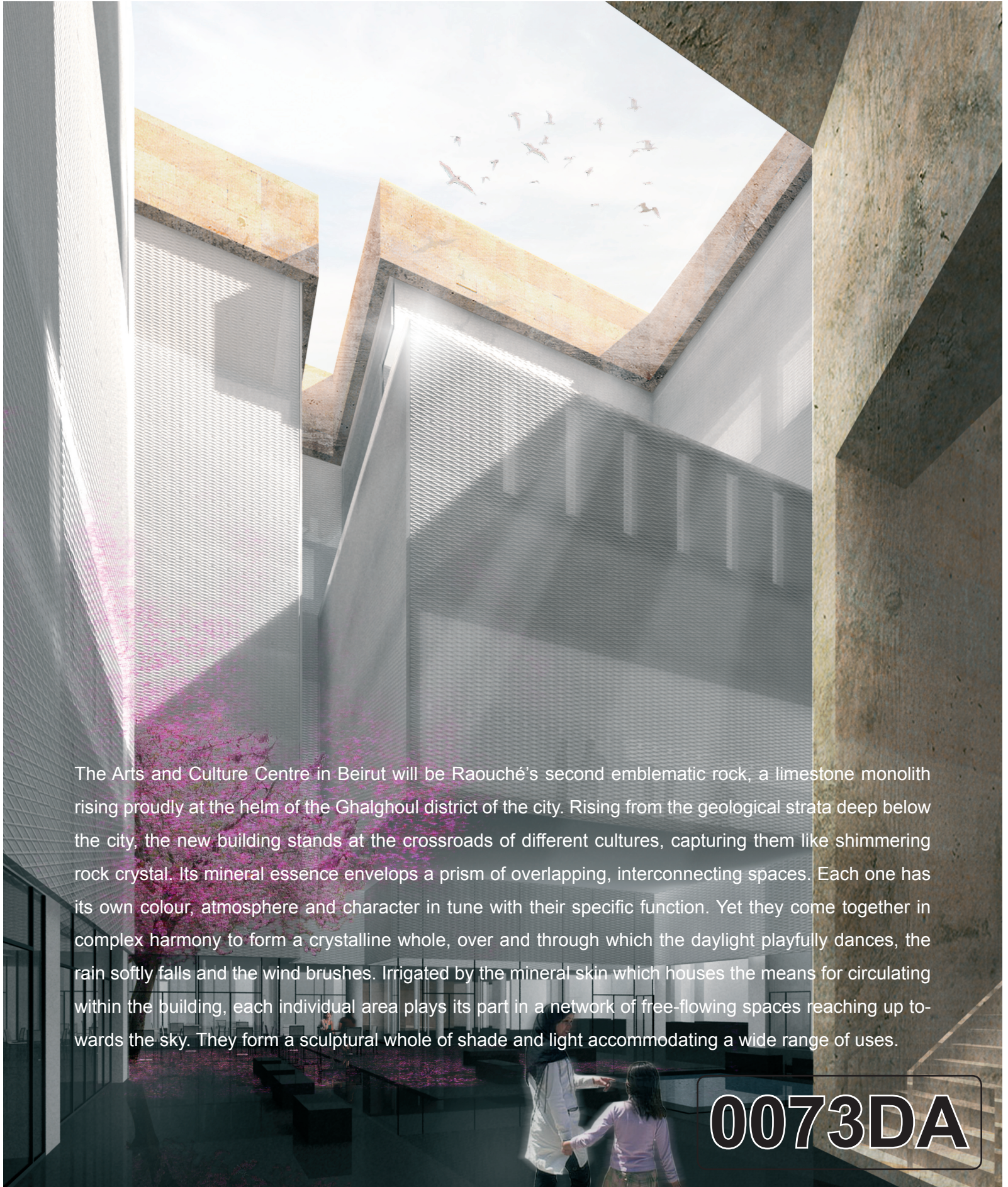


WHAT THE ROCK WHISPERED

الاستماع إلى الحجر

EN ÉCOUTANT LA PIERRE

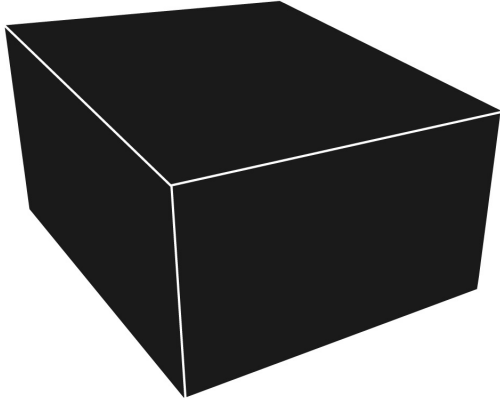
Hidden universes beneath an outer skin



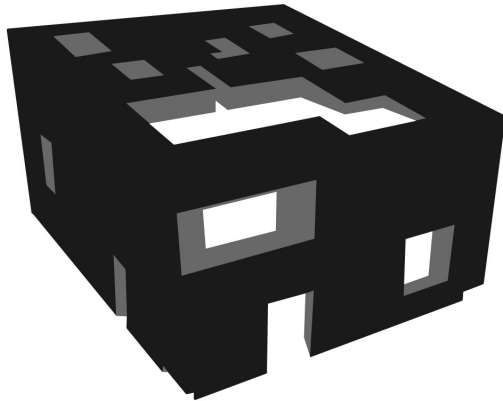
The Arts and Culture Centre in Beirut will be Raouché's second emblematic rock, a limestone monolith rising proudly at the helm of the Ghalghoul district of the city. Rising from the geological strata deep below the city, the new building stands at the crossroads of different cultures, capturing them like shimmering rock crystal. Its mineral essence envelops a prism of overlapping, interconnecting spaces. Each one has its own colour, atmosphere and character in tune with their specific function. Yet they come together in complex harmony to form a crystalline whole, over and through which the daylight playfully dances, the rain softly falls and the wind brushes. Irrigated by the mineral skin which houses the means for circulating within the building, each individual area plays its part in a network of free-flowing spaces reaching up towards the sky. They form a sculptural whole of shade and light accommodating a wide range of uses.

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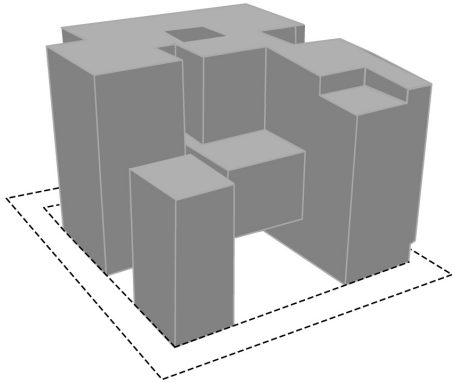
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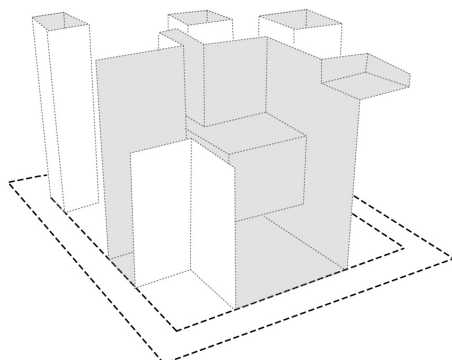
OPENINGS



CULTURAL ACTIVITY AREAS



POTENTIAL SPACES



The Arts and Culture Centre will be a new icon of this charismatic district of the city, clearly visible from the Ring. Its powerful mineral envelope endows it with a clearly identifiable voice and elegant simplicity.

It will stand out against the distant skyline of high-rise buildings. The windows punctuating its pure lines allow glimpses of the diversity of activity housed within. Resolutely urban and introvert on the outside, a universe of colourful worlds lie beneath its sturdy skin, shimmering and shining at its heart.

A vast paved area leads up from Riad El Solh square to the building itself. The interior prolongs the urban fabric of the city. With direct connections to the town centre, it opens up onto public areas in this new neighbourhood of the city. In an urban context where most people use their cars for transport, the entrances to the car parks, positioned down the sides of the building, are designed with as much care and consideration as the main pedestrian entrance. The building's imposing façade stands proud before the Ring – authorized access only is situated here. The building's architecture, so solid and invincible, and yet approachable and sociable, is a powerful source of curiosity.

