

[9 boxes]

The museum is often seen as a neutral container of objects, a blank canvas that must allow art alone to speak for itself. Contemporary priorities are uniformity and/or flexibility: the space should never change or it should always be changed. [9 boxes] rejects this approach. No matter how much white paint is applied, or how 'free' the space, context cannot be silenced. Therefore, [9 boxes] proposes a strategy of diversity and juxtaposition that emphasises the inevitable significance of context. The logic of recent museums has been to clad supposedly neutral exhibition space with iconic façades. Instead, [9 boxes] offers distinct curatorial opportunities inside, while engaging with the city and fjord on the outside.

[outbox : surroundings, heritage, urban space]

[9 boxes] breaks up the building's volume so that it appears smaller within its surroundings. The cuboid forms reflect the blocky qualities of Pipervika's architecture, in particular the overlaid composition of Main Terminus. The boxes seem to be scattered at random, but their various orientations mediate between the differing alignments of urban core, Aker Brygge, city hall, railway station, fort and coastline – traces of the city's past and present – that make claims upon the site. Boxes increase in size and height from south-east to north-west to acknowledge the change in scale and quality from Vestbanen and the pedestrian realm of Rådhusplassen in front to the urban blocks and vehicular infrastructure of Munkedalsveien behind.

The museum is a canvas for the life of Pipervika. It complements rather than competes with the three focal points – Oslo City Hall, Akershus Fortress and Vestbanen – that already define Rådhusplassen. Similarities of form are combined with differences in material qualities. The faceted translucent and reflective façade engages in a play between internal activities and external conditions, the sun, rain and snow of the bay: a lively yet subtle backdrop to the stolidity of Vestbanen.

The boxes are arranged to define a public square between Vestbanen and the museum. This is a space for congregation, performance, dining and exhibition, enlivened by the museum entrances, café and shop clustered around it. Semi-enclosed by the station buildings, it is protected from coastal winds and offers a place with a more human scale in which to relax, meet and enjoy the view across Rådhusplassen and Pipervika to Akershus. The arrangement and orientation of boxes invites entry from the main pedestrian thoroughfare along the quayside between the public transport hub of National Theatre and Aker Brygge. The internal courtyards bring light deep into the plan and provide space for outdoor sculpture.

[inbox : flexibility, diversity, display]

The boxes structure and define internal diversity: each contains a different gallery type with particular form, scale and proportion, lighting and acoustic conditions, material and tonal qualities – from open hall to classical enfilade, some subdivided, some not. Each arrangement brings different display possibilities and relationships between viewer and object. The intersections between boxes allow visitors to move through the galleries in different ways – for long or short tours – while the ribbon window around the perimeter of the building (re-)contextualise the exhibits with the Norwegian capital: the city, the hills, the fjord and the changing weather, light and seasons.

Defined gallery spaces do not mean static exhibitions. Instead there are opportunities for different relationships between exhibit and gallery space: the collection may be permanent, but the museum experience can continue to change and new acquisitions are easily accommodated. This flexibility achieved through plural enclosures rather than uniform void realises the project's ambition, not only to 'raise our awareness and involvement with the visual arts' but to 'develop our critical sense, stimulate new recognition, elicit growing historical insight, and build respect for the *diversity* of expression of the arts'.

[functionality]

The clustering of public and private areas with semi-public spaces in between ensures the efficient operation of the building: facilities are easy to find and internal travel distances are minimal. The private spaces to the west and north of the site connect with public spaces at a few key points to allow for the controlled movement of staff and exhibits. The arrangement of storage areas and their proximity to exhibition spaces allows for easy conversion into galleries. The loading bay is optimally located with direct access from the Enga area to storage, workshop and staff areas.