



Beirut's New Arts & Culture House

(the project awarded to an Italian architect and his team, out of 388 projects presented by several countries)

A competition to design the much-awaited art center of Beirut was announced in July 2008 during the General Assembly meeting of the International Union of Architects in Torino.

The competition and the project was conceived by Gaia-Heritage for the Ministry of Culture and is funded by a \$20 million gift from the Sultanate of Oman.

A panel of international juries received 388 official projects from several countries and the winning team was Teknoarch, a group of 7 Milano based architects, graphic designers and engineers led by the Italian architect Alberto Catalano.

The project site for the House sits on the limit of the "old town", in the shadow of Jean Nouvel Tower between the Emir Amine and Galghoul streets where two different urban areas meet, covering an area of 3.785m².

The center will be finished by 2013 and, as the Minister of Culture Tammam Salam said, will be "a non political and non sectorial space that will help promote national unity and awareness... to enrich Lebanon's culture".

Alberto Catalano's design is open and versatile, in describing his architectural plan, he used a post conflict lexicon with words such as "cuts", "boundary" and "scars". He wanted to realize a place for gatherings, meetings, exchanges, in other ways a "piazza": a place where

socializing is encouraged, a place to share with the other public spaces of the city. Beirut is a Mediterranean town and it is natural to think of an outdoor space for art and culture.

The Arts and Culture House will include an auditorium of 800 seats, a polyvalent performing hall of 200 seats, a cinema, exhibition spaces, rooms for workshops and rehearsals as well as a multimedia library, cinemathèque and commercial spaces.

The maquette of the architectural project will be exhibited at the Italian stand of the forthcoming Beirut Arab International Book Fair in December as it is "a very important recognition for Italy and Italian creativity", as the Italian Ambassador Gabriele Checchia said.

