

## **The HOUSE OF ARTS & CULTURE – The Lebanese-Omani Centre**

### **Urban and Architectural Objectives**

Civic Virtue.....Public Institutions have cultivated a long tradition throughout history to reflect the moral compass of its society. Reflecting the consciences' of its people, the public institution serves to challenge conventional administrative notions, create possibilities which redefine 'how' and 'what' and help to publicly aspire and accomplish new social arrangements. Public Institutions in Beirut serve an even more important role of embracing the city's unique history and ever evolving society to bring hope and the contemplation of future to a proud citizenry. While the city often struggles to understand its constant and 'perpetual redefinition', it is this synthesizing which makes Beirut a unique and dynamic place. Beirut contains close to 5000 years of layered tracery which mark its storied history, dynamic civilization and rich urban fabrics; from the ruins of the Roman Empire, the Ottoman and French mandate period, up to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century capitalist interventions. This confluence of diverse cultures and multiple layers has created a rich fabric and unique identity lending to its reference as 'The Porous City'.

With a clear vision to re-develop the inner core of Beirut, BCD (Beirut Central District), to its past status as a world-class city, the "House of Art and Culture" provides a major linkage to the renewed spirit of the people and its art and culture once again invigorating its dynamic porosity of urban life. Sitting on a periphery of southern Mazraa and northern Bachoura district, the site for "The House" will be a major focal point in the city and important visual marker for approaching vehicles along the ring road (Avenue Du General Fouad Chehab) from other parts of Beirut. Pedestrians access, primarily from already active Etoile Square in the Marfa area, arrive at the small plaza along Rue Ghalghoul (in front of the site) which will act as an open urban vestibule for 'The House' offering the opportunity for outdoor gathering/ event space onto the streets of the city.

Today, the digital revolution has transformed the way in which we experience the world around us. This new technology has forever transformed art production, distribution, and even our perception of what art 'is'. However, what still remains is the significance of communication and experiential intensity between artist and audience, transmitter and receiver.

## Functional and Spatial Organization

The Public Domain.....The urban streets of Beirut capture the spirit of a permeable social construct; citizens and institutions, interior and exterior, public and private, all of which collectively engage in a sense of public 'theater production'. This engagement creates an active heterogeneous spatial assemble that rediscovers the spirit of the place. Access to the main reception hall from the north opens to a large open public forum where one's interactive journey begins. An ascending public street (grand stair) maintains conceptual consistency with the urban condition and public plaza to the north providing an interactive linkage from southern hills to ocean port. This grand stair, like the Spanish Steps of Rome, creates a moment of pause along an experiential journey along 'Via dei Condotti' reinforcing the pedestrian experience with the city of Beirut. The combined energy of the grand stair and linear atrium space works as a connector to the building as a whole. Vertical circulation located along key circulation routes allow for connectivity and overlap to take place throughout the Atrium 'Void'. Additionally, a series of strategically located public balconies allow optional circulation patterns to emerge which connect various programs throughout the 'Void'. This elective course of movement reinforces the fluid character of the interior space. In the course of developing art (performing and visual arts), the production process primarily stays 'behind the scenes' leaving the act of making an isolated event lost to the masses. This prevailing formula which reinforces the mythical notion of the artist is reinterpreted here as the art studios are revealed as a volumetric prism to the public street encouraging visual participation between artist and audience; workshops as Artists' Village. This display of experimentation and collaboration reinforces the importance and need of the seamless connection between society and the arts, artist and audience. These 'pod' workshops form the prismatic skin of the atrium space, directly interpreting the nearby artist village of Saifi. Three levels of workshops demonstrate subtle variations of materiality following each program's requirement of light, sound and connectivity. A collection of transparent, translucent and opaque polycarbonate panels envelop the workshops maintaining the sinuous interior sensibility in collaboration with public balconies.

In order to have maximum flexibility, the main 800 seats performance hall adopts retractable seating and stage configurations, which modify into three major performance types, flat floor, traditional proscenium and center stage. This venue's primary entrance is located as the finishing journey of the grand stair. An upper atrium lobby provides a secondary lobby zone for intermissions and other center events. The flat floor configuration can be used for various fashion events and convention purposes. The traditional proscenium setting provides for a regular Italian drama configuration which is achieved by movable and

retractable wall panels along the sidewalls. The center stage configuration provides for intimate performance venue which reduces the distance between performer and audience. To accommodate all of these configurations, an under floor modular hydraulic lift system will be provide flexibility for various scenarios of stage/ seat arrangement. Higher ceiling allows various lighting and sound equipment to be placed for maximum effect. Multiple level entrances will link this venue to other performing arts programs and workshops throughout the building complex. The small 250 seat performance hall, a multi-media 'Black Box' theater, encourages experimentation with enough sectional height for a variety of theatrical opportunities.

The Cinema, located on the (+35) level, provides another location for events and along the journey of the grand stairs and participates in the active lobby of art and public interaction. On the rooftop level a public restaurant and bar offers mingling space for artists and patrons. Overlooks and bridges, which crisscross the atrium, provide points of interaction with the public spaces below and provide locations for dining. In addition to overlooking the vibrant scene of atrium, uninterrupted views towards the city and surroundings provide ideal connections to the dynamic city of Beirut.

### **Technical and Building Solutions**

The structural systems for the building utilize a composite system. Concrete frame and vertical shear walls will provide the major structural system for the performance halls, office and support functions of the building. Steel space frame with interspersed metal deck and concrete slabs provide the cage-like structure of the workshop programs of the main lobby. Mechanical systems will utilize passive heating and cooling technology will be incorporated into the new facility. All of the performance spaces and exhibition will incorporate an under floor passive supply system, providing cooling and heating to the human source where it most preferred while allowing for natural convection to eliminate the undesirable air. The remaining cellular programs will rely on a raised floor passive heating and cooling system to follow the efficiency of providing air where most useful. The atrium will rely on passive heating/cooling through natural convective air floor.

Sustainable systems will be employed in the building enclosure by strategically planning the building to take advantage of its northern exposure creating an open, prismatic lens transmitting light into the inner workings of the building's body. Where glass is more directly exposed to sunlight, degrees of fritting will be employed which will uniquely respond to the each glass piece's orientation as well as increase efficiency and performance. On the south, east and western exposures a wood slat shading screen provides additional solar protection

from the sun's energy while allowing an open more transparent enclosure for the office and administrative programs above.

Photovoltaic systems will be incorporated by extending the prismatic lens of the north façade overhead and down the southern façade defining the open atrium public court. This upper enclosure will integrate solar photovoltaic panels further benefiting the building's reduction of its carbon footprint.

Geothermal technology is utilized in the building to provide passive energy for heating and cooling of the building, in both the summer and winter months, through a series of carefully positioned deep and/or shallow wells which tap this constant and abundant source. This more energy efficient system will capture excessive heat for redistribution where normally it would have been wasted.