



*Beauty sometimes is in not knowing.*

The proposal for the House of Arts and Culture in Beirut seeks to bring together 3 basic premises for its subsequent feasibility and maintenance as a live and constant equipment:

1) To be a landmark and artistic benchmark in a new part of the city where a set of new impressive buildings with independent shapes will exist. We chose to generate a contrast and seek a contained building with a stereotomic and monolithic appearance, in opposition to the tectonism derived from high technology;

2) To be closer to a truly public urban equipment rather than a building enclosed in a land plot;

3) To bring about a consequent development of the surrounding area with propositions of extensions of public environments and their link to the immediate neighborhood and certain visuals and perspectives that are important to the city.

Thus, a formal study was carried out with the intention of coherently articulating these 3 premises.

Three different blocks came as a result, which separated create a radical cleavage in an ideal prismatic volume, consequent of the terrain and its rules. It answers the challenge of addressing a difference of almost 7m in level between the Avenue General Fouad Chehab and street Ahmad El-Jabbouri, bordered by two future streets anticipated in the “Masterplan for the Beirut Central District”.

It was necessary to connect one street to the other in a non-linear fashion so that the passage is not seen at once. Thus, crossing the building, the user experiences an encounter with the entries of the 3 blocks. It is the deconstruction of a constructive axis, transforming it into a phenomenological pathway, intuitive and filled with possibilities for pauses and promenades.

Like a scar in the idealized mass, this street brings the urban space into the building, which is generously open with no doors. With heights of approximately 6 to 8 floors, the cleavage functions as a reminiscence of the traditional street in the former Central District and has an affectionate connection to the traditional informality of Lebanese streets.

The largest block (hatched blue) holds the main function, namely the Large Performance Hall, Movie Theater and their primordial activities.

The smaller block (hatched magenta) holds the more commercial, daily, and bureaucratic functions (offices). This is where the restaurant, shop, meeting rooms, management offices, and the National Cinematheque are located.

The intermediary block (hatched yellow) holds the mainly cultural and public functions, yet with a more introspective and subjective nature, i.e. the Documentation Centre, Exhibition Spaces. The top floors, over the roofing of the other two blocks, hold the workshops and training rooms.

The second step in connecting these 3 blocks to the internal street was to create 2 public foyers in different levels to generate internal squares and the accumulation of people in major events. These are the result of two subtractions of the height of 1 floor. The first, at +7.20m (Ave. Gen. Fouad Chehab) is a rectangle (15 x 40 m) creating access to the Large Performance Hall; the second, at +3.60m is a square (27 x 27m), which creates the most important public square in the project, where the Reception Hall, Tickets Offices, Information Desk, etc. are located.

This square, along with the stairs that lead to the +7.20m level, forms an open stage for special and informal performances, for which the space can be dimmed and made adequate by lowering large panes from the roofing closing off the large public entries.

The project, therefore, aims to form a proximity reference with the individual that celebrates group activities in open spaces but who is intrigued towards seeking knowledge in the unseen, yet suggested behind the edges of the blocks, in the levels above and below, beyond the doors within the spaces of the final functions of the House of Arts and Culture in Beirut.

As a way of giving the building a possibility of expressing particularity through constructive techniques it is necessary that its workers develop proximity, which demands intervention and obstinacy in the production. Thus, shapes with small random projected volumes were proposed, erosions that reveal assemblies and arrangements in the form of concrete covering, as a way of highlighting and valuing the presence of the large white exposed concrete gables. These will be detailed in a future development of the project design, with constructing formwork pieces no greater than 3m long, which can be moved by only 2 workers. This texture will allow an intense expression of light, color, and shadow over the building's material surface, transforming its interpretation throughout the day and night.

In opposition to the apparent rusticity of these external planes, the floors and door frames, the

low walls of the subtractions, and the interiors are more solemn, carefully covered in precisely fitted Carrara Marble, allowing light to pass through the thin panels that covers the pivoting and sliding doors, favoring the integrity of planes and surfaces. This material transformation is proposed as a way of adequately differentiating the rooms, exalting what can be interpreted as universal and what is individualized in the building.

