

Space Framed/Framing Space

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The relationship between art and architecture is inherently grounded in time. Viewing art is an event in the present, placing the viewer in a triangle between the viewer, the subject and the frame of the architecture. Historically, viewers have encountered art in many ways, but since the mid-twentieth century, artwork has become an active presence, engaging and confronting the viewer in real space. Rather than providing a window to an illusionistic world, the new art confronts the viewer immediately in the present.

Much of the art of the past provided a view on a separate, hermetic space. Certain artists in the past reached an acknowledgment of the viewer, bringing him or her into the frame of the art. For example, Velázquez achieved this with *Las Meninas*. Unlike modern artists, he did this through the use of scale and perspective, creating depth in order to position the viewer in the projected space of the painting.

In the late 1970s, I visited the Cerasi Chapel at Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome. The physical relationship of the three Caravaggio paintings exhibits the direct relationship between the illusion of space within a pictorial painting and the physical space of the architecture. Standing and facing the altar, the space the visitor occupies continues into the pictorial background. The architectural elements of column and arch frame the artwork and become a threshold between the physical and the illusory. In creating these paintings, Caravaggio transformed the traditional narrative into an event in the present, placing the

viewer firmly within this context. The presence of the viewer is as necessary here as it is in site-specific, minimalist work created 300 years later.

By the mid-twentieth century, artists such as Ellsworth Kelly, Robert Ryman, and Carl Andre pushed the art from the background to the foreground. For certain minimalist artists, the framing device became the architecture. Like these artists, I try to create architecture in which the viewer is compelled to consider his place in real space and time. In this architecture, the presence of the viewer completes the work.

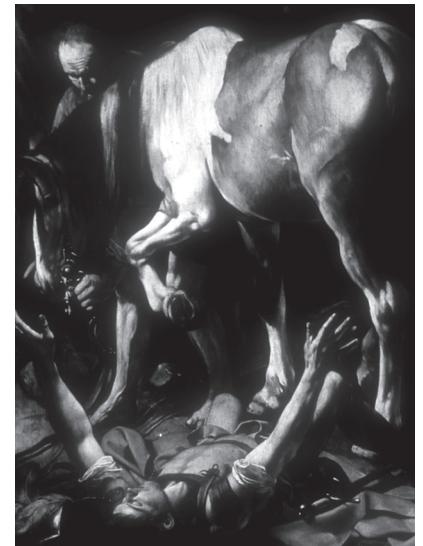
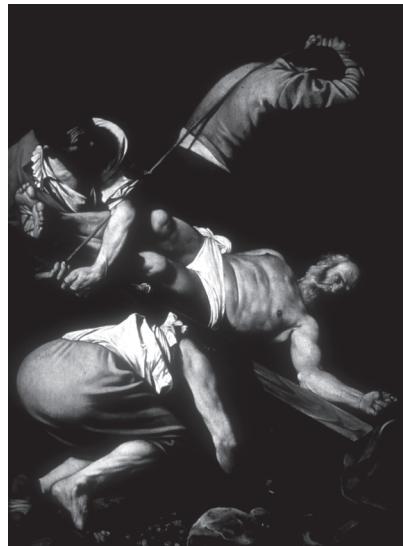
My earlier work has explored this idea in the context of “space framed.” More recently, the work has moved towards the idea of “framing form,” and finally, “beyond the frame.” With site-specific work, such as that of Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, and Richard Serra, art

incorporates and rearranges the frame. Electronic art breaks open the frame completely and demands and creates its environment. The new museum must accommodate all of these types of art, as well as art that has not yet been created. The art space is “incomplete,” both literally and figuratively. If the space is not qualified until the viewer is present, then we are designing for a future from which we are excluded.

The project described here is a proposal for a new Museum for the city of Lleida, Spain. The program incorporates galleries, theater, library, educational and other public functions. Lleida, the capital city of the Segrià region, is the largest city in western Catalunya. It is an inland economic center located 150 kilometers to the northwest of Barcelona. The city and region have a rich and varied history. Settled in the sixth century BC, it was

under Islamic rule from the eighth to twentieth centuries. There have been a series of wars in the area; the most recent was the Spanish Civil War. The Seu Vella, or old cathedral, is one of the region’s most important monuments. Located prominently on a hill, it was built in the thirteenth century on the site of a mosque from the Moorish period. From the eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century it served as a barracks. To quote the Museu d’Historia de Catalunya, the cathedral has undergone “periods of splendor and calamity.” The same could be said of the city of Lleida.

