

Mitzvah – The Danish Jewish Museum, Copenhagen

The Danish Jewish Museum differs from all other European Jewish Museums because Danish Jews were, by and large, saved through the effort of their compatriots and neighbors during the tragic years of the Shoa. It is this deeply human response that differentiates the Danish Jewish community and is manifested in the form, structure and light of the new museum. *Mitzvah* is the guiding light of this project whose implications are materialized in the exhibitions of the new Danish Jewish Museum. The meaning of this Hebrew word as a deep response, commitment and precept represents both the Jewish experience in Denmark and the inspiration for the construction of this new space.

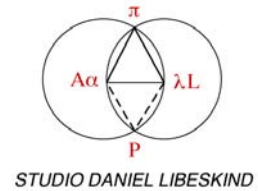
The unique context in which The Danish Jewish Museum will find its new home represents a deep historical legacy. As the Royal Boat House built by King Christian IV at the turn of the seventeenth century, then transformed with the new walls of the Royal Library at the turn of the twentieth century, the new use of the building by the Jewish Museum will share in this fascinating tradition. Indeed, the space and the transformation of its functions across almost half a millennium expresses the continuity and significance of the many layers of narratives that the building offers to the public as a Jewish Museum.

The proposal has both urban and architectural aspects. On the urban level it ties together the new library and the old library by activating the pedestrian walk along the Proviantgården in the interior of the Royal Library courtyard. It does so by proposing that one of its internal planes, Exodus, is here turned to an urban space in which water and a symbolic rowboat dramatically speak to the uniqueness of the survival of the Danish Jewish community. It communicates the importance of the museum behind its walls. This feature brings the visitor into the internal courtyard entrance which is marked in both the horizontal and vertical dimensions. On the ground plane the entrance is configured by an ensemble of conversation spaces that will be developed into intimate meeting points for visitors and space for an outdoor cafe in the summer months. The vertical walls are marked by a projection of the *Mitzvah* configuration whose trace can be followed into the depths of the exhibition.

The organizing principle of The Danish Jewish Museum is the concept of *Mitzvah* itself in its deep ethical meaning as a commandment, resolve and a fundamental good deed. The museum takes the tradition of writing, reading and memory as the overall matrix of organizing the exhibition space. In doing this, it is *Mitzvah* itself on both emblematic and architectural levels that guides a dialogue between the ancient vaulted space of the Royal Boat House and the walls of the Royal Library in relation to the experience of the new museum.

The visitors enter into a dynamic and exhilarating architectural structure which offers a seamless organization of the artifacts and the path of the visitor. The entire building has been conceived as an adventure, both physical and spiritual in tracing the lineaments that reveal the intersection of different histories and the dynamics of Jewish Culture and its unfolding in contemporary life.

This matrix is organized by four planes that intersect in the floor structure emanating from the inside to the outside of the building leaving their marks at the entrance of the museum and along the pedestrian path along the Royal Library Garden. The four planes - Exodus, Wilderness, the giving of the Law and the Promised land - structure a topographical landscape that grows to its fullest density within the vaulted volume of the existing building. These planes are articulated in



both the corrugated floor sections and in the projection of walls, vitrines and the path of the installation.

The entire space of the museum that integrates the entrance, the cafe and support spaces is unified by the exhibition space that is both written and read like a text within a text within a text. This is a text in which the margins (walls, internal spaces, vitrines, virtual perspectives) play a fundamental role as the peripheral commentaries of the Talmud due to its central text. Through the synesthetic experience of the visitor, the richness of the Jewish experience in Denmark will be given both a deeply memorable and ever expanding horizon. The entire space of the exhibition is penetrated by an oblique slope that opens a fifth virtual plane forming surface and a horizon that integrates all the surrounding exhibitions. The surface is used in the exhibition as tables, plinths and vitrines. It is also a visual vector that extends the visitor's experience beyond the walls of the museum. This fifth plane of space acts as a datum orienting the visitors and giving each child and person a scale through which the museum as text becomes legible.

Once inside the visitor has an easy access to the cafe that is also conceived of as part of the exhibition space and doubles as a projection space. After entering the exhibition proper, the visitors are in a space constructed of a wooden floor with slightly sloping planes representing the four planes of discourse. The entire exhibition space is illuminated by a luminous stained glass window that is a microcosm of *Mitzvah* transforming light across the day.

The Danish Jewish Museum will become a destination which will reveal the deep tradition and its future in the unprecedented space of *Mitzvah*. The intertwining of the old structure of the vaulted brick space of the Royal Library and the unexpected connection to the unique exhibition space creates a dynamic dialogue between architecture of the past and of the future - the newness of the old and the agelessness of the new.

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