

The HOUSE OF ARTS & CULTURE
The Lebanese-Omani Centre

INCUBATION: '.....to develop life within, by any process.'

INCUBATOR : '.....a place, organisation, or environment that promotes the growth or development of something.'

The Lebanese-Omani Centre in the heart of Beirut is designed as an incubator for the cultural life in Lebanon, enabling the interaction between the different arts of the country.

Interwoven three dimensionally, the diverse program of the centre is organized in layers, each one dedicated to a group of arts. The program of the brief is organized according to the functionally needed dimensions in a super rational way as stacks, which become interconnected by open platforms. Grouped around a central atrium, this kind of organization leaves a maximum of open space for the exchange between the different arts, the breeding space for ideas and inspiration.

Wrapped by a textile skin, this concept expands into vertical open voids of light, creating the special aura of the house of arts and culture. This membrane mediates between the centre and the city life, filtering the Mediterranean light. Perforated on special situations, the skin gives view to Beirut and the surrounding. In the evening, the mediation turns inside out, illuminated by media projections of the inner life of the house on the membrane.

Starting from the central reception hall and the access from the square, the centre is organized in five platforms. At ground level, the entrance platform opens to the square with the shop, the café and an outdoor terrace. From here, all levels can be directly accessed by elevators, supervised from the staff at the information desk.

From an open lounge and event space on level two, the performance platform starts with the two multifunctional halls and the boardrooms. The cinema and the national cinemathèque are grouped on the third platform. Together with the digital, video, sound and photo workshops they form the medialabs.

On top of these labs, right under the textile roof is the garden of poetry and sculpture situated, a green space to relax and concentrate, connecting the art and performance workshops and the library of the documentation centre.

From here highest level opens up, the fine arts and exhibition space. Right on top of the building, it benefits with its shed roof from the beautiful light in Lebanon.

Between these levels, the circulation is organized by open stairs and lifts, enabling also handicapped people to use all functions of the centre.

All levels are served from the loading dock directly by goods lifts. In addition, the café also has direct access to the outside, in order to function also after hours.

Along the newly created pedestrian zone connecting via a pedestrian tunnel to the south, a drop of and a small pocked park with the secondary staff and artist's entrance is situated. From here, the changing rooms, the orchestra pit and both performance halls are directly connected.

The administration of the centre is placed on in between levels above the board rooms.

While the small performance hall is designed as a black box, the big hall is equipped with a movable floor, enabling different settings, from a large conference on a flat floor to an Italian style theatre.

Furthermore, the possibility exists in the flat floor configuration, that artist can enter the space from both sides.

The construction of the centre is kept simple. The main 'program stacks' are built conventionally in concrete and the platforms in between are constructed in steel. The top box of the exhibition platform is also constructed in steel. The tensile structure of the membrane façade is directly attached to the main structure of the building.

The aesthetic appearance of the building is shaped by the textile skin and its seams following an Arabic pattern. On special occasions, this skin is 'perforated' in a random system by parts of the translucent skin substituted by transparent ones.

The main interior of the building is kept neutral in white concrete and natural stone floorings, accentuated by special furniture. This underlines the inner spaces of the built volume like for example the performance halls, which are all designed in different materials.