

## Reflection Paper

### Graduation Studio, Beyond the White Cube. New Berlin Museum for 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art Chair of Interior Buildings Cities

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The graduation project 'The Factory and the Ruin' expands upon the notion of designing the museum of the 20th Century art at the core of the former west Berlin, Potsdamer Platz. Such occasion represented the opportunity to reflect on the implications of designing in the city of Berlin, which stays at odd with its own history and scenarios even after that the rubbles of the war have been cleared out and new images of the city could capture the sight again.

The Cultural Forum is the site which is invested by the competition brief formulated in order to give an architectonic shape to the intentions of several art collectors whose aim is to reunite and to exhibit their treasures under the same roof, thus the extension of the Neue National Gallerie is on the agenda of the city governors.

For its induced modernistic nature, the site is an entangle of roads punctured by outstanding buildings and voids. It is 'per se' a monument to the contradictions of the modern age, the product of several urban reshapements that are the outcome not only of dystopic eras, as the WWII has been, but also of individual minds and powerful men, namely Albert Speer,- the architect of Hitler which was named after the war the chief of reconstruction of the West Berlin-, and the projector of the desires of the 'fast-city' and of the 'urban landscape', the architect Hans Scharoun.

On it, the tabula rasa allowed 'silent giants' to enter without disturb in the city fabric and instill a new aesthetic under the precept of the US ideologies. Scharoun and Mies van der Rohe reacted to the destruction by building introverted spaces which had to form up the core of the cultural institutions of the West Berlin. Despite that, with its pointy tower the St.Mattheaus Church remained the only witness of some past centuries, a city landmark and a monument of the prussian architectural tradition embedded in the school of Friederich Schinkel and its pupil August Stuler.

In the supportive research for the design, the act of demolition of the ruins of the West Berlin is unveiled for its intrinsic significance of detaching Berlin from its past so to allow modernism to inform the new architectural discussion. To make sense of this burden that determined an unglued urban scenario hold between the shop/leisure and the cultural activities of the museum and music clusters, historical facts and urban analysis were of great support for positioning towards the extension of the Neue National Galerie.

With that said, as in an operation of modern archeology, to unearth the historical layer of the prussian neighborhoods and to impose it on the site by attaching it to the Church, has generated the precedent for the museum of the 20Th Century Art. To that followed the definition of the volume of the museum by mimicking the size of the Neue National Galerie:a twist between the miesian built void and the new museum's built mass.

The implication of the operation determined the impossibility to faithfully follow the competition brief which had to be adapted programmatically. Nevertheless, the graduation lab supported extensively the proposed design by providing guidance and tools to cope with its complexity.

Another study vector specified on the aesthetic of the space for art formed the background for framing the forces at stake when designing for housing an heterogeneous art collection, and more precisely, to answer the question of what aesthetic the design of the museum aspired to gain.

In order to answer the question it has been necessary to determine the points of contact between art and architecture and to what extent one sphere enters the other. Thus, three curators from the art scene of Rotterdam were interviewed so to strengthen the design position with their informed point of view. The vivid and intrinsic conversations with the curators helped to understand the curatorial choices in the generic white gallery which has become a classic representative of the art space.

Indeed, the Museum as a type ascending in the urban realm of any major city, has become a complex machine which processes the continuous changing language of art. In the play of the institutions chasing after the

others for figure attendance, flexibility and adaptability are the main goals of designing a museum, but on the other hand, within the general rule of the demand-supply of the art market, the white cube ideology has generated a flatness in architectural solutions for art spaces.

In this respect, the study of the precedents of the white cube, and more specifically the late 20th Century art space where art started to be in dialogue with the space for production and the factory became a place for exhibiting outside of the establishment of the palace, informed the physical representation and the formal approach of the design.

The final operation thus has been framed on merging the prussian courtyards as an as found object, with the one of the industrial hall that holds the notion of flexibility, clear movement of people, goods, air conditioning, lightning by creating a museum-machine which differs from the factory and from the ruin for its intrinsic need of publicness and appropriation.

All these ideas were tested by casting models of the sheer volume of the case study 'De Pont', a factory in Tilburg which got converted in a contemporary art museum, but also by studying the extreme case of the museum seen as an infrastructure of the Centre Georges Pompidou.

With those ingredients at hands, the Museum of the 20th Century Art in Berlin has become the narration of the fictional story of 'The factory and the ruin', of the notion of the ruins as the artifacts, the lost tile of the Cultural Forum, and the industrial space for production, which offers the standard conditions for exhibiting art and the amenities to explicit the bare function of the museum.

Designing those layers separately for then merging them together in key-spaces it has become the exercise for defining the vocabulary of the project. Indeed, the declination offered the opportunity to implement several conditions of settings for art able to be transformed by the curatorial practice.

The design gives the opportunity to exhibit art in the generic white space, in open fields, and in super-controlled white cube as well as in more characterised space which refers to the 'as found' environment of the 20th Century art.

To conclude, in the city of Berlin where 'to remember' seems as crucial as 'to move forward', the historical layer in dialogue with the Church and the Factory enabled the creation of a safe 'boundary' which shuts-off the hysteric landscape of the Cultural Forum. The aim is to give back to the city a slice of land which strives to generate a public ground shaped on the notion of preserving history and allowing new aspirations, which is what in my personal opinion represents the geographical and social conditions of Berlin and of its citizens.