The twenty-first century has seen a period of urban expansion, with an increase in the number of students, young adults and children. The city looks to assert itself as a cultural destination. High speed train lines to Barcelona and Madrid lessen geographic



Cerasi Chapel, Santa Maria del Popolo, Caravaggio



hurdles. New efforts include the restoration of existing institutions and the establishment of new ones.

The museum will house the growing collection of the Fundació Sorigué, and provide a locus for cultural and educational events in the city. The Sorigué Group leads one of the main construction groups in the region; its activities encompass quarrying, concrete production, civil engineering, and construction. The resources of the Sorigué factory provide many exciting opportunities for original design, linked to efficient production

and construction processes. The design process takes advantage of both the ability to customize the design at the level of raw material, and the resources of a high-volume production system. Input is possible at all levels, from quarry to factory to construction site.

Through the Fundació Sorigué, the group pursues philanthropic interests, and is headquartered next to the museum's site, an empty city block (17,000 square meters) located just inside Lleida's ring road, and within walking distance of the city center.

In recent years, the city's growth has expanded past the ring road. The museum's site transitions between the density of the older city, and the shifting fabric of the agricultural and expanding areas beyond the ring road. The museum mediates this progression from the urban condition to that of the garden condition.

Visitors arrive both on foot and by car. Entry paths converge on the same grand stair hall and ascend to the main level of the museum. The grand hall bifurcates the north / south axis of the museum and connects the east

and west sides of the site, linking the urban side to the garden side. Visitors ascend the monumental stair which culminates in transparency—a view through and entry out to the garden beyond. The lobby provides a continuous void through the building, visible even from the exterior entry plaza, allowing visitors at the urban side to understand the building's relationship to its site.

There are three primary manifestations of time in the Museum, in order from shorter to longer intervals they are:

Space Framed

(Passage through time)

The entry of the visitor into multiple viewer/ subject/ architecture triads

Framing Form

(Passage through space)

The visitor's circulation through the Museum and the form that grows from this diagram

