

The House of Art and Culture.

Urban and architectural objectives, functional and spatial organization and technical and building solutions.

The integration of the building into the urban space recognizes the particular characteristics of a site located in a critical boundary between the historical center and the northern area, distinguished by a sharp difference in height on its N-S axis and surrounded by a system of pedestrian roads at the lowest level. Maintaining the site coverage limit of 70%, the proposal positions all the uncovered space next to the main pavement on the east side, strengthening the pavement's presence and enriching its content through its direct proximity to the open space and the creation of an entrance square. At the same time, the great difference in height between the two main faces of the building is exploited to accentuate the building's main entrance on the side facing the large avenue, and to harmoniously blend in the outdoor space with the immediate urban fabric.

The architectural proposal aims to create a well-ordered building, as a functional composition, one that is easy to understand and yet at the same time complex in terms of its conceptual organization. A building that is inward-looking yet also open to the city and its inhabitants. A building with a stern outline to guarantee the seriousness and weight of its mission, but also with a reservedly expressive design that will suggest its poetic dimension as a place of cultural and artistic expression and creation. A building with a geometric purity and directness to be distinguished as a pole of collective expression, and with a versatile solidity that can suggest other contexts.

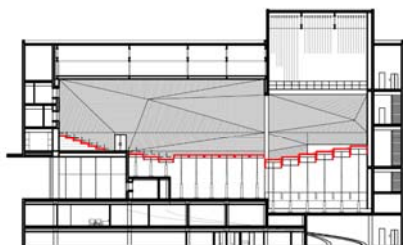
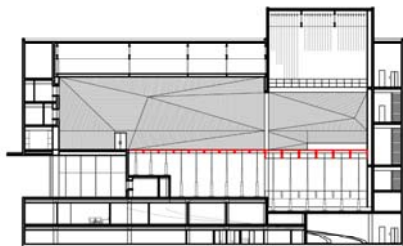
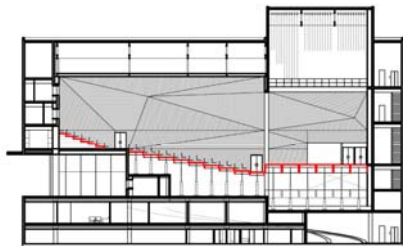
The idea of Lebanon as a "white mountain" runs through the main idea of the way that the building takes form. It is reflected on the way that the building meets the ground and also on its geometry, on its choice of Lebanese marble for the facades and the wooden elements (Lebanon cedar) outside and inside the building.

The functional composition of the building is based on the accentuation of the main entrance in conjunction with the creation of an entrance square, on the orientation of all the internal circulation and assembly areas towards the pavement and the interesting views to the north-east, on the grouping together of the administrative services and other offices in a vertical functional unity, and on the sitting of the exhibition area close to the 'sculptural' integration of the building with the ground level and on its integration into the life of the city.

According to the programme of the competition, we have:

A. Reception, information, vertical and horizontal circulation. Entry to these areas is gained at the level of the ground floor (+0.00≈40,185). The entrance has been raised to give the building a more prominent presence and to highlight the urban characteristics of the entrance square, which is intended to be a natural extension of the interior to the external public space. With the directness of an internal walkway, a rectilinear staircase directly connects the entrance foyer with the large foyer leading to the halls, at a height of 6 m. At the same time a transversal, more elaborate vertical movement connects the foyer with the intermediate levels that lie on the 13-metre vertical axis in the interior. The light that enters this area freely through the roof of the building stresses this vertical movement throughout its entire length.

B. Performance and conference halls, cinemas. Through a mechanical floor-raising-and-lowering system, the two halls, can be quickly adapted to cater for the entire range of possibilities that the programme requires. Its geometric characteristics provide for a seating capacity of 800, 250 and 200, while the size and positions of the exits ensure safe



evacuation. Provision is made for all the special areas required for the access of goods vehicles and the technical support of the hall's operations, in accordance with the programme's specifications. Access, as already has been mentioned, is gained via a system of free vertical movements, characterized by easy orientation, a pleasant progression towards light and the view into the multilevel space of the foyer. The position and size of these 'movements' will encourage their use instead of those situated in the closed nuclei of vertical communication, which of course satisfy the requirements for access to individual areas and their use by people with special needs.

