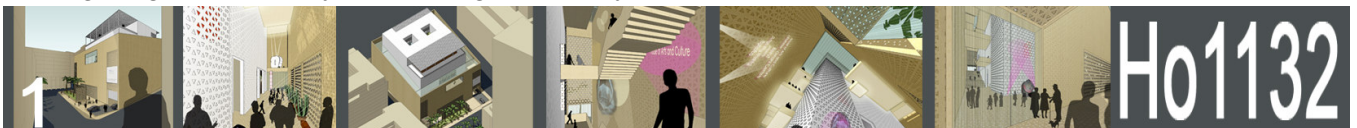
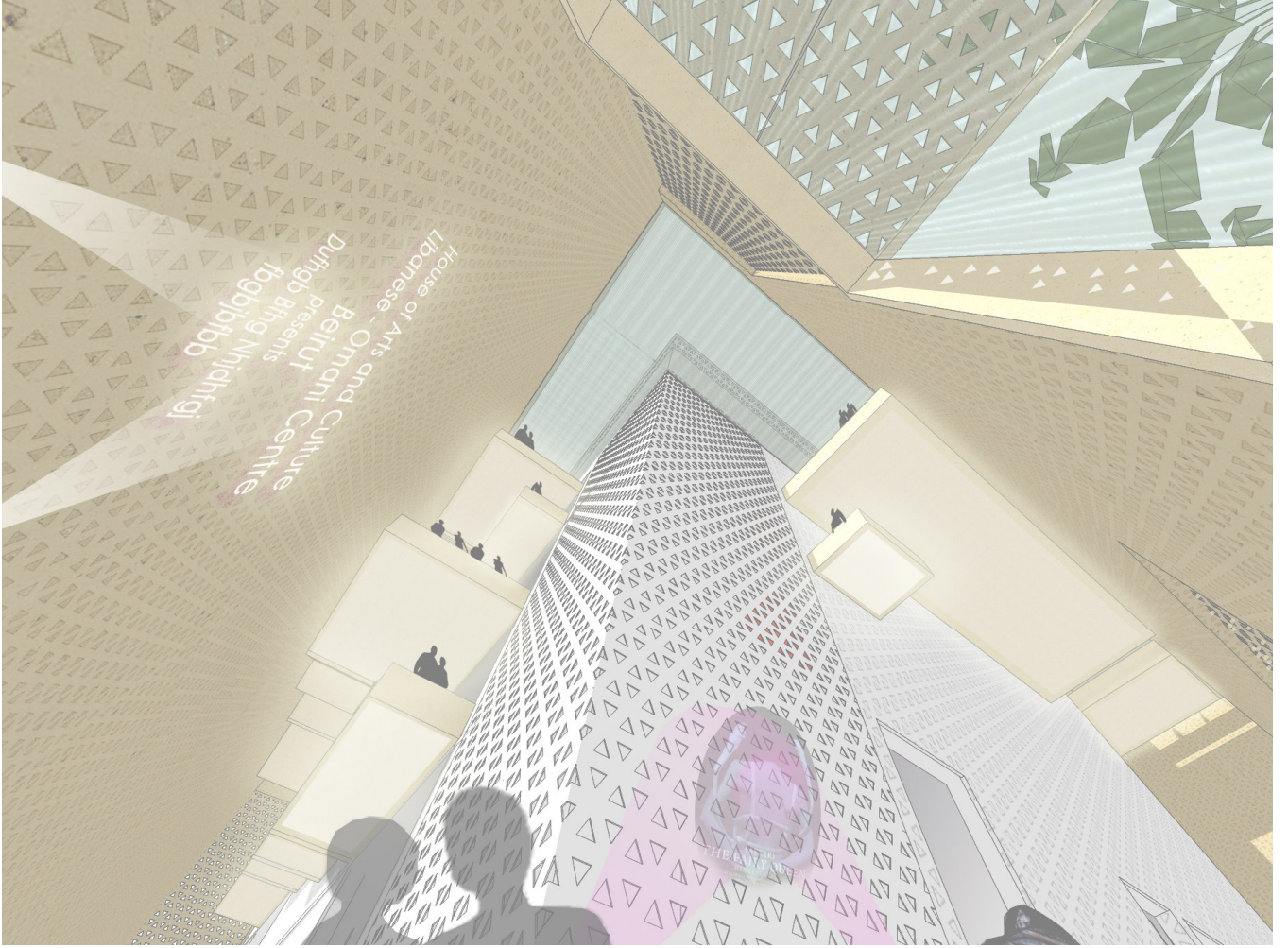




Today is the day, when **Catherine and Said** married each other five years ago. Since a number of months, every now and then Said already heard whispers about the new house of culture and art in Beirut. He knows that his wife loves being surprised and he remembers she loves Lebanese music. This morning, during breakfast he surprised her with concert tickets. Dressed up, now they sit in the car and enjoy feeling very curious and excited. It is now five o'clock in the afternoon and they drive down the Rue Cheikh Toufic Khaled. They turn to the right and in the sunlight appears the impressive house of culture and art. Catherine is overwhelmed; the building looks different to what she expected. A brave expressive monolith with a limited number of openings stands in front of her. Getting closer to the building she recognizes that parts of the walls are covered with a relief of triangles. Tension increases when Said turns to the right again. Entering the building, they observe a game of light and shadow on the concrete wall. Shadow and light dance with each other while Catherine and Said get deeper into the building. They have to stop. It is very busy, cars queue up. Said looks out of his window, through a window in the wall he notices people inside the foyer of the building. They are dressed up, visitors from any age stand around in groups and talk with each other. Masqueraded people are moving and dancing through the visitors in the foyer. It seems they play, sing or narrate something. Will we be there, too? They can move on and sitting in their car they dive deeper into the building. The parking system guides them down, 1 floor, 2 floors and a third floor downwards. Leaving the car Catherine recognizes she can still watch the playing of shadow in the hosh. "It is influenced by the cars entering the building", says Said. They step into one of the lifts and leave upwards. When they enter a wide lobby, Catherine realizes that the surrounding walls do not only filter the sunlight but also keep the noise and smell of the city outside. They are entering a new world, the fast moving and hectic city, which annoys her so often is locked out. At the information service counter Said ask for the concert. "We own cards for this evenings concert, could you please help