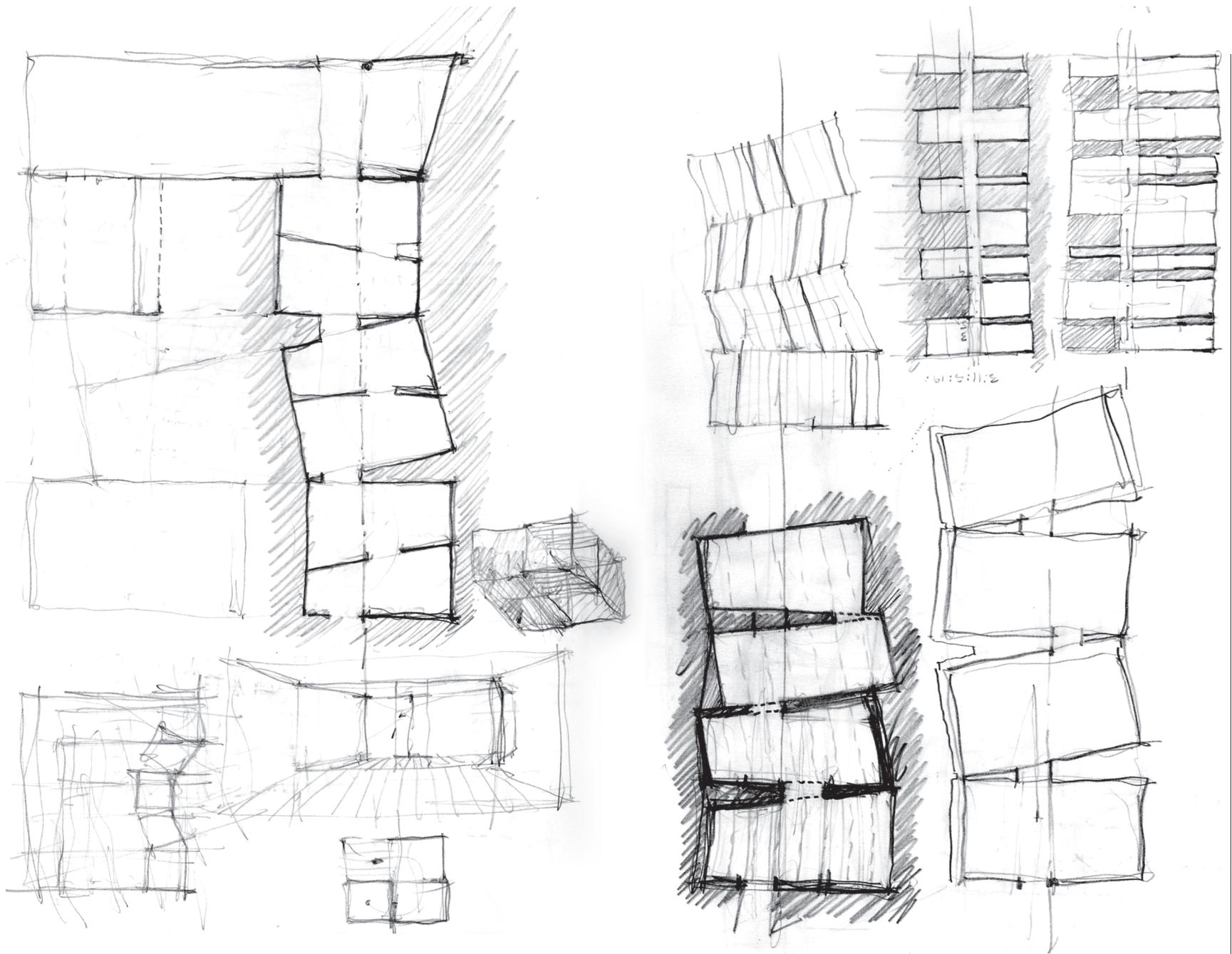
Beyond the Frame

(Space through time)

The changing aspects of the Museum in relation to the visitor and the city over the course of a day, a week, a year

Design Strategy

The starting point for the design is the Experience of the Viewer; his/her relation to the art and the space it inhabits is the prime experience of the museum. Approaching the design of a structure containing over 7000 square meters requires strong basic principles. The programming needs of the museum demand a clear and legible organiza-



tion. This organization must address not only public circulation through the galleries, but also address access points and secure separations between art galleries and the public areas, which may be independently opened and closed. There is a Slow Path and a Fast Path that serve the exhibition components and the complementary components of the institution. These experiential paths of circulation further develop into physical lines of organization.

