

Contemporary architecture of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is being determined to some extent by the growing energy consciousness, the revolutionary impact of digital technologies & communication as well as the democratization of information in almost all fields including the arts & sciences. These factors have mutated the sociological, economical, political , as well as cultural issues of architecture from a national to a global phenomena. The impact of this mutation is more apparent in the lifestyle of the younger generation where we notice a fusion in thought, culture and lifestyle between the Eastern & Western cultures. It is at this point of time, that the government of Lebanon has decided to establish architecture called **The HOUSE OF ARTS & CULTURE** in the prominent Ghalghoul district, of Beirut. Beirut is recognized as a flagship city of culture in the Middle East, and it is here that, in periods of turmoil, the significant cultural initiatives and creations from the Middle East have been known to the rest of the World. The central theme for the center was envisioned as:

**“This house will be a major factor in the field of culture, arts and creativity. Its work will be deeply rooted in the history of the country, remembering what Lebanese have already achieved and created and, at the same time, it will be a child of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, looking towards the future. It will not repeat the past but will build on it to better itself in the future.”**

#### **URBAN CONTEXT**

This building must first become a part of the city, which the people interact with on a daily basis hence gradually become an integral part of the urban culture & fabric, which houses spaces of exchange, familiar spaces which communicate and inspire rather than intimidate & awe.

The site being located between two parallel roads, the building has been designed as a thoroughfare, a passage, a connection between places and people.

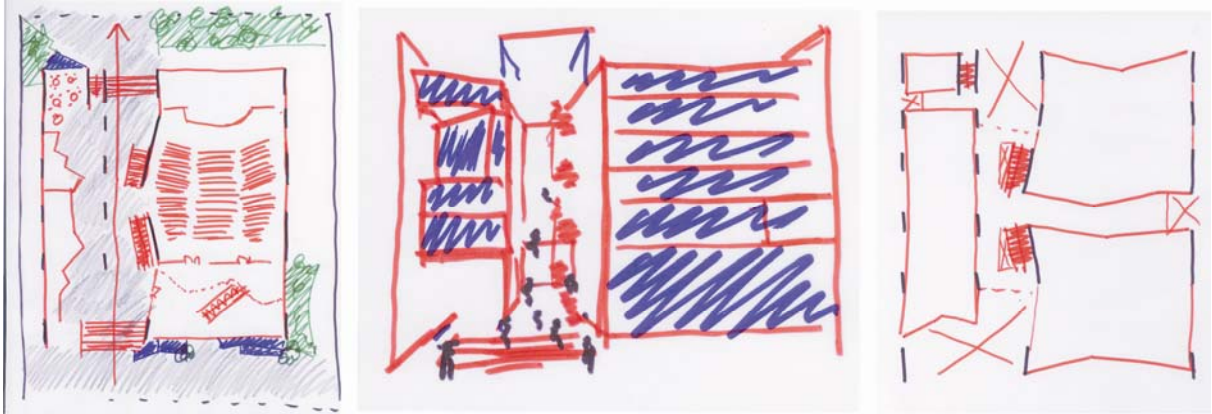


On the pedestrian level one walks from the front street to the road behind which leads to many significant projects in that area, transforming the lobby into another street. In Louis I Kahn's words "**A Street is a meeting room without a roof**". The street has always been the place of meeting and exchange in this part of the world especially. Here, the building allows one to just pass through, and in the process, use its amenities, its cafes, its shops, and participate in its events. The absence of a formal enclosed lobby also makes this building more receptive from both streets. Its "open" entry makes it more a part of the urban fabric. The faceted glass blocks reveal themselves to the surroundings and thus are in constant dialogue with the city. A section of the glass wall will be used as an LED screen which will constantly project to the city, not just the shows and events happening inside the building, but also global events related to art and culture. It becomes a part of the city culture as well as a "place" of culture. The open lobby besides being a street and a crossroad of people and cultures flows up through the different levels, to the roof where there is an open air theatre and a open air café over looking the city and the sea in the horizon. The building thus dissolves its "constructed presence" and becomes a connector, a facilitator, a place of meeting and exchange and finally a transformed urban plaza also viewed by pedestrians and motorists as they drive by the fly over. On the street sides the building has total transparency, in other words, an abstract nonexistence, but on the sides it has strong parallel walls finished in local stone, with a composition of rectangular openings that abstract the cityscape.