us?" Aya looks at the cards the man shows her. "The concert starts in two hours. It is arranged in the big performance hall. Your cards are for the balcony. The entrance is on the fifth floor." The man looks surprised and a bit irritated. He wonders why they are guided upstairs and not downstairs? Especially as he is already impressed by the visitors and artistes he saw on the lower floors? Aya smiles: "Downstairs? This is today's interactive performance session in the small hall. It is open for every visitor. As you have some time left, you can of course visit it. They present the new book of Amin Maalouf. The presentation is enriched with dancing, instrumental music and songs". "Lovely, but we booked a table in the restaurant". "The restaurant is on the 8th floor". Aya sees the man walking back to his wife, who already strolled towards the stairways. Catherine, we need to go upstairs. Together they pass something that looks like a white skin and enter a small high hall. Catherine recognizes the external wall. It is the same velvet yellow concrete wall with the triangles she admired before. They observe that the whole volume, inside which the information is located, is enveloped in something like a white membrane. It repeats the pattern of triangles. As her eyes follow the white membrane she notices that at some places she can see through the white skin. Sometimes she sees dots of light and sometimes people walking around. "This building is so fantastic, and we still have time; let us walk around a bit." They walk upstairs. On each floor they enter again the white membrane and take a glance at new rooms, see and meet new people. On the second floor they observed two women and a man disappearing with huge bags in artists' area. Two floors higher, a group of scholars drinks water, juice and coffee while they enjoy the view over Beirut. Other students scroll through magazines and books. Catherine and Said also walk over to the big window and are delighted by the view over the south of Beirut. „I never saw our beautiful hometown from this perspective before", says Said. Catherine, thinks that at the horizon she can even watch the skyline of the mountains. They continue their discovery tour until they arrive at end of the stairway, the 5th floor. Through a glass roof they can see again the city of Beirut. The view includes the new harbour area