The foyer area, common for all halls and cinema, stands out as the most important space in the House of Art and Culture, possessing the splendour of a public space that affords an unobstructed view of the city.

C. Exhibition spaces. The exhibition space is positioned at the lowest level of the building's main functional core. The basic means of access is from the level of the entrance foyer; it is clearly visible and lies next to the bright external face of the building. It exploits its proximity to the pedestrian road and the stepped ascent to the entrance square by seeking to blend in sculpturally with the urban space and by providing a water surface at the point where it forms a large opening outwards. The rhythmical disposition of internal movable screens permits a variety of alternative arrangements and a flexibility in the use of space, while the unexpected geometry of the projecting bay, as opposed to a typical opening, redefines the relationship between the exhibition space and the open space of the city. A particularly effective feature is the relationship between this unit and the delivery area for the safe reception of works of art.

D. Workshops and training rooms. The choice of position for the workshops and training rooms stems from an overall conception of the building: as in the case of the library, it recognizes the education of the public as an important factor in the building's successful operation. They are positioned on an intermediate level between the entrance foyer and the exhibition space. This highlights the importance of the opening of this unit to the public, as well as its direct connection with and dependence on the area that hosts big exhibition events and systematically promotes artists' work.

E. Documentation centre. The library is positioned on the same level as the entrance foyer, in direct contact with the public, thus highlighting its important and symbolic presence in the life of the House of Art and Culture. It satisfies the programme's requirement for two sub-units by being articulated on two levels, in contiguity with the internal two-level reading room. At the upper level, the library stresses its presence on the vertical access route to the public assembly areas, while it is also directly connected with the operation of the cultural shops on the same level.

F. National cinemateque. The national cinemateque is located in the same unit as the service and office areas, possesses an independent entrance and provides direct access to the cinema.

G. Cafeteria and shopping spaces. The cafeteria is positioned on the ground floor and is directly connected with the entrance foyer. It possesses an independent entrance and has a direct functional and visual connection with the cultural shops. The shops are laid out on the first floor, conceptually enriching the movement in the interior of the building towards the foyer and in the two-level dining area, lending the cafeteria – even at times when no big events are in progress – the special character and feeling that befits a venue connected with art and culture, and making it an attractive and unique place to be.

H. Administration. The administrative offices are positioned on the top two levels of the building, completing its vertical profile. Together with the library unit, the cinemateque and the dressing rooms, they form the north-west corner of the building, a functionally independent unit, six storeys high with an autonomous entrance, which nevertheless forms an organic part of the overall functional composition of the House of Art and Culture. It observes the programme's requirement for two sub-units, choosing to locate the management offices on the top level and incorporating an internal staircase for the effective uniform operation of the unit. A skylight illuminates the interior of the unit, particularly the waiting and internal circulation areas.

I. Miscellaneous spaces, J. Technical rooms. The miscellaneous spaces and technical rooms are located in the basement. Through the internal stairs and elevators easy access to all areas of the building is provided.

K. Parking and Delivery. The parking area is positioned on the lowest level of the site, while delivery points are provided for on the adjacent *Avenue du General Fouad Chehab*.

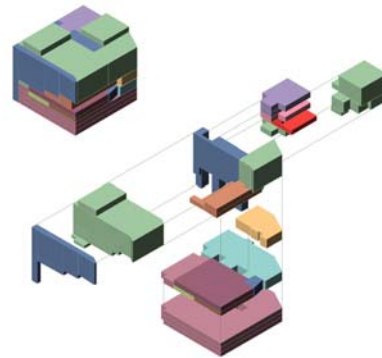
A combined structure of a metallic frame and concrete surfaces incorporates all the required electro-mechanical systems. It exploits the roof and the wavelight termination of small performance hall for its energy autonomy. It is internally lined with extensive wooden facing; while externally Lebanese marble is used and metallic inox elements to construct the glass screens. The lighting level in the library is controlled through the use of wooden blinds.



G.floor – Level 0, 1



Level 2



3D Functional Composition



Level 4, 5



Level -3, -6

	FOYER
	PERFORMANCE HALLS
	LIBRARY
	CAFE
	ADMINISTRATION
	DRESSING ROOMS
	EXHIBITION SPACES
	WORKSHOPS AND TRAINING ROOMS
	PARKING AND DELIVERY