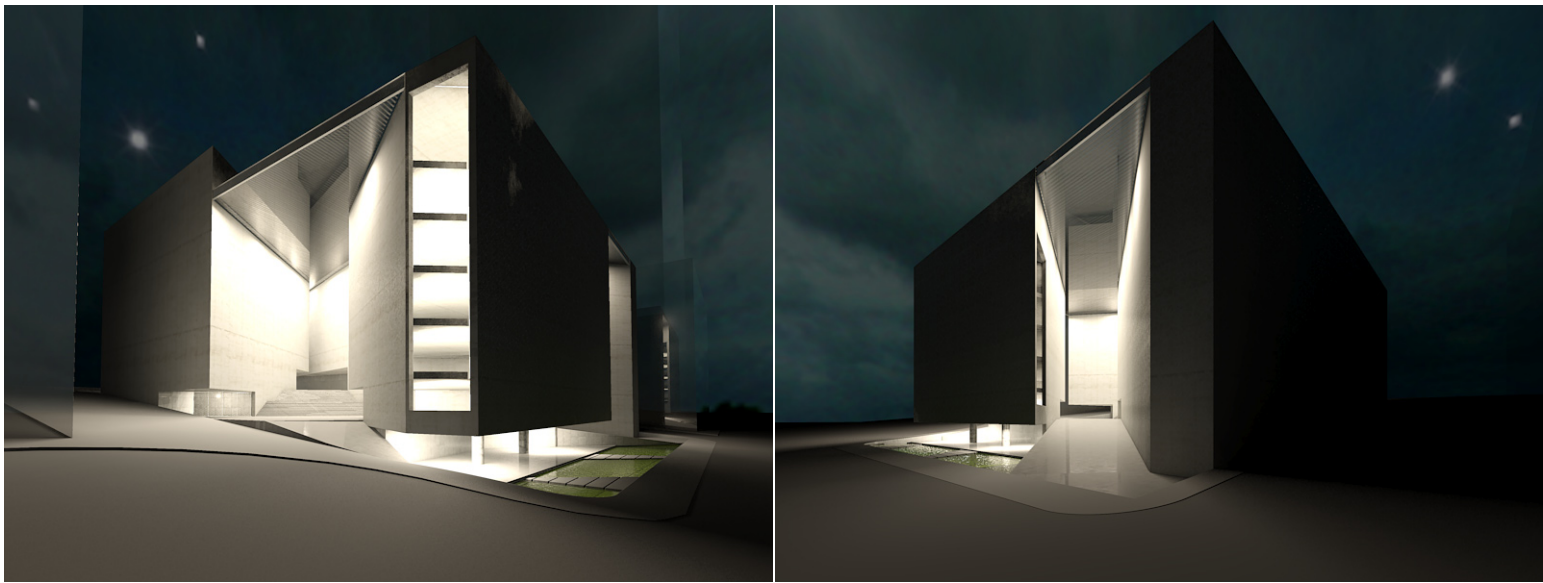
The roofings will collect rainwater, which will be stored in large underground reservoirs. Solar



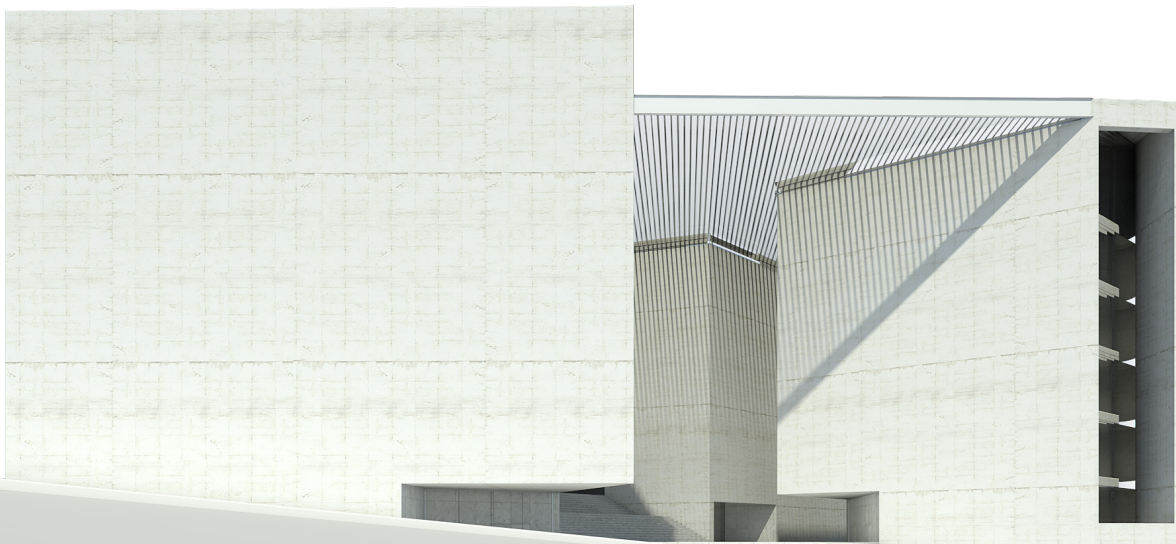
Enclosure of the main square with the descending velvet pane







energy plates will heat the drinking water for the restrooms, kitchenettes, and butleries. The sunlight can be controlled through the steel and glass structure that creates the zenital lighting of the internal street. It will function as a brise-soleil or shed, capturing only the desired lighting. At night, diffuse lights with a color temperature of approximately 5000°K set above will give the appearance of a large skylight and present the entire building as a luminous unit. Water treatment stations are located underground to discharge clean water into the environment. The selected and recycled waste is located near the loading dock areas so that it can easily be redistributed to the adequate collectors. Within the building most functions require rigorous temperature and humidity control, thus, the thick concrete walls will help maintain the temperature, especially in the seasons with major changes in temperature, ensuring the highest safety standard for the exhibitions.



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The project, as exposed, aims to bring together the collective and subjective aspects of individuals leading to a greater perception of the human nature. The experience of discovering an architectural space on its own is what we aimed here. Man and women making decisions and discovering the unseen yet suggested, becoming part of the building and the institution and the world of arts and culture. Hence *the beauty of not knowing*, but learning by experiencing.

#### Summary of Surface Areas

Spaces	AREAS PROGRAMME (m <sup>2</sup> )	PROJECT (m <sup>2</sup> )
A. Reception, Information	435	652
B. Perform. & Conference hall	2.434	2941
C. Exhibition Spaces	1.170	1302
D. Work and Training rooms	670	690
E. Documentation Centre	640	652
F. Cinematheque	273	302
G. Cafeteria & comm. spaces	510	615
H. Administration	451	624
I. Miscellaneous Spaces	305	520
J. Technical rooms	500	600
K. Parking and delivery	7.800	9108
<b>TOTAL USEFUL SURFACE</b>	<b>15.188</b>	<b>18.006</b>
Hor. and vert. circulation	700	included above

