

THE HOUSE OF ARTS & CULTURE, THE LEBANESE OMANI CENTER

Concept of the House of Arts and Culture

Beirut's strong cultural activity has since long been confronted with war and destruction. Art and Culture are not immune to social problems; they bear the responsibility of absorbing and responding to social conflicts. Artists such as Robert Frank, Gabriele Basilico or more recently the Atlas Group have interpreted this condition of Beirut and denounced a city of ruins, destroyed buildings, shooting out façades (...) and, although their work being usually valued by its aesthetical quality, and because of this exhibited in museums all over the world, it refers, in fact, to a real world, to real problems.



Gabriele Basilico and Robert Frank on Beirut (1991)

We propose to build the House of Arts and Culture, literally from these remains. To overcome the war experience is to say “forgive but not forget”.

A “black-box” is placed on top of the Beirut ruins. This “black-box”, like in airplanes, is something we all wish to keep as a survey from “accidents”, something that will record data, information and memory; an indestructible vehicle of communication.

That is what we believe The House of Arts and Culture, The Lebanese-Omani Center, should be.

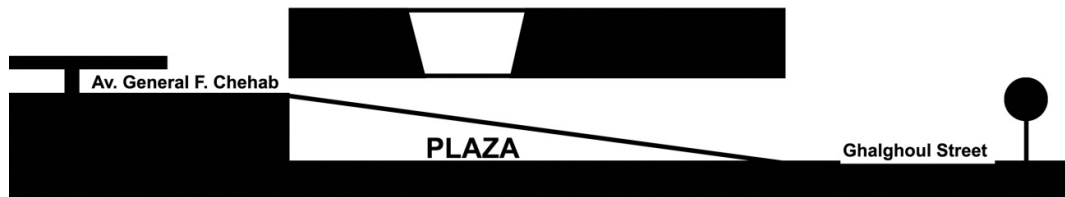


Urban Context

The renewal of the urban context after war damages is necessary and understandable. Nevertheless, an entire reconstruction of a significant part of a city, in a short period of time, hardly competes in character with cities based on slow transformations. New buildings foreseen nearby lot 128-4 represent the need of a new city image, based on contemporaneous “generic” architecture. Our idea for The House of Arts and Culture is not only about architecture signification but also about construction of public space.

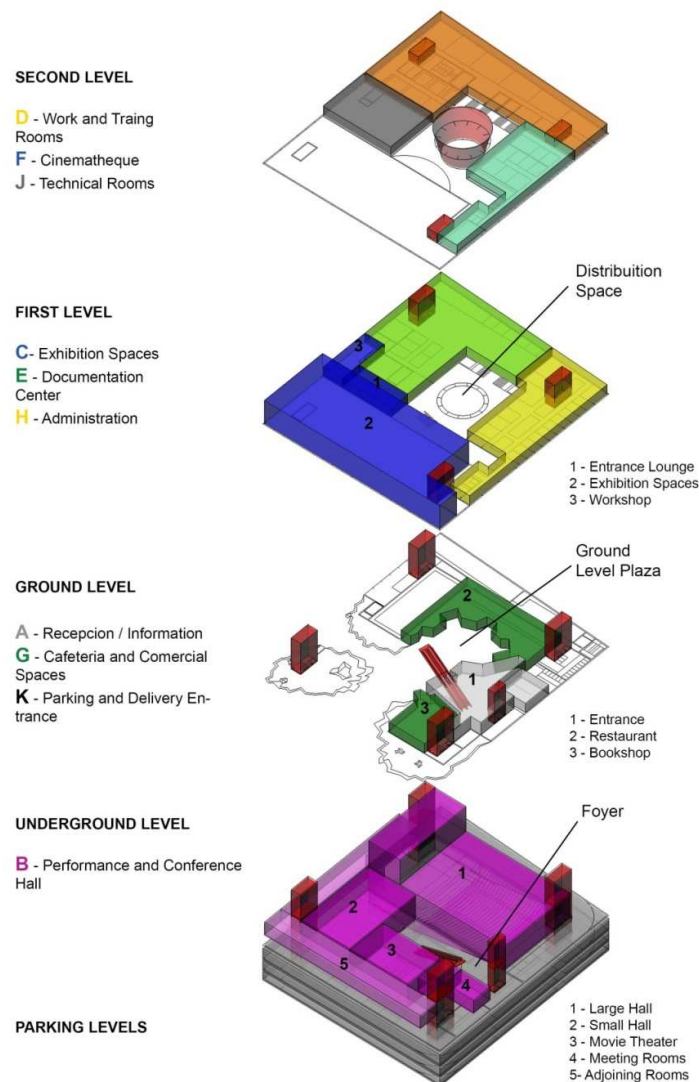
Public Space should enable multicultural interchange and freedom of expression. Our House of Arts and Culture will extend the existing (but small) plaza on the other side of the Ghalghoul Street, offering a new covered plaza useful for meeting point, street art expression or just small talk.

Our building proposal is very simple. The “black-box” floats over the ruins of houses and façades. Main entrance is foreseen on Ghalghoul Street, and on the opposite side, the “black-box”, gets closer to the ground level (due to the fact of the south terrain being 7,5 meters higher) closing the plaza to the traffic noise of the Avenue du General Fouad Chehab. We propose a very low height building for two reasons: a) to affirm the exceptional character of this public equipment (we cannot compete with neighbor towers); b) to assure that all the different uses are nearest to the ground level plaza, the urban foyer of the House.



Functional and spatial organization

At the ground floor (level 0), under the “black-box”, we propose a covered plaza from which you can directly reach the main hall of the House of Arts and Culture, the cafeteria or the shop. This intention of integrating the ground floor of the House in Beirut’s urban life aims to enable casual visits to take a coffee, see what is currently happening, buy a ticket for an upcoming show or just sit outside in the shaded esplanade. An escalator situated in the main hall of the House on the ground level grants a direct connection to the several uses integrated in the building. The Performance Hall, the Second Performance Hall and the Cinema are situated underground (level -1) due to their needlessness of natural light. The double heighted Exhibition Room, the Library and Documentation Centre located in the first floor of the box (level 1) are connected to each other by a central distribution space around an open air patio that lights the plaza.



The upper floor (level 2) hosts the Cinemateque office, workshops and workrooms. Through the positioning of an important part of the program underground we insert urban life into the core of the building through the groundfloor plaza, the central space of the House.

The vertical connections are divided into two types: public and service stairs/elevators. Four service stair/lift blocks are located in each corner of the building and one public escalator connects the main Hall with the public uses above and below. This circulation scheme allows direct connections between the different parts of the program (underground – above ground) without mixing public and private users. Parking levels, located underground, have an independent access, directly from the covered plaza.

Construction and materials

The structural layout of the building is a modulated structure of concrete forming, a grid if 12 by 12 meters (or multiples of 6 meters in order to easily adapt to the underground parking levels). Six huge vertical elements contain staircases and elevators, and bear the weight of the “black box”. The pavement of the box is supported by one meter high concrete beams placed every 1.5 meters. All the concrete elements applied in the building should remain fair-faced. The “black-box” itself will be wrapped by dark double-glazed panels. This aesthetical option also serves as a sun protection for the exhibition spaces. Furthermore the black glass allows an indifferent use of open/close façade. We propose that the façade incorporates LED or similar technology to announce information about the center.

