

## The House of Arts & Culture

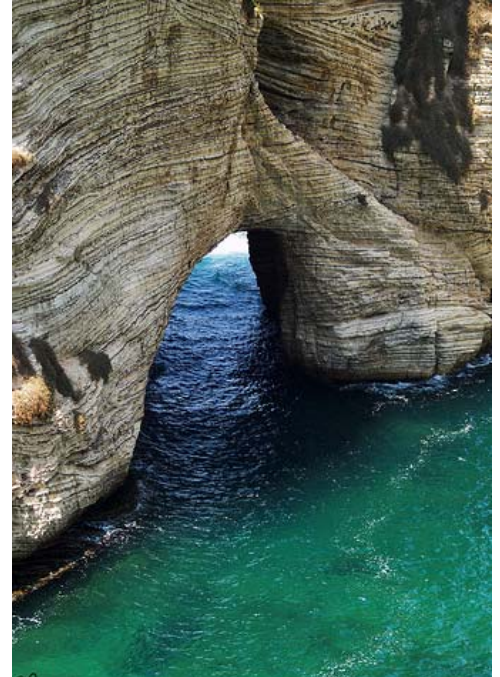
### The Lebanese-Omani Centre

What art offers is space - a certain breathing room for the spirit. ~John Updike

Like the force of a river laden with the melting snow rushing down Jabal el Shaykh, cutting through the rock, forming its own route and creating for it a path where none exist, so does the power of the arts, carrying human emotions and imaginations, carving in the heart of society a location for all those creative souls, leaving its evident mark, and exploding with life to materialize the silent expressions and preserve them for eternity.

#### Urban and Architectural Objectives & Impacts:

- **Regional & Urban Impact:** the location of the site formed one of the driving forces of the design and the architectural concept. The rich history of the area, its geographic location in terms of proximity to the sea and importance in the Arab world, and the progressive avant-garde nature of the inhabitants among which rise names such as Gibran Khalil Gibran, the Rahbanis, Fayrouz, and Wajih Nahleh to mention a few, dictated design considerations manifesting in the use of elements and fragments of elements symbolic of these such as the purity of the form, the sharpness of the lines, the arabesque pattern, and the use of local stone, creating a presence for the building, yet still keeping it in harmony with its surrounding and the architectural spirit of the area, and always keeping it in line with its main function of housing art – the signature of civilization, and culture - the sum of all nobilities, which when combined free the mind and the body allowing the individual to further excel and go beyond their limitations.



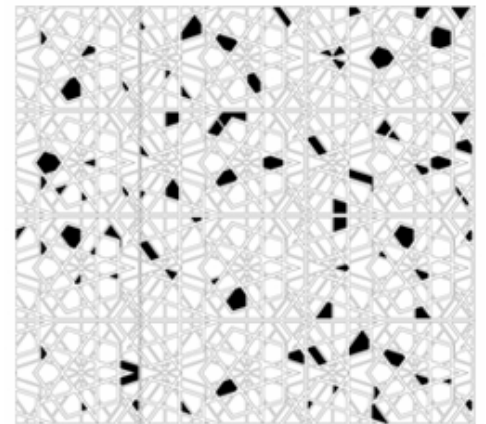
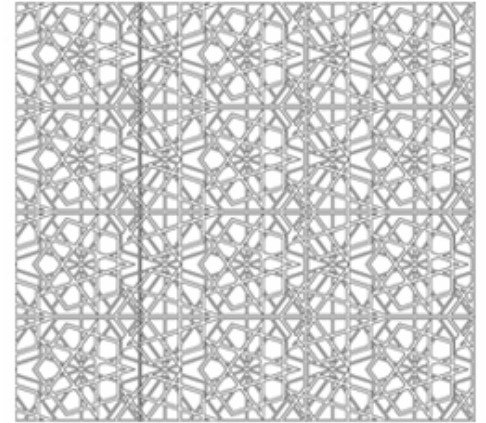
The main pedestrian flow into the site comes mainly from the north, from the direction of the Etoile Square, the Martyr's Square, Riad al Solh Square, and the plaza next to the Bacri House, extending with it the public space and the urban fabric, and forming the entry point to the building by cutting

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away from it and creating an internal plaza which links the building to its surrounding, and maintains flow of motion leading it off of the street and into the building, creating a dynamic, sculptural experience, and merging it with the public and making it for the people.