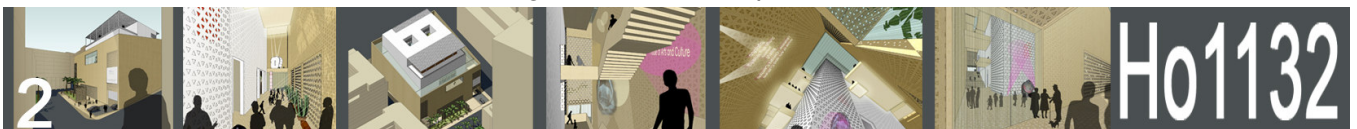


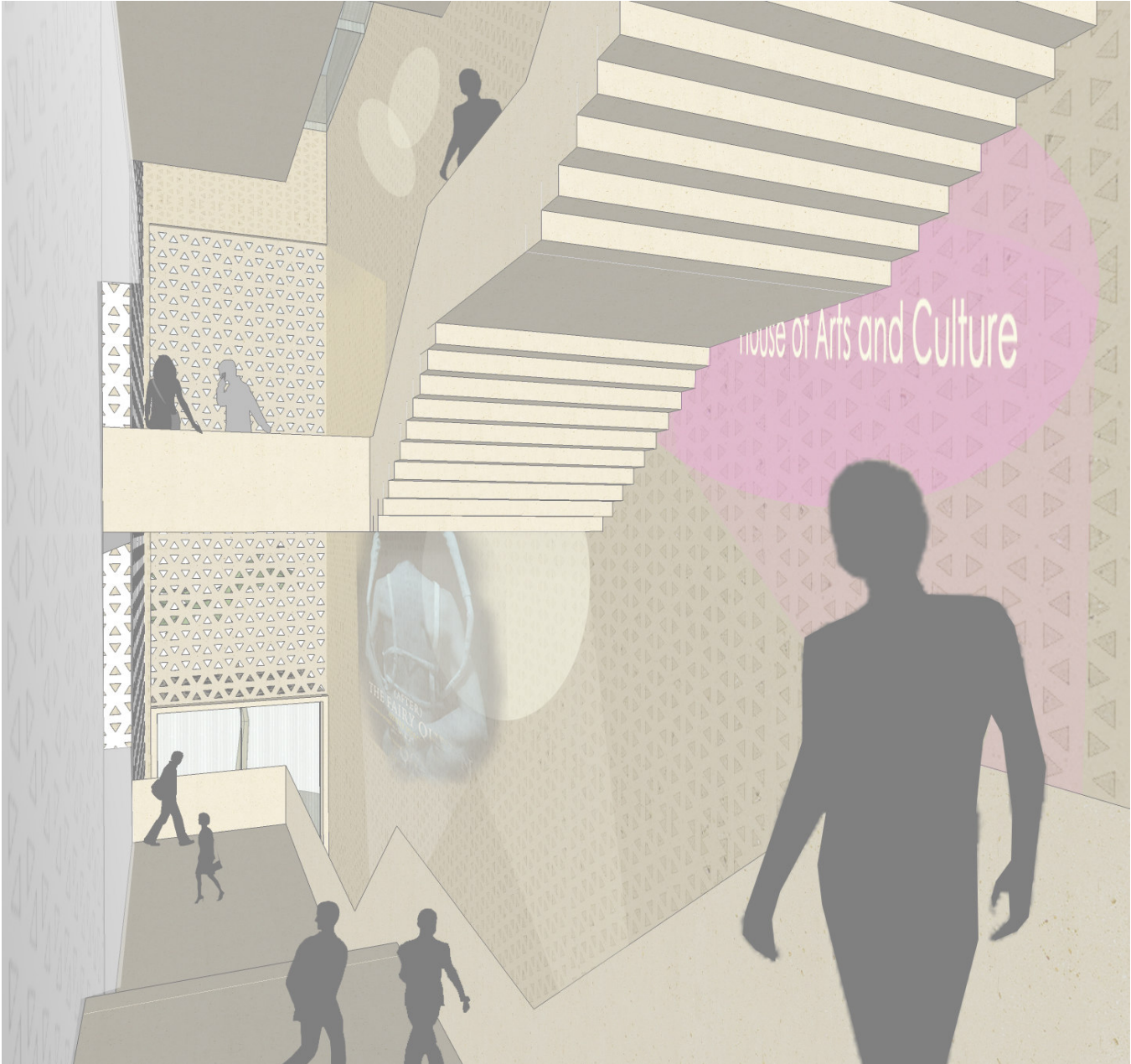


where Said is working. To move higher Said and Catherine step into the lift. When they arrive at the 8th floor and walk towards the restaurant they enjoy again the phenomenal view over, the new harbour, the old city districts, the recent buildings from the European architects, where the last small items are being finalized. They walk around a halation and enter the restaurant. Said asks for the table and Catherine looks down in a “hosh”. Her eyes follow the light down through a glass roof. Two girls, who are bend above a book. Sitting on a table outside on the terrace beneath the shadow of a big sunshade. Here, at the top of the building it is very comfortable. Catherine realizes that the table napkin and the porcelain are marked with a pearl. She already observed it when they entered the restaurant. What an adequate name for a restaurant in a place like this. With its sturdy and screened body shell and the contained, internally secured, white, fragile and enchanting kernel, the whole building reminds her of a pearl. Later, after the concert the applause doesn't stop, Heavily impressed, Catherine and Said don't feel like going home, to many impressions keep them busy and curious. They join the cafeteria, where they already enjoyed the view over Beirut some hours ago. Now the landscape looks different. The sun perished and left a beautiful red glow on the horizon. Said arrives with their two drinks and they enjoy the view and their feelings. Catherine visits the shop to buy a cd of the concert. She thinks this will be a nice souvenir reminding them of this beautiful and impressive evening. She walks along glass cabinets and show cases. At the end of the shop Catherine arrives at a balustrade, above her the glass roof and the dark blue night. Below her, she sees the big hall, where Said observed all the artists when they rode into the building. Now the foyer is crowed with children from a school excursion. Some of the girls are dancing while the boys stand around in groups or are walking back from the foyer into the hall. Catherine smiles, this is typical behaviour, it is the same behaviour like during her youth. “This building does not only show new and surprising things and offers new experiences, reminds it also everybody to her personal history and heritage? What a fascinating idea!



