

Architect
-Adjaye Associates

Aishti Foundation
Beirut, *Lebanon*, 2015

Client
-Aishti Retail

Structural Engineer
-Hayek Engineering and Consulting

Mechanical Engineer
-Tehini consultants

Lighting Consultant
-Zumtobel

Total Area
-17,600sqm

Contract Cost
-Confidential

The juxtaposition of art and shopping presented the practice with the challenge to create a design for an entirely new typology that would integrate two, often conflicting, worlds. The concept, therefore, has been to establish a lively architectural dialogue – via a celebration of views into the different spaces (both gallery and retail) as well as a homogenising tiled design that presents a continuous language throughout the building's floor, façade and roof. The opportunity for flexibility has been a key consideration, so that entrances to the separate uses can be distinct, but there is also the opportunity to connect the entire programme. Doorways, screens and boundaries are therefore highly flexible, demountable, sliding and adaptable.

The Aishti Foundation building is located on a brownfield coastal site in central Beirut and replaces a number of previous warehouses, while also fronting onto an enhanced seaside promenade that has been created through land reclamation and the insertion of a playful, undulating landscaping strategy. This immediately defines the site as an amenity and a draw for visitors. In addition, the top level offers a sky bar with striking sea views as well as over the city of Beirut. The form is a simple block that has been rotated on one edge so that it appears tilted. The retail floors are to one side of the building, configured around a central atrium. The other side of the building accommodates the Aishti Foundation galleries.

The main entrance is punched into the façade and sits within the corner of the building, drawing visitors through the interior on a diagonal axis, which offers views to the sea. While the retail section of the building is wrapped in a solid façade and draws light from the atrium, the east façade is defined by a single large window, behind which a staircase ascends the galleries, offering a moment where the building connects back to the city. The façade has a number of layers, so that the building is like a glazed box that sits within a louvred frame. The outer layer creates an efficient passive shading system. Laterally supported, it floats around the building, with a void existing between the two layers. The geometric 'thunderbolt' pattern of the ceramic louvres – or 'baguettes' – reappears in the landscaping across the entire site, as well as on the interior tiling, and becomes a defining motif.

