

VESTBANENPLASSEN.

The competition for the National Museum at Vestbanen offers the perfect occasion to harmonize the historical disparities of Pipervika with a supplementary milestone and source of pride for a forward thinking city. The National Museum fits into the urban fabric while respecting the existing buildings. The design interfaces nature and machine as it transitions from water front to city. A new plaza is created with a curve that completes Radhusplassen and re-orientates the Nobel Peace Center as a sculpture in the center. This gesture invigorates all sides of the old Western Railway Station and re-creates the existing parking lot as a social meeting place and entry to the new National Museum. Whilst the exterior shaping of the museum is an expressed response to a set of discreet urban conditions, the interior is "not" shaped as an emphasis on the experience of artwork. Significant is the impression a visitor absorbs from the combination of the contextualization of the museum in Pipervika and the clear presentation of the collections in the galleries. The National Museum thus approaches the issues with cohesion and distinction, is an integral urban addition to the Pipervika area, and offers a distinctive new home for national art and pride in Oslo.

The building is shaped to complete the west end of Radhusplassen. This extension of the public space re-orientates the Nobel Peace Center as a focal point of the inner plaza rather than an edge. No longer viewed in a constant state of distraction, it is the treasured centerpiece of public space along the Pipervika waterfront. The old Western Railway Station can be admired as a vaunted example of Norway's architectural history standing among two contemporary examples, Oslo's City Hall and the national museum. Framed with the Nobel Peace Center, the sloping front facade of the museum edges a new square filled with sculpture and outdoor recreation. Visitors and passers-by are encouraged to meet and relax while enjoying views of Pipervika's diverse urban infrastructures as well as its picturesque waterfront and harbor. Additionally, this local plaza is bolstered by a series of connections to museum programmes along the edge of the space.

Two urban axes are considered and engaged by the museum. The first axis runs between the rail yards to the west along Munkedamsveien and City Hall. When traveling east along this axis one witnesses a framed view of city hall with the peak of the museum shaping and Aker Brygge shopping center. An indentation in the west façade of the building terminates this walking access with an entry to the private functions of the museum, encouraging the use of open land to the west of Dokkveien to be developed into a green space adjacent to the indented plaza. The second axis is a cultural path connecting the Munch and Vestbane areas. The Munch area is rapidly developing with the new Oslo Opera House, Munch Museum, and Library. The success in the Munch area stems from the inclusion of these architectural icons to revitalize the waterfront image. The National Museum terminates an axis from the Munch area as an urban form and an architectural gesture which reinforces the existing urban fabric of Pipervika as a revitalization agent. This axis skewers such historical icons as the Oslo City Hall, Akershus Fortress, and the Nobel Peace Center. Future development along this axis may further reinforce the cultural significance of this gesture and bleed the enthusiasm of waterfront development into the city center.

The west façade of the museum slopes up from the ground, transitioning from a horizontal to vertical section that terminates in a peak on axis with the Nobel Peace Center and Oslo City Hall. The sloping shape works as an interface between the nature of the riverfront and the density of the urban development beyond. From the peak the form recesses down to each border of the site. Along Dronning Mauds Gate and Dokkveien the shape is sliced, creating a street wall condition typical within the city. In the south-most corner of the site the shape opens to the water, inviting pedestrian access from the harbor into the local plaza. A double height window at this juncture creates an overt connection between life along the waterfront and the mutable art exhibitions within the temporary galleries. This ensures a point-blank dialogue between the life along the edge of Pipervika and that of the temporary/contemporary gallery. An indentation on the western façade activates the empty space behind Akerbrygge as a sister public space for local professionals. A simple box massing on the western corner of the site above the E18 Avkjøring offsets and highlights the shape of the mostly public portion of the museum. This box can be easily expanded if an office building is later added to the site. The massing is committed to connecting all surrounding streets with or without the office addition as it is critical to stitch urban connections.

The emphasis of the museum experience is in the galleries and on the artwork. Galleries are not shaped except to milk conditions in which focus is placed solely on the art displayed. Such a design catalyzes a collective memory among visitors to the museum. Whilst the exterior shaping of the museum is an expressed response to a set of discreet urban conditions, the interior is "not" shaped, to ensure an emphasis on the experience of artwork. Significant is the impression a visitor absorbs from the combination of the context of the museum in Pipervika and the collections presented in the galleries. The museum need not be a destination, instead an artery through which the collective memory of Norway pumps.