Samir is stressed. His flight from Kairo was delayed and he has to arrive at the House of Art and Culture in time! Finally the taxi arrives at the Avenue du General Fouad Chehab. This is now Samir's third concert in the building and every time the building surprises him again. The rough outer walls with their protecting almost repellent character fascinate him. The limited number of openings, covered by a sort of modern mashrabiya, allow only filtered light to flow into the building. The only interruption of this principle consists of big two panorama frames. From these, visitors enjoy a gorgeous view over Beirut. Samir pays the taxi and enters the building. The direct sunlight fades away and he stands in the adorable entry lounge. It is high and the temperature is kindly cool. In the centre of the building stands a fragile volume. It contains all levels which are involved with art and culture, all facilities which contribute to keep art and culture alive. Personally, for Samir it is the treasure and beating heart of all Lebanese. In front of him are broad stairs which lead downwards. Young visitors walk and sit in small groups on the stairs. Probably a school class, Samir thinks. Above him he can see a world of stairways, which spread a diffuse light from their bottom edge. Samir remembers that after the sunset they create an awesome sphere. He moves on and takes the stairs downwards. In front of him the entrance of the Rue Chalhoul comes closer with each step. At the end of the stairway he turns to the left and rushes through an opening of the white metal membrane. Visitors and actors stand in the foyer. The doors of the big black box are open and create a relationship between one of the performance halls and foyer, yes via the big frames even with the street outside. Especially this is very fascinating for Samir. He moves forward to the back of a black box into the delivery area, just to go sure that all music instruments arrived and have been brought backstage to the upper hall. He is glad to find out that the whole equipment is already in the orchestra pit. In the good elevator, four men are busy with carefully bringing the last item upwards – the grand piano. Samir is happy, he takes a deep breath and settles a bit. He strolls back to the lifts, which bring him two floors up to the restricted artist areas.

