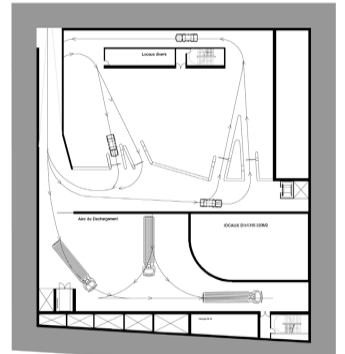
level 3 admin. & artists



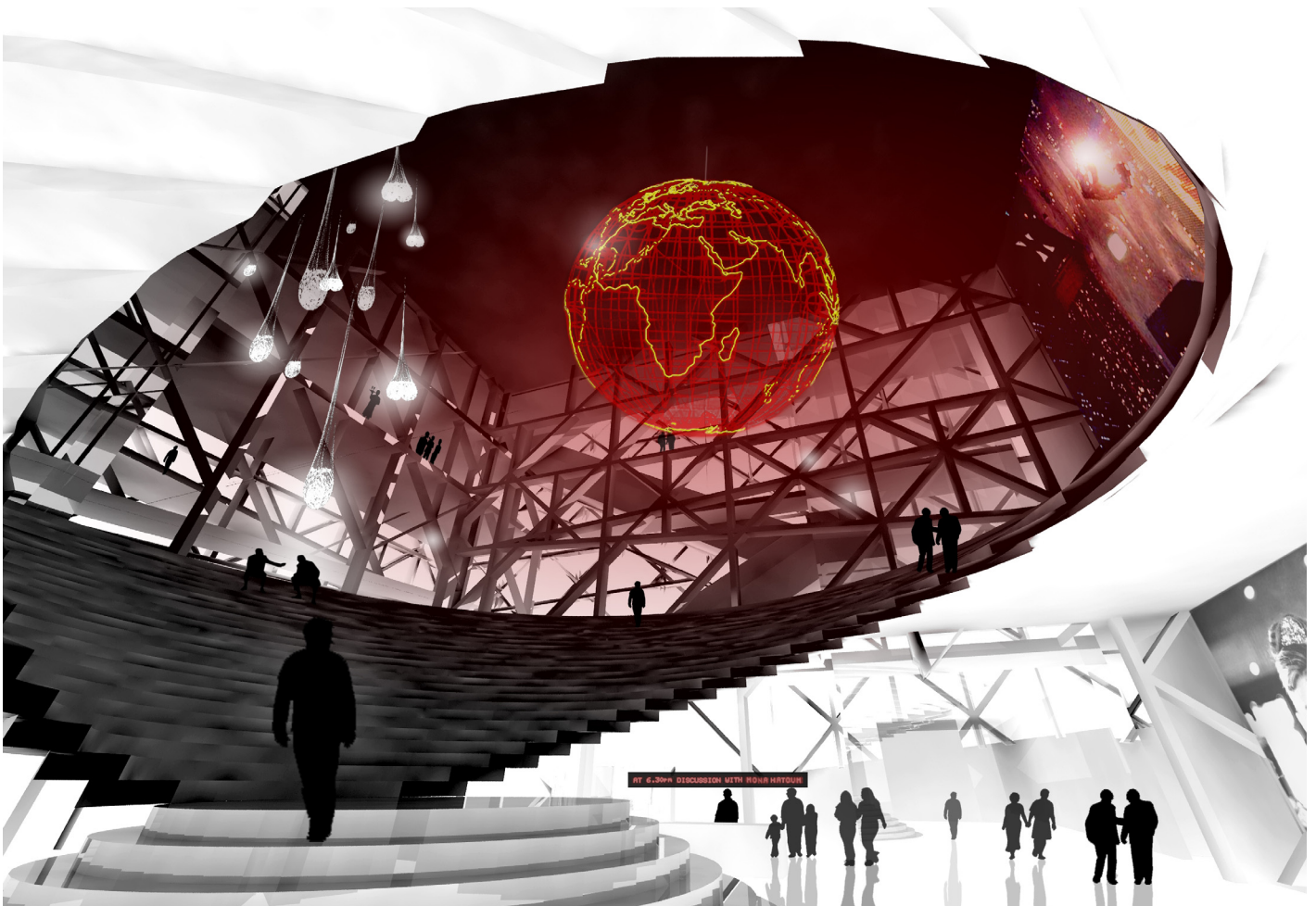
level 4 library, restaurant, foyer exhibit.



level 5 exhibition



level -1 entrance car-park and delivery bay



View of the central staircase linking the light and open entrance hall with dark and scenographic foyer. The convex form of the staircase gradually shifts from a meeting point and a bench in the entrance hall to a concave shape of an arena in the foyer.