

*“...one day we shall rediscover that our borders, our natural places of confrontation, are meant to be transformed into exclusive places of gathering and sharing.”*

Amin Maalouf

*“Beirut has been influenced by different, and most often, conflicting powers. It owes its wealth and its survival to its capacity of accumulating and synthesizing different cultures.”*

“Urban Context”, Competition documents

The House of Arts and Culture should be a physical manifest of Beirut's unique condition, acting as a gate and link between cultures, between East and West; this inherent hybridity being its most precious asset.

A solid white monolith is proposed. Its dual nature fragments the piece in two through a strong and affirmative gesture, giving birth to an in-between space of permanent dialogue, the "fissure". Blurring boundaries, the "fissure" generates a new gathering place on the building's heart, in direct relationship with the exterior square.

Aware of the territory's transition stage, the House longs for a positive role in its development. A refreshing landmark enclosed on itself, yet sensible to its surroundings, its white concrete exteriority unfolding in complementary ways.

All the elevations are embedded with a "memory" layer, synthesized through a geometric pattern, recalling a transitory role as well as serving as a metaphoric testament to more difficult times. Sharp black openings are made throughout, part of the same system and assuring a desired level of abstraction.

The exteriority's magnetism changes in the "fissure". Entering means participating. To embrace with the community's flow means a more crude and honest standing. All walls are therefore in bare white concrete, with clear glass openings.

More than an urban passage, entering and wandering through the "fissure" is above all a physical experience. Inside, one is still able to sense the passage of time and feel the way the climate slowly changes. Here, a new centrality begins to take shape.

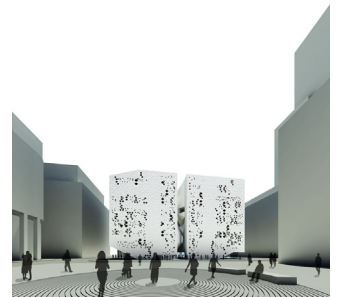
Conceived as a mass, with clear vernacular conceptual guidelines, the project allows for an overall balanced performance in terms of sustainability. The shadowed inner square, gently protected from the weather, delivers a more intimate ambiance, a place where people easily meet, act, react and exchange. Accordingly, it's where the workshops and studios are open and accessible, as well as possibly autonomous and informal programs like the restaurant/bar and retail areas, all with direct connections to the exterior. The inner square also serves as a buffer between the parking space underground and the public programs above, with the corresponding degree of flexibility of uses.



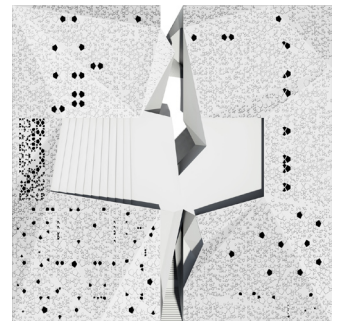
Pigeon's rock, Beirut



Beirut, 1991, Gabriele Basilico



View from the exterior square



Roofscape

The physical fragmentation of the piece allows for a clear programmatic distribution and emphasis on each side (Performance Hall/ Exhibition spaces). The content is therefore broadly split between “performance” (Performance and Conference halls/ Cinema) and “contemplation” (Exhibition spaces/ Documentation Centre/ National Cinematheque). The Main Performance Hall is designed as to maximize uses and audiences, from its most restricting configuration (Italian style) to a completely flat multifunctional room (seatings removed). The possibility of visual permeability between the two levels of seating and the meeting rooms is another distinctive feature.

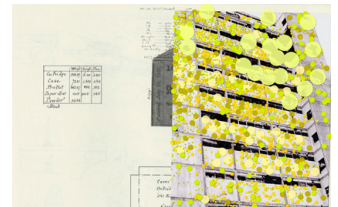
The exhibition spaces are designed for maximum flexibility, entirely modular, providing areas of different heights. Both artificial and natural light are guaranteed, the later with an integrated compact system of black-out in the openings of the elevations.

Both sides of the piece are connected through moments of tension in the “fissure”, each side developing a continuous promenade.

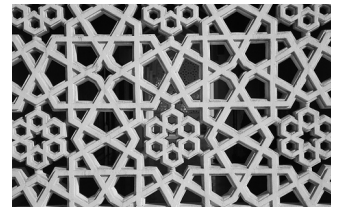
As a culminating point in the unfolding of the various programmatic elements, one reaches the roofscape, where an outdoor amphitheatre and exhibition space as well as seating areas and a bar take place: a distinctive Mediterranean living area over Beirut’s skyline.



Post-war facade, Beirut



Walid Raad, Atlas Group, Beirut



Arab pattern



Axonometry