

PLATFORM, COURTYARD AND ICE CUBE

This project focuses on two key ideas, creating a new public realm both internal and external and establishing a clear identity for the new National Museum. Consolidating three National Museums into one comprehensive museum is an ambitious task; the task becomes especially compelling when the architecture proposal has to engage with national historic monuments.

Re-activating the role of the existing Vestbanen building, in effect turning back the clock and bringing the former train station alive is the starting point for our architectural intervention. The Vestbanen building becomes the main entrance to the museum complex and is absorbed into the new. This clear juxtaposition between old / new is a critical decision which combines the two entities rather than allows both to dwell as separate urban fragments.

The site location and surrounding context are breathtaking and unique; hence we create a platform acting as an outdoor terrace with views onto the Rådhuset, Pipervika seafront and the Akershus Fortress. This public terrace will be directly accessible from both the museum and the surroundings with independent entrances and offers the possibility of acting as an external exhibition space for sculptures and other events.

The notion of expanding the public domain is also applied on the ground level with the creation of a monumental internal courtyard effectively extending the Rådhusplassen into the museum. This vast internal room, more than 1500m² in area and 20m high, offers a new forum space to the museum and Oslo that is accessible to all, non commercial and where stored art pieces could be temporarily exhibited, creating a comfortable public hall where community, art and architecture are harmoniously unified. This new civic space also acts as a cultural counterpoint to the main hall of the Rådhuset where the two spaces could be activated in tandem for special national events.

The identity of the museum is a floating “ice-cube” which sits directly above the courtyard, as if the cube is the materialisation of the void below. The cube is orientated toward the seafront and parallel aligned to the platform elevations creating a highly visible landmark recognisable from any direction. The cube is made from cast recycled-glass; a material that resembles ice, creating façades that respond and change to the external conditions, reflecting light and hues.

All the permanent galleries of the museum sit within the cube, accessible either via the structural core or the ceremonial staircase facing the sea. The structural principle of the cube, core and post tensioned slabs, allows open plan galleries for maximum flexibility. The front of the cube facing the sea is totally open to light, a mixture of transparent and cast-glass while the remaining three façades are clad with cast-glass with potential openings to allow natural light into the galleries where desired. This stacked gallery layout allows viewers the freedom to select individual galleries or view all galleries in sequence, surrounded by the constant reference to the harbour.