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Akademie der Wissenschaften Competition

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Akademie der Wissenschaften Competition

Robert A. M. Stern Architects

While the experience of this century has fractured and dissipated the assumption that scientific progress inevitably leads to social progress, we propose that the two are still interdependent. Confronted by a context and program charged with ironies, we have responded with a design which, we believe, represents the ideal of progress even as it engages those ironies. The architectural evidence of this exchange, it is hoped, will resonate with meaning and possibility.

As I see it, the task is not simply to restore the former Italian embassy to its previous physical and conceptual integrity, but also to challenge that integrity. To do this, I have turned to the materials — glass and metal — and the forms — dynamic abstract shapes — which most closely represent the ideal of science as a process of renewal. The reality and the symbolism of glass and lightweight metal counterpoint the static monumentality of Friedrich Hertzelt's design.

But our approach transcends mere formalism in its effort to contrast new with old, optimism with cynicism. Our design is based on the belief that the future of science depends on the ability of the science community to work within the public realm, a belief to which architecture is powerfully able to give expression. Therefore I consider it essential to infuse the symbols of modernity with the programmatic reality of an open institution in a democratic society; to make our bold shapes function as instrumentalities of



Model

the democratic order, while leaving to the existing, traditional elements their function as containers of ceremony. Therefore we acknowledge the past and the present in all their complexities.

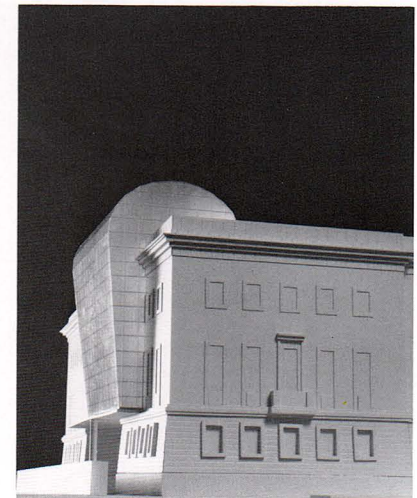
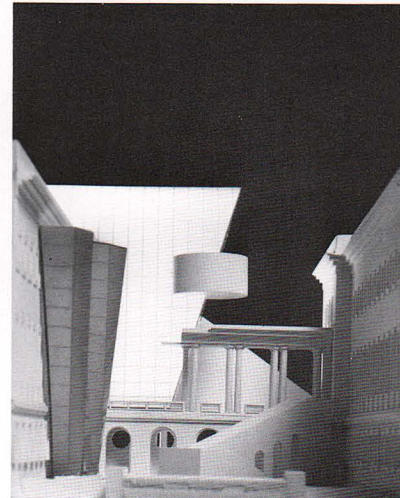
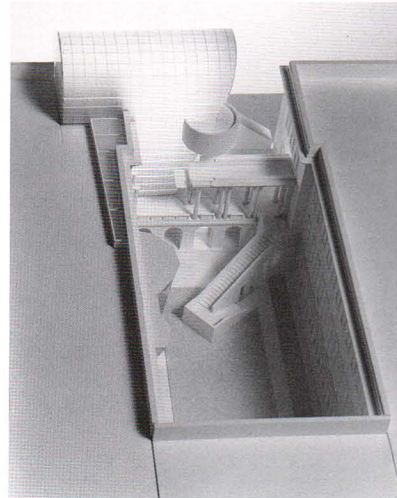
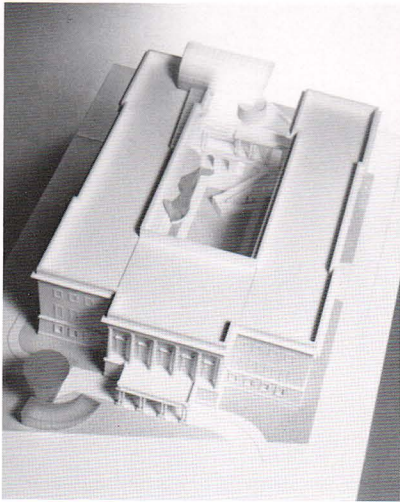
To begin a past-present dialogue, it is necessary to introduce elements which go beyond the frame of the existing building, to design entirely new architectural spaces within the existing shell, and to preserve and restore the many public rooms and offices that are relatively intact.

The most visible expression of our approach is a new element, the glass pavilion placed before the main facade, which is construed as a public entrance, intended for daily use by staff and scholars as well as for large meetings. It leads directly to a 241-seat auditorium which would be available for both the special needs of the Academy and as a forum for the city. The curving ramp itself functions as an accessible means of entry for the handicapped.

At the opposite end of the wing is another, larger glass pavilion, a sleekly tapered volume that closes the courtyard vista. On the first floor it contains a cafeteria; above there is a glazed library, with a concrete study room floating in its glass frame.

Throughout the interior, we decided to both restore and intervene. The grand entrance and staircase remain, but there is now an alternative circulation pattern along the wing's inner wall. On the first floor five conference rooms are meticulously and sympathetically restored, yet the rooms adjoining them are new or altered designs. The corridors and lounges take advantage of the courtyard, opening to it through the existing windows and a new 'break room' housed in an undulating glass bay that climbs the wall as it cants into the courtyard.

