Arab World Institute Jean Nouvel

EVDA 621 Formal Strategies in Architecture | Case Study Analysis
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PROJECT: Arab World Institute, Paris (Institut du Monde Arabe)
ARCHITECTS: Jean Nouvel
CLIENT: Institut du Monde Arabe
PROGRAM: 25,000 square meters of museum, library, auditorium, conference and meeting rooms, cafeteria, and offices.
STURCTURAL SYSTEM: metal structure; curtain walls.
MAJOR MATERIALS: aluminum, glass.

Part I Form

Since the completion of the Pompidou Center, there is no building in Paris evokes as much discussion and anticipation as the Arab World Institute. This building is a physical symbol of the friendship between France and the Arab world which makes it facing the contradiction of Arabian and European culture. Also, because of its special location, it becomes the connection of old and new Paris.

Jean Nouvel and his team won the competition of a contract to design the Arab World Institute in 1981, and the building was constructed from 1981 to 1987. The team was given a complex program with a complex site. As the headquarters of a foundation organized to encourage a development of different culture, the Arab World Institute requires a 5,000 square meters museum, a cafeteria, an auditorium, reception space, a 100,000 square meters library, meeting rooms, support facilities and offices.
Old and New

The Arab World Institute is located on Rue des Fossés Saint Bernard in Paris, France. The building acts as a buffer zone between the Jussieu Campus of Paris VI University and the Seine. The river facade follows the curve of the waterway and helps reduce the hardness of a rectangular block, adapting itself to the view from the Sully Bridge. At the same time the building also appears to fold itself back in the direction of the Saint Germain des Prés district. The building’s transparency encourages the sense that the Arab World Institute is not a gateway but a scrim separating old and new. The building itself is split in two and the driveway between, in line exactly with the towers of Notre Dame, terminates in an internal court, with a fountain at its base echoing the fountains of Arabian palaces of 1,000 years ago.
The south façade’s extraordinary sun screen is the Arab World Institute’s metaphorical tour de force. Its 27,000 diaphragms, organized in 113 panels, operate on the principle of a camera lens. The lens’ polygonal openings echo Arabian geometries. The huge 30 by 80 meter façade acts as a giant mushrabiya. This subtle interpretation perfectly combined high-tech modernity with traditional Arabian architecture form. “Visitors should know that this building is Arabian,” says Nouvel.
References

Thomas Vonier, Critique: Arab World Institute, Progressive Architecture Vol: 76, Date: 08/1995, Page: 62