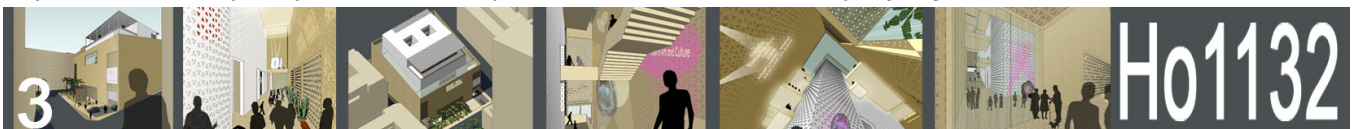




Stepping out of the lift he recognizes Rebecca, Katja and Raschied walking towards the artists' room. Samir follows them until they turn left into the big dressing room, while he turns to the right and enters the artists' foyer. Slowly the tension, he always feels in front of getting on stage rises in him. The same exiting stage freight, which he always experiences, until the concert starts. At the bar he orders a refreshment. With the cold glass in his hands he walks towards the balcony at the end of the room. From there he studies the people streaming into the building. It is like the world turned upside down, as he is the audience and the visitors are the actors of an unknown surprising play. Looking up to his left, the floor of the backstage area is visible. It hangs between the white volume and the yellow concrete wall. He is already now thrilled by the view over Beirut, which he will have during the concert. Refreshed by a shower and dressed up Samir enters the stage from the side. He gets a goose skin and is deeply impressed from the location as well as from the people visiting it tonight, the guests, who attend to listen to the music, their music. The concert is sold out and 800 guests fill in this fabulous new concert hall. The atmosphere is gorgeous; the walls are decorated with cedar wood, creating a special cosy atmosphere. Samir turns around and starts feeling very comfortable when he looks into the proud faces of all his colleagues. The faces of his colleagues from the orchestra who sit in the orchestra pit and from the ones in the choir who are lined up on stage. They are positioned on two large stairs, who are part of the variable facilities this stage offers. Samir looks straight ahead. The wings of the external stage doors are wide open. Through the tremendous window the audience sees the sunset and the skyline of Beirut. He knows no greater coulisse than this one. He raises his arms, he feels full of energy and music flows out of the orchestra pit. The sound of the instruments pairs and dances with the voices from the choir, involves the audience and carries them into another world.



16 years old **Nasif** is a student at the 20th basic school in Beirut. For him and his classmates this is a very special day! Today they visit the House of Arts and Culture in Beirut. Only Nasif feels a bit annoyed. He is interested in history and art, but he doesn't really like to do everything together in a group. His friends are very curious and already studied the whole building in the internet. They know all possibilities and most of them selected a workshop in which they would like to participate. The bus stops in the Avenue du General Fouad Chehab and the bunch of students poors into the building. Passing through, under a big sun roof, they immediately find themselves back in a high and small room. Here they all stop and automatically, their curious eyes become big and follow the walls to the ceiling. The group became silent. Also Nasif is deeply impressed. The building is surprisingly high and inside it is very bright. The large amount of stairways, plateaus and runways remind Nasif on a picture or landscape he remembers from a movie or a computer game. It looks like a labyrinth. Mr. Abbud discusses something at the information counter. Nasif maunders around and takes a brochure into his hands. Then he realizes that he is surrounded by white walls. Strange, in the entry area and outside all walls were in yellow stone? - Mr Abbud joins the group of students again and gives instructions. "We all have to go the bioscope on the 6th floor, there we start with our day. Most of the students decide to take one of the lifts while Nasif and his friends chose the broad stairways. They ascend from floor to floor. Nasif re-enters the fascinating internal white building on each floor and looks around what new perspectives he encounters inside. For a moment he reflects again about the original comparison with a labyrinth, but thanks to the brochure he actually knows what is where. His friends are snoopy like him and follow him to look over his shoulder on each floor. "This I already saw on the internet" bursts it out Mustafa on one of the floors. Further upstairs it becomes very exciting, there are areas for workshops and today they are allowed to participate in everything. Emir says he is interested in a workshop with sound and video art. "Of course the girls want to do workshops around dancing", he jokes, "haha!" Altogether they enter the cinema. Before the film starts Mr Abbud calls the students together and explains them why they are here today. He introduces them today's program and into the film