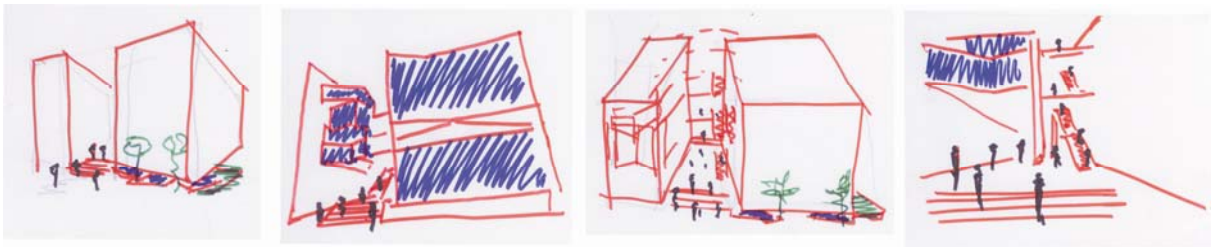
At night, the building will "animate" itself in a beautiful manner. The different parts will illuminate at different times telling the city of its different activities, acting like a living "**Billboard**" for its internal activities by constantly talking to the city.

## **CONCEPT**

The basic design concept is an abstract representation of the turbulent history of Lebanon; its diversity in culture, religion and thought, depicted by the use of fragmented yet dynamic lines within a rigid frame symbolizing the inherent cultural cohesion and solidarity of the nation. The destabilization of the internal organization within the external rigidity of the box serves to remind one of the upheavals, turmoil and diversity of the past as well as its present dynamism.



Culture, especially in a institutionalized form has not only no appeal to the youth but rather incites them to rebel and take a stand against all institutionalizations of Culture. **The Challenge of this project is to mediate between the youth and their mindsets and the institutions of culture.** We believe our design will be able to do just that.



The dynamic, transparent glass façades of the gallery overlooking the internal street/thoroughfare that passes from the front street to the backstreet proposes a place of gathering in the cityscape. The glass facades also allow ample daylight and thus making the building more energy efficient. Its cafes, shops, cinemas, are primarily the destination points of the youth and the sweeping escalators that rise through the grand internal street takes them to their destination point, and finally to the open roof-scape. This creates the perfect situation where the " Cultural" activity parts present themselves along the journey and thus "infiltrates" their minds. This "positioning" of the Cultural activities has a far more " acceptable" presence rather than a hard-line dominating presence of "culture" .The exciting circulation spaces that tie all the spaces both visually and physically also provide views & vistas to enjoy and fun places to be in.

**Culture must be felt and lived; it cannot be explained, defined, institutionalized nor sermonized.**

## THE BUILDING

Public buildings no matter how old or modern, represent a certain tradition and cultural heritage and form an integral part of people's lives. The designed spaces are places where people can directly experience tradition & culture through active or passive participation in the events and activities. With a view to this concept, the building has two parts, CONSTRUCTED SPACES i.e. the hanging gallery levels as well as the spaces that holds all the other activities like retail, recreation, leisure etc. and the central CIRCULATION SPACE i.e. the thoroughfare street and the bays of escalators that connect all the activity spaces and which also passes through the building linking the front with the back. On the street level people can directly see the lobby of the main performance hall and can be aware of all events. The Gallery hangs above the entry, the 4 levels provide the flexibility of different scales of exhibition as well as multiple, simultaneous exhibitions. As one travels upwards by the escalators, one can see all the levels of exhibition without even going inside the building.



The building is extremely clean and direct in its organization just as all public buildings should be. The circulation is full of wonderful vistas that look out and at the different levels and parts of the building as well as the city. Located in the main block on the ground level, is the main performance hall; above it is the canteen and the second hall, designed such, that all of them can support each other in terms of shared facilities & services.

The other parts are placed one by one; each part again has its own internal drama of spaces. The library is in two levels with its own internal stair, the gallery has its own internal circulation, when people are moving from the escalator landing to the internal passage at the far end is a balcony that lets light into the internal passage and also provides views of the city.