PRECEDENCE STUDY

KUNSTHAUS GRAZ

GRAZ, AUSTRIA 2003

PETER COOK & COLIN FOURNIER
The structure for the exhibition spaces is held within the steel frame in the skin. This allows the space to remain unobstructed by columns, giving absolute freedom to the plan of the exhibits. The skin spans a distance up to 60m.

Below the exhibition spaces, the freeflowing public space is enclosed by a thin curtain wall of glass, giving the space a feeling of transparency. This space uses a more conventional piloti and brace beam system, and in fact, it is the foundation for the free-form structure above. The same rigid floor system that resists the thrust from above, acts as a brace linking the columns at the ground floor.
The KUNSTHAUS houses a variety of programs. What makes the museum space unique is the lack of a permanent collection. The galleries [1] were designed to house travelling exhibits, as well as serve the other art institutions within Graz, and the rest of Austria.

In addition to art exhibition, the KUNSTHAUS hosts CAMERA AUSTRIA [2], an independent research program exploring photography as an art medium and historical tool. The research facilities are located above the public floor at grade and within the bottom floors of the curved structure.

The complex also is linked to historical architecture in the THIENFELD PALACE [3]. This is one of Austria’s first steel structures, and has been restored as part of the museum support facilities.

The excavated levels house a parking complex which was constructed primarily to serve the nearby commercial area, though the Kunsthaus staff will use these spaces for their needs as well.

Two other traditional buildings [4,5] are part of the complex, and at this time do not serve a direct museum function, yet once refurbished, will house cafes and other public entertainment spaces.
THE SHARP CONTRAST OF FORM ON THE EXTERIOR BLOCKS MELT AWAY WITH THE DESIGN OF THE INTERIOR CIRCULATION. A TRANSPORTER - ESCALATOR CALLED THE "PIN" GRADUALLY MOVES VISITORS TO THE EXHIBITION HALLS WHILE ALLOWING THEM TO SURVEY OVER THE VARIOUS SPACES. THIS CONTINUES THROUGH THE LOWER EXHIBITION SPACE, GIVING A UNIQUE OVERVIEW TO THE PRESENTED ARTWORK.
Although the KUNSTHAUS complex connects with more traditional structures, it is the striking form of the structural skin that creates the most excitement. The design incorporates a triangular brace system, and hexagonal ports which grow to self structured nozzles. These tilted extrusions act as light ports bringing northern light into the exhibition halls. They also serve to highlight the history of Graz, by their orientation to traditional heritage monuments, such as the Clock Tower atop the Schlossberg.

In addition to the skin’s structural role at the exhibition spaces, the designers created multiple uses and multiple definitions for the "skin" beyond the traditional role as merely the enclosure system.

This skin is a complex layering of form and systems, yet its construction is made of typical materials, and is conventionally detailed resulting in a much lower cost than would be assumed. The interior tensile layer forms easily to the steel frame, while the acrylic panels are attached with a conventional pin system.

The skin does have an added media function. 930 circular fluorescent bulbs are placed behind the acrylic panels, forming what could be described a very large very low resolution grayscale bitmap matrix. Each bulb can be controlled independently, for intensity and duration. The skin can then be programmed for signage, or for a programmed media exhibit.
The models to the left illustrate the connectivity the structure would have with the surrounding buildings, as these structures are incorporated into the program. The measured facades of the traditional Austrian buildings act as music bars upon which the new form is composed.

The city of Graz celebrates a rich history of the Avant Gard, and welcomed the new form as a compliment to their Tyrolean conservatism.

The form seems strangely like an artificial heart being inserted into the city, to give it a re-birth, and new life. The City has taken charge of this project in coordination with a large scale revitalization effort. It could then be said that the connection to an artificial heart is accurate indeed.
Project Information

Formal name of Project: Kunsthaus Graz
Location: Graz, Austria

Gross square footage: 141,007 sq. ft.

Total construction cost: $50 Million

Owner: City of Graz

Architect: ARGE Kunsthaus
Mariahilferstrasse 1
8010 Graz, Austria

ARGE Kunsthaus is the joint venture between:

– spacelab cook-fournier GmbH
– Architektur Consult
– Bollinger+Grohmann

Bibliography:

Architectural Record Jan 2004: KUNSTHAUS GRAZ. p 146 article by Liane LeFaivre

ARCspace Foundation website: www.arcspace.com article: Spacelab Cook-Fourier, Kunsthaus Graz

Graz, Austria City website: www.graz03.at article by Peter Pakesch, Artistic Director of the Regional Museum, Joanneum: Kunsthaus Graz, A Friendly Alien.
CITY OBSERVATION "NEEDLE"
FOURTH LEVEL

SPATIAL ORGANIZATION

PUBLIC READING AREA
GROUND FLOOR

LOWER EXHIBITION SPACE
THIRD LEVEL

UPPER EXHIBITION SPACE
FOURTH LEVEL

HYBRIDIZATION

KUNSTHAUS GRAZ
GRAZ, AUSTRIA, 2003

1. Entrance foyer
2. Media lounge
3. Café
4. Delivery area
5. Multipurpose events
6. Medien Kunstlabor (art installations)
7. Shop
8. Lecture/performance
9. Children's area
10. Exhibition area
11. Administration
12. Camera Austria magazine
13. "Needle" events space

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