

**insidExt - Beirut The House of Arts and Culture** –The program offers a chance for Beirut to create a space that embodies the principals of openness and exchange. It is a chance for the city to build a common, contemporary cultural identity that reflects the diversity that has characterized Beirut for ages. But *to build* does not mean to make a physical object within the city where activities take place, but instead points to the activities themselves. The *building* is not a finished object but rather an ongoing process that develops over time to mirror the multiple visions of a city and of a nation.

These values serve as the basis for our thinking about the project -- about urban, functional, spatial and technical issues. The project leads the visitor, the viewing body, into spaces where she is constantly aware of her surroundings, acutely aware of the production of culture that is taking place so that she has a stake in it. Her viewing body, in motion and at rest, occupies spaces in ways that transform culture into an energy, an energy moving through space and time.

**Urban Objectives** -- The site proposes several challenges to this idea for a House of Arts and Culture. It is penned in on all sides: by an four lane elevated street, a proposed tower to the west and other projects to the north and east. These elements bring activity to the site but also suffocate.

The surroundings comprise a fabric that is anonymous and ubiquitous. The new development zone, central to the planning and renewal of Beirut, runs the risk of creating a neighborhood that is hostile to site and place. Working within the planning commission guidelines, the project activates possibilities for placemaking and rethinks the site to create a zone that engages the neighborhood.

The project arrives at this objective by creating a public space that stretches from north of the site to within the limits of the building itself. Beginning with a courtyard typology, the project opens up the inner space to the outside by lifting up the northeast corner of the project. This lifting creates a continuous plane that leads the public into the House of Arts and Culture while at the same time opening up an intimate yet expansive public area in a neighborhood that lacks such a gathering place.

**Architectural Objectives** -- Courtyard buildings create inner worlds that are detached from their surroundings. Courtyards are spaces of reflection and also spaces of exchange. In urban contexts such as Beirut, they are oases where a singular spirit pervades. Because of this very nature, courtyards are also guarded and secret, often a realm of privilege. By lifting up the corner of the building, the project operates on the tension between the courtyard as a space open to reflection and closed from the world.

It creates a new kind of space that is at once an inner world and open to the outside: an interior space linked to the city.

In addressing the consequences of this typological transformation, additional objectives drive the project: an interest in the movement of the body along the oblique and in using visual and spatial proximity to create possibilities for new types of interdisciplinary programmatic forms.

All of these objectives seek to challenge traditional modes of thinking about cultural institutions as places of spectacle where visitors are passive receptacles. Rather, the intent of the project is to allow for new modes of use and experience that align the inhabitation of the building with the production of culture, so that every interaction can be understood as part of the *building* of a contemporary cultural identity.

**Functional Organization** -- The program is organized to create efficient access routes for users while at the same time juxtaposing and overlapping spaces so that different types of users and programs are not isolated. The idea is to create an organization that opens up possibilities for exchange and allows the movement of people, view and ideas throughout the entire project.

Different programmatic elements are organized and accessible from two vertical elevator cores at the south-east and south-west corners. Between the two cores, a ground floor reception area leads to upper and lower reception halls or to the elevator banks themselves. Elevators at the south west corner lead to the movie theater and performance/conference halls as well as exhibition spaces on the fourth floor. Elevators on the south east lead to areas with more regular traffic patterns: the documentation center and workshops on the first and third floors and the national cinematheque and administration on the second and fourth floors.

**Spatial Organization** -- The ideas driving the project's spatial organization derive from the tensions opened up by raising the corner of the building, tensions between inside and outside, between a private interior world and an opening outwards.

The project can be diagrammed as two L-shaped wings. The southwest "L" is structured as a stack of floors and the wing to the north-east figured as two cantilevered bars raised from the ground and separated from each other by a garden. The lower of these two floors contains the library and the upper floor the workshops. The workshop bar spirals around the western side of the building, above the southwest "L" to create the exhibition area.

All of the programmatic areas contained within the figured bars are organized with circulation running along the facade and flexible spaces contained within. Moving through the building in these public areas is movement along the facade, always allowing the opportunity to look out at the city or into the courtyard. These circulation spaces are ramped at an accessible slope expressing the lifting of the building off the ground as the oblique movement of the body through space.

Programmatic areas are also designed to be flexible. For example, the large performance/conference hall incorporates an adjustable stage and seating system, making it possible to host different types of programs. The glass wall along the courtyard side of this space can be closed with sliding black-out panels or can be opened to accommodate additional seating in the courtyard. In the workshops, adjacent classrooms can be combined to create a large lecture hall. The dance and theater workshop areas, located on the cantilevered northeast corner of the site with views out to the park, can be transformed into a larger practice space. The exhibition galleries are configured as two large spaces that are connected by a peripheral ramp and an elevator.

Informal performance spaces are placed throughout the building: in the courtyard where landscaped seating can be accessed from ground level or from the foyer mezzanine, in the second floor garden, in the exhibition rooms where seating under the upper gallery can provide an audience for lectures or performances in the lower gallery.

The garden running through the building is accessed from the second floor and continues along three sides of the building. It can be reached from both elevator banks and directly from the fourth floor galleries. Because this garden is a layer within the building, it offers a new type of space that is at once contained by the building and outdoors.

**Technical and Building Solutions** -- The structural diagram of the building is similar to that of a cantilevered bridge or crane using steel truss sections. The cantilevered bars are independent box frame trusses that are supported at the southeast and northwest corners of the building.

The building's facade varies in response to orientation. The project's skin creates a coherent image while taking into account environmental factors. These factors help to determine a system that modulates the character of the building. In the south, horizontal fins act to mitigate direct sunlight. In-fill - glass, polycarbonate or opaque panels – changes in response to the programmatic needs within.

Along the east, a secondary structure follows the orientation of the truss structure and infill is pushed back to the interior so that this structure acts as a *brise soleil* against early morning light. To the north, the secondary structure is placed in a horizontal position and infill is pushed to the exterior surface plane. The courtyard facades of the cantilevered truss structure operate similarly to the exterior facades, with the exception that mirrored glass is also used to bring indirect light into the courtyard. The courtyard facades of the theater and the southern wing are in high-lead glass to allow views into and out of the spaces.

Environmental concerns are addressed by the very nature of the building. Because the building is never very wide, a natural ventilation system will be used to reduce reliance on artificial cooling systems. Circulation spaces along the facade can be entirely ventilated through cross currents while interior rooms could be fitted out with climate control systems. The planted roof and garden incorporate a rain-catching system that circulates water so that it can be used for toilettes or in the cooling system. The facade panel system is responsive to the needs of the inhabitants. Where opacity is a possibility the panels can be replaced with solar panels to accumulate energy for the building while subtly transforming the nature of the facade.