- **Architectural Expression - Solid vs. Void:** The regulations of the site in terms of setbacks, height, and percentage of built up area, allowed for a volume much bigger than what is requested in the program, thus the decision was to take an introverted, subtractive approach on the permissible full envelope, and reflect this difference in volume internally, extracting what was not needed in terms of areas and transforming the excess into a sculptural void that acts as a common area, attracting and gathering visitors, merging them, mixing them, making them one with the building, then dispersing them onto the different enclosures and functional areas.

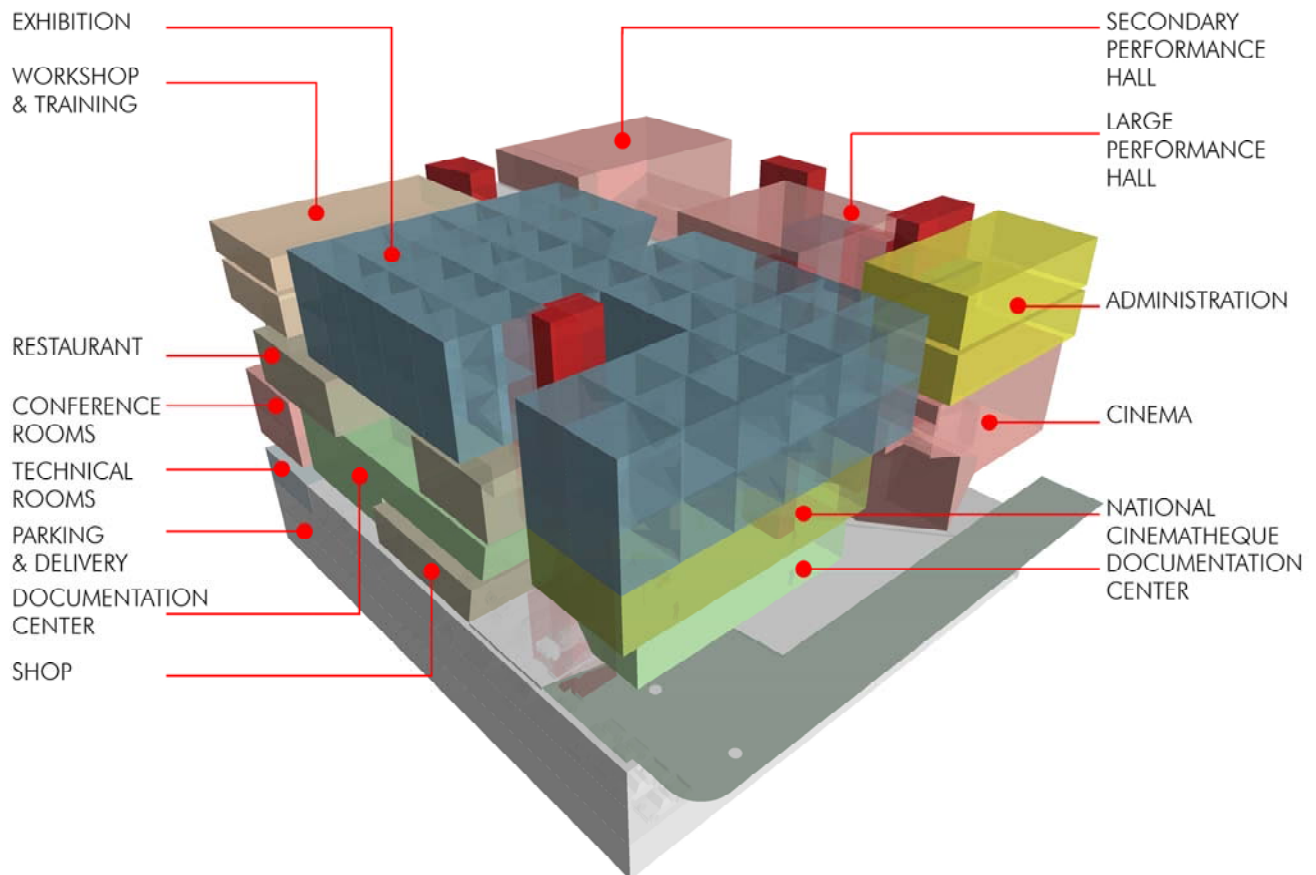
For the passers-by, the building appears at first glance to be a rigid stone block, set in what was left of the old battered Ghalghoul district. Then, as they approach, flashes of movement and activity start emerging through selected penetrations and punctures, reminiscent of the traditional arabesque patterns, in the outer shell, bringing the inner life of the building to the external world. The purity and grandeur of the solid form, built using local technologies and materials, is disrupted only by these penetrations and the chiseling on the different surfaces, mimicking the work of an artist breathing the soul into a rigid block of stone, and transforming it to a work of art. These penetrations, in addition to introducing light and ventilation to the building, also work on attracting the passers-by, showing them glimpses of the activities embedded within the walls, and luring them inside to discover what lies beyond the folds and dents by going through a series of linked sculpted spaces, thus allowing the building to be expressive of its functions, housed in its outer shell, and creating in between these a labyrinth of spaces and gathering areas.



