

AGORA' CONFERENCE HALL - LONDON

Bloomsbury is one of London's most important district, being a point of reference for cultural and recreational events as well as for its renowned buildings such as the British Museum, University of London, SOAS University and the Senate House.

Bloomsbury was born as a residential district but it has evolved with cultural and institutional structures, urban parks and green areas over time.

In the district buildings belong to different architectural styles: residential buildings have a Neo Georgian character, cultural buildings are Neoclassical style and institutional buildings are in Art Deco. Each style has significant architectural elements such as the detachment of the building from the road, typical of Neo Georgian; the repetition of vertical elements and closure at the top with a pediment, typical of Neoclassicism; broken line and use of prestigious modern materials typical of Art Deco and in contrast with Neoclassicism.

All these elements are incorporated and reworked within the design idea so that the New Conference Hall connects with the district and part of it.

THE SITE

Malet Street Garden is an enclosed garden of the University of London that was granted for public use in the 19th century. It is located behind the houses on Gower St., at a lower level than the road, surrounded by a high brick wall that emphasizes the detachment from the context.

The site will be subject to a low environmental impact intervention for the protection of the green area and the re-connection of the garden with the environment around it. This reconnection is given by a hallway surrounded by vegetation that will be the entrance to the New Conference Hall. The park will have an alternation of open spaces and closed volumes that are located along the new longitudinal hallway. The shape and materials of new volumes will interact with existing structures and will incorporate Agora Conference Hall London into the network of Bloomsbury cultural structures.

THE PROJECT

The "Conference Hall" is typically an introverted architecture. Since its main objective is to isolate itself acoustically and visually, it becomes a closed volume that hides the functions inside. So it eliminates the dialogue with the external environment. The aim of the project is to re-elaborate the "Conference Hall" as an architectural typology, to re-elaborate the functional distribution and recover the contact with nature and city. The project is based on a morphological dialogue: form follows function. Diagonal cuts emphasize elevation denouncing the presence of the auditorium outside, making a connection between building and context and improving the spatial perception.

The heart of the structure will be a public "agora": an open, democratic, inclusive place where all functions start. The structure has a vertical scan with steel pillars that extend for the entire height of the elevation alternating transparent, translucent and opaque walls. The transparent glass walls make visible the internal life of the building. Translucent walls, made with Alabaster slabs, cover the auditorium halls and create a visual comfort for shows. Opaque walls hide service functions of the Agora Conference Hall. The verticality of the building is rebalanced by the roof which emphasizes the footprint of the building: a plate that allows Agora Conference Hall to be used during typical rainy days in London.