

A NATIONAL SYMBOL

'Culture' stems from the Latin cultura meaning 'to cultivate'. The modern definition describes culture as the pattern of human knowledge and belief, particularly as the dependence upon and capacity for symbolic thought is unified through artistic learning and the humanities.

This House of Art and Culture speaks of the potential of a place in which this heritage is both propagated and encouraged to flourish.

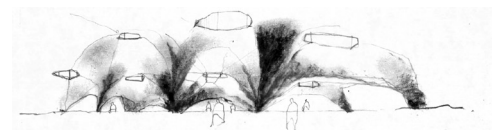
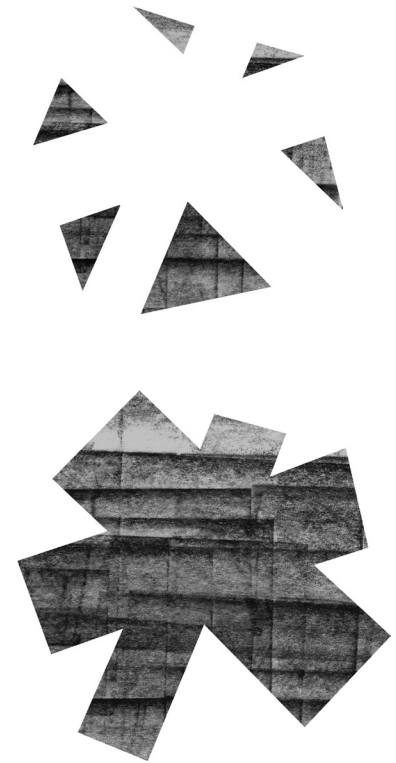
A conversation about Lebanese Culture – or any culture for that matter – must begin at the root; in cultural development and folklore.

In the Epic of Gilgamesh Lebanon's Cedar forests are described as the dwelling place of the gods. The Cedars' importance as described in Ancient Mediterranean religion and mythology carries with it the meaning and presence of a world tree. Traditionally venerated by both Christian and Arabic faiths – the Cedar is a natural monument. It stands as the embodiment of history, its' destruction tied to the destruction of empires. The tree therefore links Lebanese culture inextricably with the first civilizations and by extension the history of the world.

In the World Heritage Forests of Ouadi Qadisha, in the Lebanese Mountains, dense stands of ancient timber rise through shelves of light creating brooding shadows and penumbra - in the manner of the Cordoba Mosque in Spain and the Cisterns of Turkey. In the Epic of Gilgamesh this sequence is followed by ascension into the foliage – into the realm of the gods and light.

We might then consider the idea of the tree itself: its' seed. As metaphor, the House of Art and Culture is an abstract cultural seed. It is simultaneously a stand of cedars and the cedar cone, and is sculpted in the same light – noble and generous in its form.

In recalling the Cedar cone, the building's composition is at once strong, and optimistic: an alabaster sculpture full of light and openness - eyes opening outward toward the city while inwardly harbouring the cultural and artistic potential of Lebanon.



URBAN CONTEXT

The relation between the building, its context and the immediate surroundings is crucial to a successful outcome for such an important public facility.

A national house of arts and culture requires a major public space as both functional support and point of arrival as well as to identify and celebrate the prominence of the development.

The building type is characterized by the fact that it returns enclosed and open public space back to the city. This notion is embedded in the most successful public spaces in the world. Public buildings of this scale and importance in the city must not only contain spaces, but also must shape the wider space of the city.

We have created a new major public space for Beirut as part of the building project, to act as the front door of the major cultural events for the city, as a major public outdoor foyer for arrival, gathering, celebration and performance.

Against the backdrop of the Landmark tower, the House of Art and Culture needs relief. The 'Outdoor Foyer' provides an apron which allows the building to breath. It also establishes an important forecourt to both the Landmark tower and the House of Art and Culture and the wider precinct.



ARCHITECTURE AS THE MEANS

Beneath the new public space we have located the art galleries for exhibition. This submerged facility extends through to ticketing and multi-level foyer and entry to the theatre spaces.

Entry to the theatres can then be made on grade above from the new public space, and from the gallery level beneath, which can also include commercial spaces, parking and service space below.

A series of light prisms score the new public platform, lighting the galleries, public spaces and cultural 'souk' below, enlivening both, as well as extending the character of the foyers at each level into the theatre/s.

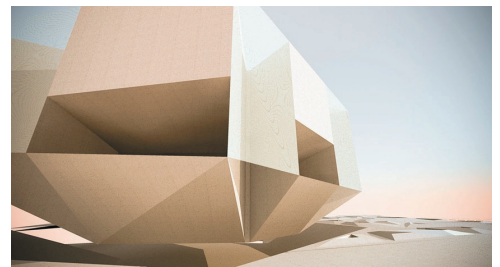
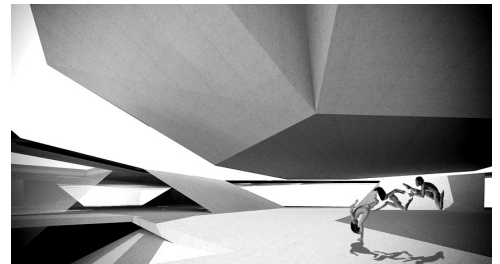
The theatres are conceived as dynamic, multi-layered envelopes, allowing many combinations of stage-to-seating arrangements. Interstitial space between each seating envelope allows for vertical circulation and services distribution, lifting and theatrical support.

Air, water, gas, power, goods, props, people and services are delivered from below through the interstitial cavities, while the upper levels accommodate administration and operations.

Intimate theatre can be composed within the envelope with small audience numbers, to maintain the link with traditional theatre, alongside more contemporary modes of performance.

Classical, modern and contemporary theatre and performance can take place simultaneously, while major performance are possible for both internal seated and fully controlled, through to external open air occasions.

The uppermost part of the building is conceived as a roof top entertainment and events facility, enlivening the rooftop and affording views over Lebanon, allowing Beirut to be re-presented to the public from a new public platform above the city.



ESD

An intelligent building management system would be developed for electrical and mechanical energy requirements, as part of the overall design strategy, early in the design development phase, along with a practical response to current best practice for material sourcing, life-cycle costing and environmental responsibility.

Air conditioning is proposed as a displacement system through floor distribution, to minimize fan and duct sizes, reduce air speed and plant room size, all to reduce installation, operation and running costs. Air distribution to theatres is proposed through the seating system.

It is proposed to temper the chilled water for the air conditioning system through piped water deep into the ground, which returns through heat exchangers, to off-set running costs.

The gallery is reduced below ground, effectively coupling the earth for temperature stability, to reduce energy costs to meet international AAA requirements for temperature and humidity.

The proposed buildings are constructed from concrete, achieving high thermal mass to assist with temperature control and thermal performance.

Alabaster is the proposed stone to clad the theatre building externally, and internally to the public foyers which then gives the walls a capacity to be cavity back-lit, completing the House of Arts and Culture as a light filled prismatic sculpture.