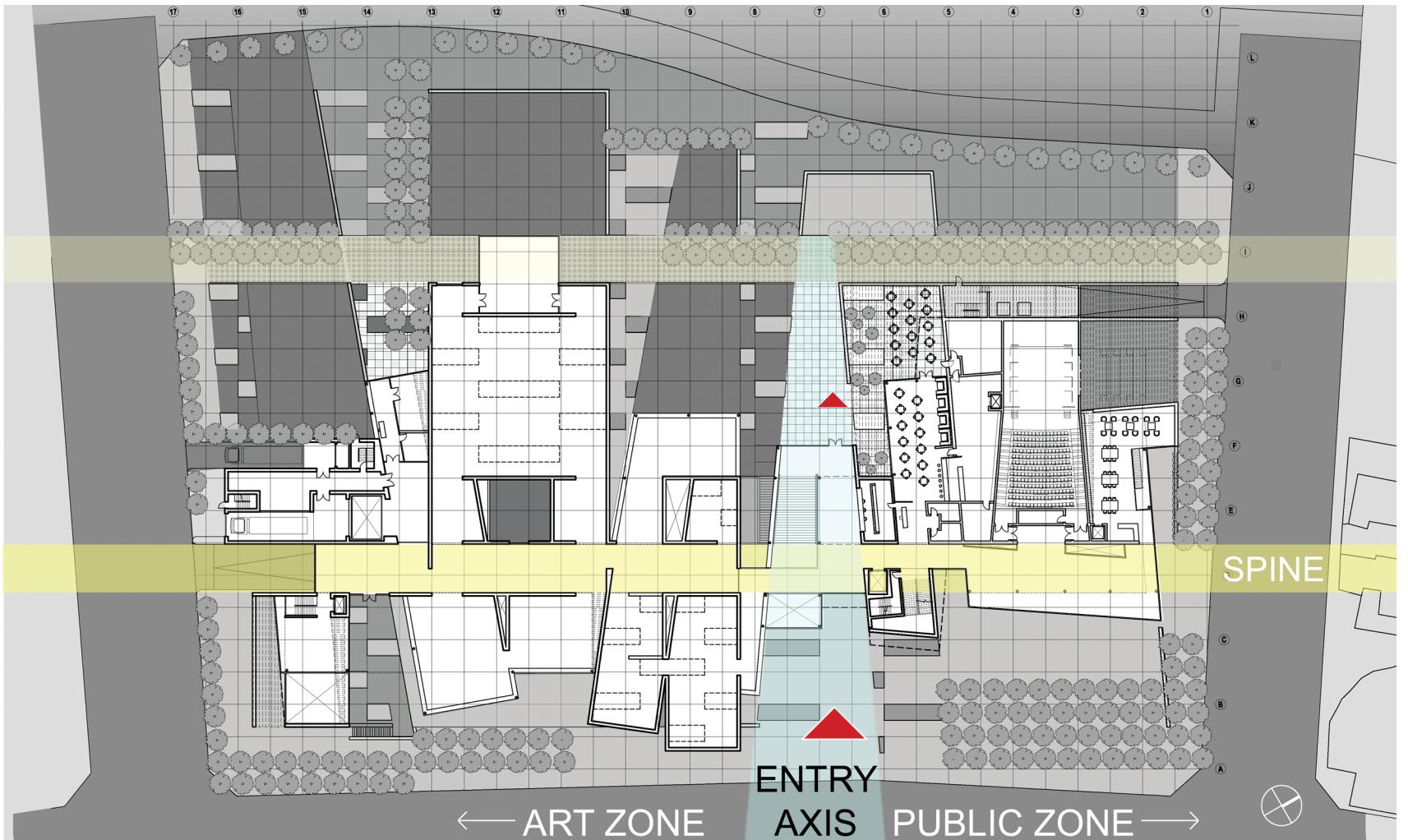
Slow Path

The Slow Path allows an intimate, specific encounter with each art object in each space. This allows for a static experience within a dynamic environment, both meditative and interactive. This is the gallery sequence of the building. The Slow Path consists of the visitor's consecutive encounters with art. The galleries are of three kinds to accommodate different needs. Opaque galleries for light-sensitive art

have opaque walls, and introduce carefully-modulated natural light through skylights. Transparent pavilions have double-skin glass walls with an opaque roof, and are suitable for light-tolerant art such as sculpture. The opaque roofs become occupied spaces at the terrace level, creating sky rooms for sculpture.

The design allows two different kinds of entries into the art spaces, along

the longer side of the gallery (if from the Slow Path), and along the shorter side (if from the Fast Path). Initial sketches jumped off from the classical concept of galleries linked by one visual axis. This quickly transformed into galleries with unaligned entrances, directing the view into each room, not beyond. The passage from gallery to gallery, as well as the form of the galleries themselves, began to shift off the orthogonal, conceived as a string

