Gaumont-Pathé Alé sia Cinemas by Manuelle Gautrand
Architecture, Paris – France

In 2011, the Gaumont-Pathé group decided to renovate the existing building in order to upgrade the cinemas and to improve user comfort. This aim led to the gradual update of the somewhat outmoded image of the chain of cinemas, transforming them into cultural venues, animated day and night and sufficiently flexible to accommodate a varied programme.

This project has two main aims:
- To showcase the film theatres and visually identify them as physical spaces, as much from within the building as from without;
- To showcase the films: the facades are covered in a kind of huge curtain of LEDs, which is used to screen a range of animation (film extracts, clips, colours and abstract images can be used to brighten the façade to life).

These are the means by which the cinema hopes to resume its position within the city. Internally, the architecture aims to display the cinema’s unusual and spectacular volumes, while externally it enrobes itself in film extracts and moving images, which also speak of cinema.

The facade is broken down into a dozen vertical strips, like ribbons. Each strip supports several facades, alternately oriented upwards or downwards, as if folded. In the central area, these great plates are made of glass and covered in regularly spaced LED modules, forming a large, animated grid. Towards the edge of the facade, the large plates are opaque and framed of metal cladding, sometimes covered in the same structure of LEDs, sometimes simply folded to maintain the rhythm. These ribbons can function either independently of one another, each showing a different picture from its neighbours, or as a whole, showing one single picture across all the LEDs.

The bottom section of each ribbon tilted upwards to form surfaces that are almost horizontal, creating a vast canopy that overhangs the pavement by some 3.5 metres. These plates are also covered in LEDs, providing the public with different images, which are this time almost within reaching distance. This gives the public the sensation of walking into the picture as they go into the building. At dusk, the luminosity of the LEDs is perceptible from the inside, illuminating the foyer and circulation spaces with the different colours of the animated images.

The film theatres are arranged within the building so that virtually every volume is visible and identifiable. The contents of the lobby form a sort of vertical assimilation, where the theatres settle into one another like a puzzle. The linear seaming in the theatre is made visible on its exterior, forming magnificent stepped collages. These collages are then continued into the adjacent space to create partially sheltered lobby areas: little amphitheatres that stare down towards the foyer entrances, forming spaces for informal projections.

Within this vertical and sky space are all the reception services, ticket sales, an information point, automated ticket and information points, and refreshments, with a seating area and a cafe, access to the different theatres, and then a quieter space, with areas for screening films. All the circulation interlaces within the triple-height atrium. A series of escalators and stairways bind the facades and lead to the different mezzanine levels and upper-level theatres. The public can be seen, and can move around to look at the spaces from below or from above, as well as enjoying views into the outside world.

The project presents specific features that create supplementary acoustic challenges and generate an increased level of complexity. In particular:
- several directly adjoining residential buildings,
- a mixed structure of concrete and steel, inquiring different solutions according to material,
- the client’s wish to equip certain with surround sound (5D sound).

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