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The surrounding built environment allowed for the building to acquire a fifth elevation from atop to be viewed and appreciated from the adjacent higher structures, and even though it mainly houses the mechanical equipment and services, it is forced to be sculpted and chiseled in the same way as the others, and in so doing, it completing the sculpted image of the building from all visible angles.

**Functional and Spatial Organization:**



The main functions of the House dictate a unique spatial arrangement that was applied not only on the plan, but extended to the sections thus providing axonometric links between the different spaces, achieved via the introduction of different forms of vertical circulation cores and elements. Due to the flow of pedestrians from the northern corner, slightly to the east, the building opens up to the visitors through a narrow horizontal glass façade in that direction and an internal garden, signifying the entrance of the building and appearing to be engulfing the external elements and people, pulling them inside, and merging the two with it for just long enough before beginning its own unique existence.

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The urban extension inside the building is morphed into a huge ramp with adjoining seating platforms, taking the visitor from the Reception Hall on the ground floor level to another gathering Lounge Hall at the first floor level, with the platforms allowing the people to gather to enjoy a temporary exhibit, or a projection on the walls, or simply to just sit and have a chat, all along gradually exploring the sculpted inner void.

Always presenting the visitors with glimpses and peeks of activities going on in nearby spaces, motivating them to keep moving on, the ramp ends slightly below the General Fouad Chehab Avenue with a spacious Lounge Hall prior to the Large Performance and Conference Hall which spans over three floors in height on the right, and the Meeting Rooms on the left, and provides a perspective of the volumes and surfaces carved out from the heart of the building, unfolding to form links on different levels, and folding back again to become an Exhibition Hall on the third floor, a Restaurant on the second, and a Documentation Centre on the first.

In addition to the ramp, two main vertical circulation cores carved from the same void transport the visitors from one floor to the other; the first taking them from the Reception Hall and Shops on the ground floor to the Exhibition Halls on the third, passing through the Restaurant and the Library. The second provides access to the Small Multi-Media Performance Hall and the Workshops on the third floor, with bridges penetrating the void to connect them to the Movie Theatre and the Cinematheque at the northern extremity of the building. In addition to these, two other vertical circulation cores connect the functions with the Actors' Quarters and the parking levels in the three basements.

Gardens and open gathering areas are chiseled out along the path of movement in all floors, with visual connections to the external bustle of the surrounding area, creating within the building dynamic areas of human activity and natural life, forming microclimates within the rigid block and allowing it to breathe.

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