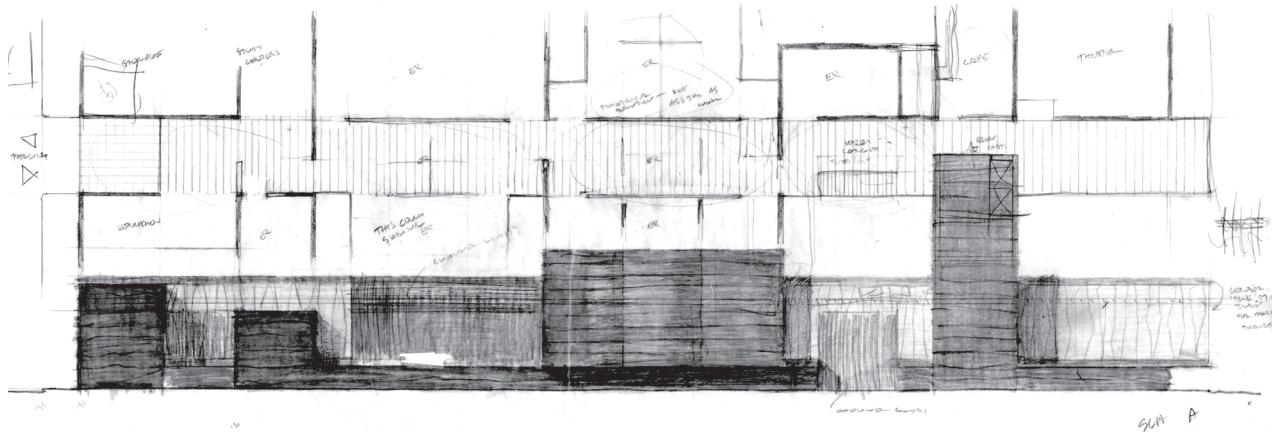
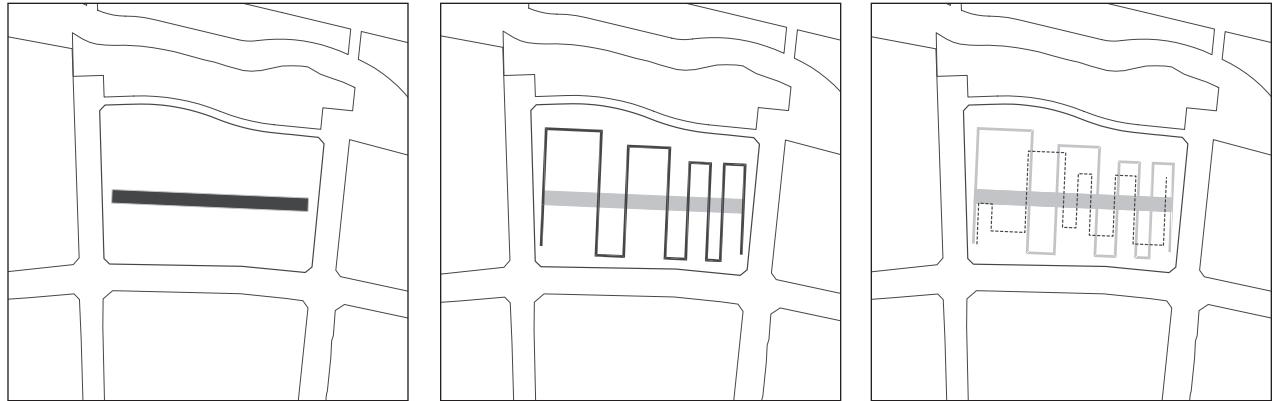


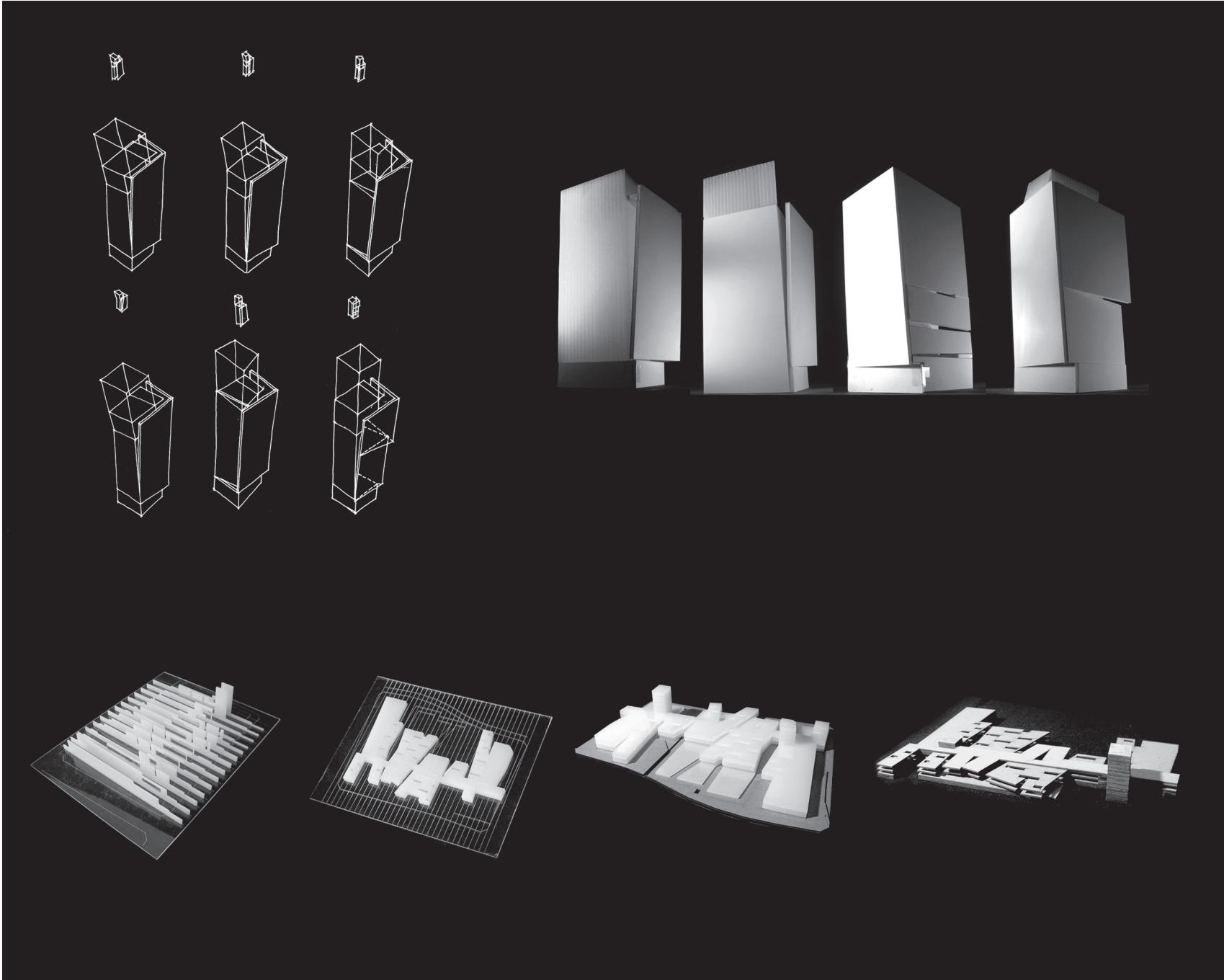
of pearls. The visitor reorients each time he/she enters a gallery, acclimating to a shift in scale, proportion, and opacity/transparency. The experience of the Slow Path transforms the formal, rather than the other way around.