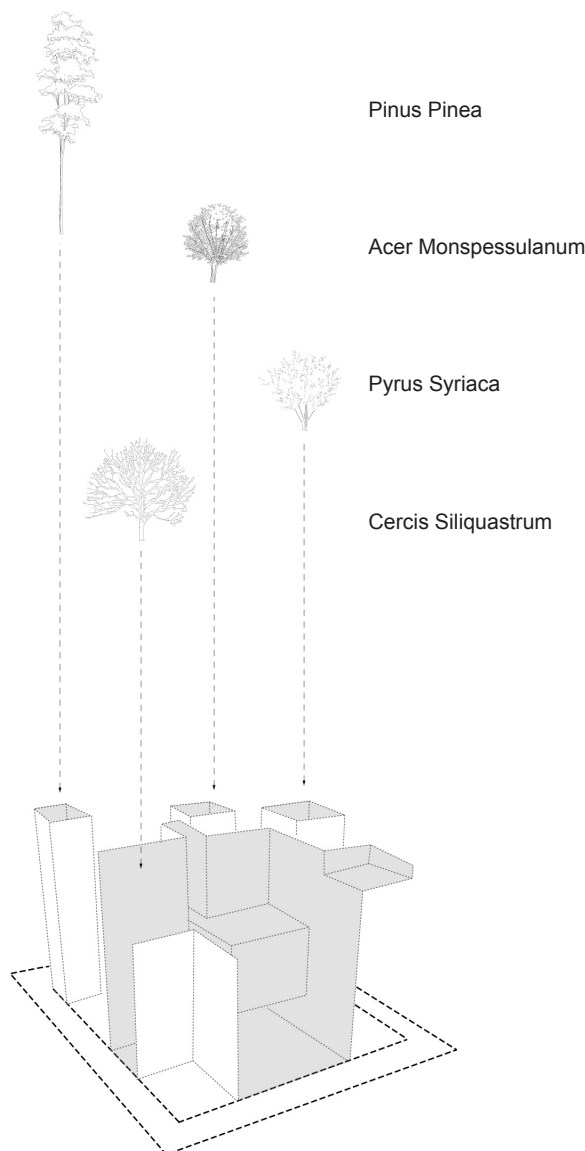
The Arts and Culture Centre has a three-part structure comprising inter-connecting areas for specific cultural activities and potential spaces, the whole enveloped within the building's mineral skin.

The mineral skin. Imposing, sturdy, with great vertical lift, the skin envelops both the sides and roof of the building. It is perforated with windows letting light come flooding in, playfully refracting around the prismatic interior of the building. The skin houses the means for circulating within the

building - a simple flight of escalators leads up to the auditoriums and assembly room and a more complex array leads to other key areas (library, museum, workshops, admin ...). Three additional lifts serve the whole building and connect the basement directly to the upper floors.

The cultural activity areas form a series of independent and secluded worlds. Their interior volumes are all treated autonomously, but they come together to form a unified whole which refuses fragmentation. They are sheathed by a fine metallic mesh, bathing them in dappled light.

The potential spaces are less varied in character than the cultural activity areas and their homogeneity and simple elegance are an expression of the Centre's true identity. They are the building's breathing spaces, composed of spacious landscaped areas demarcated by a fine mesh. They are designed to offer possible extensions for each cultural activity area, to be freely conquered by visitors for an evening or an afternoon, to be used for dancing, a concert or play, an exhibition, making a film or simply reading a book. Perforations in the building's skin leave them open to the wind and rain and they form the symbolic interface between the diversity of activity housed within the Centre and the urban fabric of the neighbourhood outside.



POTENTIAL SPACES and TREES

LIMESTONE of BEYROUTH



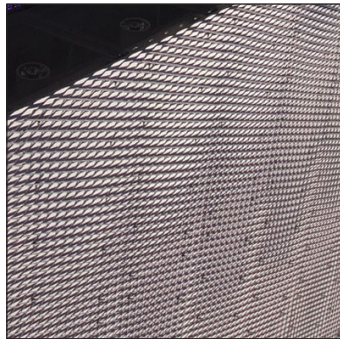
MINERAL SKIN



POLISHED BLACK GRANIT



METALLIC MESH



CERCIS SILIQUASTRUM



PINUS PINEA



Each of the three structural components of the building is independent -

The mineral skin has a reinforced concrete framework, clad with a layer of limestone, in keeping with Beirut's architectural character. It is a sensual, silky smooth space into which the visitor slips like water over stone.

Each volume housing a cultural activity is treated individually, each has its own distinctive character. Yet all lie within the simple embrace of the building's concrete shell. The cantilevers are compensated by a thickening and solidifying of the building's structural components. Pillars are used to reinforce the structure of certain volumes.

The cultural activity areas are physically separated from the potential spaces by a double layer of fine metallic mesh which reaches up towards the light and envelops the central volume shaping the building's heart.

The flooring chosen for the potential spaces is polished black granite. This will contrast with the pristine white of the cultural activity areas and absorb excess light reflected. The dark floor seems to float. The trees and water features in the potential spaces give the visitor the impression of exploring the granite bedrock. The vertical temperament of these areas is strongly voiced.

A Pinus Pinea is to be planted in the basement and its branches will gradually reach up into the cultural activity areas as the years go by. It will be an emblematic feature of the building to be enjoyed on every floor.

In the interior paved area a Cercis Siliquastrum or Judas Tree will mark the changing of the seasons – its green summer foliage falls in winter only to be replaced by garlands of sweetly scented pink blossom which will scatter petals across the black granite floor in spring and make the restaurant terrace an enchanting place to linger for a while.

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