Our design philosophy for this project is perhaps most cogently expressed by the decisions regarding the restoration of the Festsaal and its Foyer, and the layout of the courtyard that lies between the Academy of Science and the existing Italian Consulate. The former embassy rests squarely in the Classical tradition of the Modern era, and despite the political circumstances associated with its construction, the architectural validity of that tradition remains. While we have given scrupulous attention to preservation, it would be irresponsible to simply reconstruct the original building, given

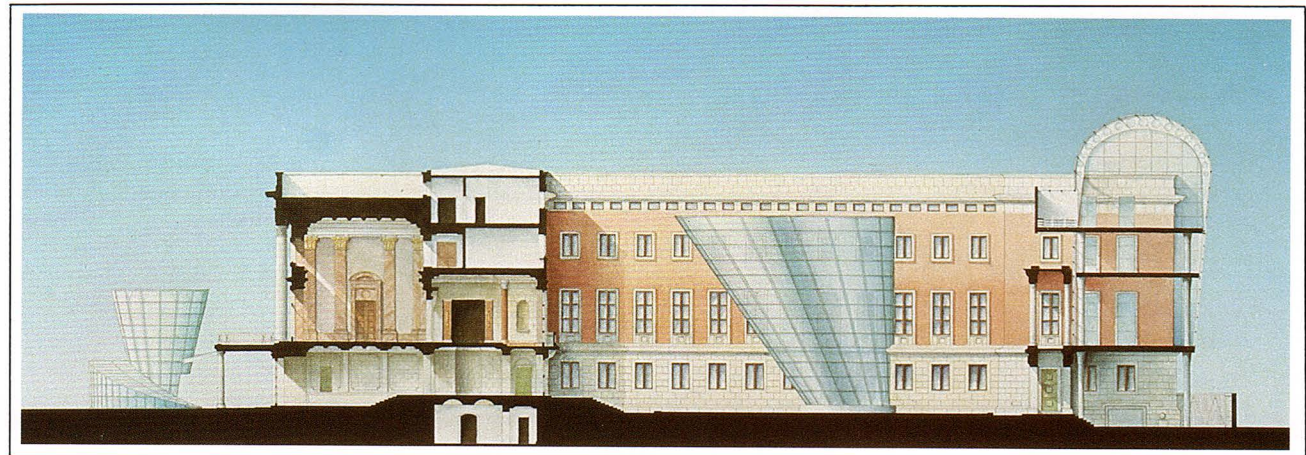


Views of Model

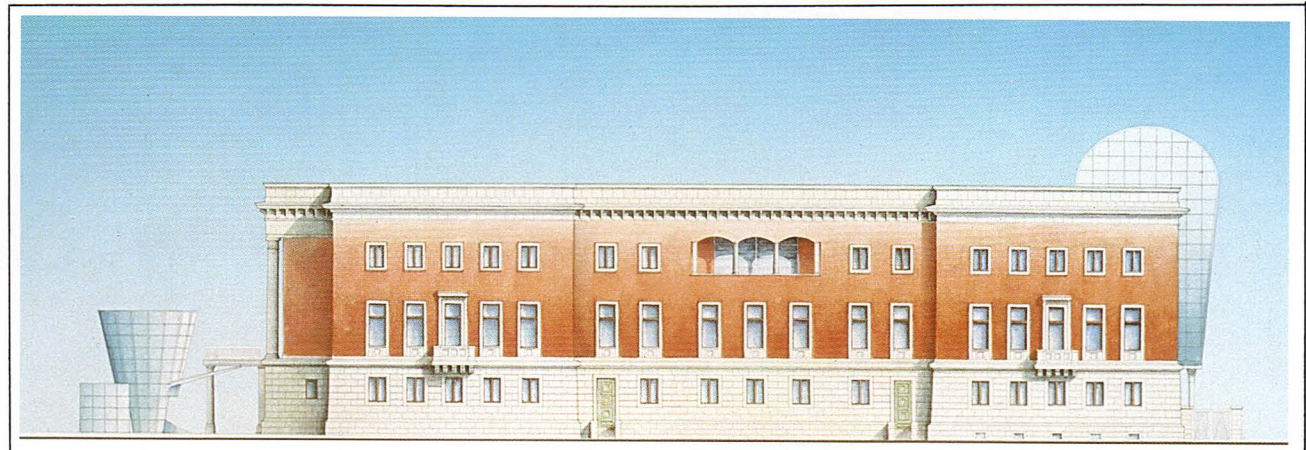
the building's past and its present. Better to treat it as a ruin, better still, as we have chosen, to construct and deconstruct.

So it is that although the Festsaal will be fully restored, its large Foyer will be not completely restored; at a critical juncture where the historical fabric is not quite intact, we have left the columns floating, supporting nothing, a reminder of the building's history.

The courtyard, too, bears witness to history, yet it also bears witness to our optimism for the future. The fragmentary pergola, damaged during the war, is placed in the context of an exuberantly reconfigured outdoor room. Rather than maintain the static, axial plan of the courtyard, we have attempted to endow it with an almost kinetic liveliness. We feel that there should be engaging views onto the courtyard from the public rooms, offices, and apartments of the surrounding building, and believe that the terrace should be a pleasant place for lunch. We would argue that the satisfaction of these seemingly modest requirements is central and essential to our main task: to "humanize" a building that is unquestionably inhuman in its associations, and, to many critics, dehumanizing in its architectural expression; to make the new resonate with an optimism that draws its strength from its sense of the past.



Elevation



Section