Fast Path

The Fast Path allows overall orientation and understanding of the spatial dimension and organization of the institution. This is the axial sequence of the building—the main spine. The spine evolves into the overall organizing structure of the building—from visual, to experiential, to spatial, and to structural and mechanical development. Virtually all of the spaces in the museum are directly linked to the spine, alternating between the gardens to the west, and the urban street to the east. The north end of the spine, closest to the existing Fundació Sorigué headquarters, contains the public spaces of the museum. Here, the spine itself functions as event space. The south end of the spine both contains and connects art spaces, which can be closed off securely when not in use. The spine repeats itself on all three levels. At the lower level it transforms from a car entrance to an interior axis that connects the lobby to the lower library; along its length are media-activated pedagogical “niches.” At the terrace level the spine functions as an outdoor “roof street,” linking outdoor sculpture spaces.

The vertical axis links the parking to the main spine and the main spine to the tower. The tower relates the experience of the visitor back to the









city. As the spine provides a consistent means of horizontal circulation, tying the museum together, so the tower provides a consistent means of vertical circulation, anchoring the building to its site and serving as an icon of the building. Arrival at the observation deck at the top of the tower, a location from which one can only return by the route of arrival, creates the suspension of time. It allows a visitor a view of the city and another tower—that of the Seu Vella—the visual link to the city's past.

Open Hours / After Hours

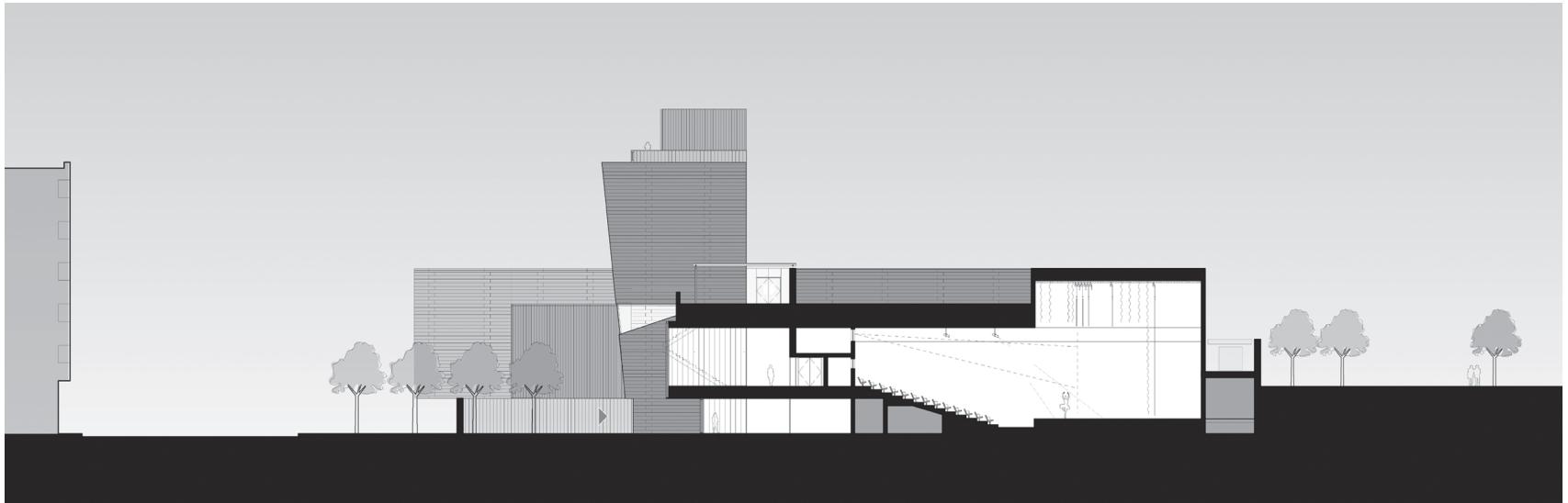
The museum assumes multiple identities at various moments throughout the day, during the week, and over the course of the year. The design is predicated on the need to accommodate overlapping functions that have the ability to operate independently. Of course, these needs can be accommodated many ways: with separate zones, separate entrances, or separate hours. The design challenge is not so much the separation, but the integration of these disparate elements in a way that enriches the whole. This integration moves the architecture beyond the frame. The cultural life of the city is drawn into and projected out of the museum.