that they will watch immediately. It is an international Lebanese film over the war in Beirut, a film which is also very famous outside the Lebanon: Juli Trip. While leaving the cinema after the film, the discussions between the students already start. Nasif does not participate; he is fascinated by the building and uses every moment he has to see more of it. Some hours later he sits with a cup of cappuccino in the cafeteria. In front of him a purchased book about the sculptures he watched in the exhibition. He is surprised as this is the first time he voluntarily purchased a book about art. He also liked the documentation centre with the tall light dome. He watches Beirut through one of the large windows. Looking from a higher point of view, the city appears larger than he thought. He is very happy that he joined the class today instead of staying at home. He wants to come back, maybe after school or in the weekend. In the computer areas he read that courses about video art, photographic art and digital animation are offered. Pleased with himself and with the world Nasif walks through his book. Emir turns around the corner. Nasif we are already searching you for a while. We want you to join us on the beautiful roof terrace and to have some sandwiches. Afterwards we want to go to listen to a concert. Come on, start moving, we are hungry!



Zara studies in Paris and during her semester break she visits Beirut for 6 weeks. Today Zara has an appointment to visit her aunt in her new city apartment downtown Beirut. Now she is on her way to the Rue Chalhoul where her uncle and her aunt live. "I should have taken a taxi, it's so warm and sticky." The climate cannot be compared with the summer in Paris. Somewhere here in this area it must be, all the new apartment buildings are here. Zara remains for a moment because in front of her a car leaves a building. She looks down and realizes she stands on a type of lattice. She can look deeply down and on the ground she realizes a stones garden. She moves some steps further, now the floor beneath her consists of large concrete slabs with a relief of triangles. These triangles cover the whole pavement, encloses a beetroot with trees and ends finally climb up the walls of a building. "What is that?" Walking further, she suddenly finds her self standing between large concrete panes. Their body is covered with a pattern of transparent triangles, their light dances on the floor in front of her feet. When she looks right through the triangles she spots people. The same moment some elements of music whisper into her ears. Again she moves a bit ahead and she finds her self back beneath the large sun roof covering a broad entrance. A large imaginative magnet attracts her and starts pulling her inside the building. She enters a narrow and very high place. Automatically her eyes start walking the walls upwards. She sees stairways, balconies, runways terraces and everywhere people. Slightly filtered sunlight flows through the building. The atmosphere is overwhelming and appeasing. The dust and noise of the street are kept outside. Zara relaxes and feels very comfortable. She recognizes a broad, smooth stairway leading higher into the building. Nevertheless on her right hand side a group of people make her curious. She passes a strange skin of white metal which repeats the same pattern of triangles she saw earlier. People hang around in groups. Actors move through the groups and sing, dance and recite something – may be out of a book? In an open room sits a man and reads from a book and everywhere Zara observes posters – the recent book of Amin Maalouf. She continues her journey and at the end of the area she sees cars entering and leaving the building. Looking upwards she discovers balconies with sculptures and visitors walking around. "How beautiful", Zara thinks. She already visited museums and exhibitions in Paris, but she never saw culture exposed in a surrounding like this. "I want to see more of it!" She walks back and joins the stairway leading upwards. The large entry lounge with the information counters and displayed brochures she finds to her right. "House of Culture and Arts" they state the small booklets in bold back letters. "Yes, I already heard about it." Zara has a glance at her watch, she needs to hurry up. She stuffs a brochure into her bag and strives the stairway down towards to the street. When she arrives at her uncle and her aunt she is still very excited and impressed and is looking forward to visit again this surprising building.