The most important of the museum's cross axes, that of the entry, joins the two major programs of the Museum—the art zone and the free public zone. The interior "free zone" includes the spaces that will be open to the public during museum hours, as well as after hours for special events. These spaces

include: theater, library, restaurant, store, and event space. The exterior "free zone" includes green space within the museum's bounds which are open to the public at all times, functioning as an urban park.

Functionally, the zones are independent. Spatially and programmatically, they are interdependent. Rather than separating the building into "halves," the entry links the two main zones with a common entrance, and the main spine, which provides a continuous axis through the art and public zones, provides a parallel spatial organization for the varying functions.





The museum lends itself to multiple paths through the art zone and public zone, for visitors with different interests and needs, or the same visitor over multiple trips. The multiple identities of the museum are evident, and exist simultaneously regardless of the configuration of open or closed spaces at any given moment.

Transparency and opacity are defined by two lines which alternate across the main spine. The primary line is a line of opacity that defines building and green space on opposing sides of spine. At its most basic it originates an on/off, either/or condition. The secondary line is a line of transparency/glazing. These lines overlap and interact to define volume, as the two-dimensional gives rise to the three-dimensional. The primary line is subdivided into heavy masonry—rough stone or precast concrete masonry at the base, and the lighter expression of poured in place

board formed concrete at the levels above. The secondary line is also subdivided into clear glass, frosted glass, and double glazed walls, tied to the needs of the interior program. While the lines are the originating design element, the visitor experiences them volumetrically, as a series of opaque and transparent enclosures which alternate across the spine. Skylights are introduced along a grid which is repeated throughout the site. Skylights oriented north-south punctuate the roofs of galleries, and light shafts oriented east-west fully penetrate the building to bring natural light to the parking garage below.

The reading of the primary and secondary lines continues from the building out into the landscape in the form of garden walls and ground textures. Concrete finish on the interior walls continues unbroken as the wall transitions into an exterior wall. Garden

walls are constructed from the same heavy masonry as the “plinth” or “base” of the building. The gaps between these walls allow the exterior landscape to penetrate the building to the datum line of the spine, perforating the building and bringing views and natural light further into the building. The alternating strategy of solid and void, light and dark in the building is repeated on the exterior with the expression of walls, louvers, grass, and water elements. A second outdoor circulation spine runs north-south across the site. Like the interior spine, it connects the discrete art and garden spaces throughout the site, and creates a circulation strategy for the visitor.

The organizing elements function for all visitors, working in specific temporal contexts to shape their experience. For the fast path visitor, navigation through the building is clear and intuitive. For the slow path visitor, the main

spine provides a reference axis. For the after hours visitor, the public zones are clustered together as an independently functioning entity. Lastly, for those visitors who integrate multiple aspects of the museum, the overall organizing elements help to shape a richer experience. The greatest design challenge lies in creating a coherent museum at all hours. The design not only provides independent paths and experiences, but more importantly, facilitates the coexistence of all of these experiences.