

DOMINICAN CONVENT IN NISIDA ISLET

What should a convent be in the 21st century? How could this ancient way of life be attractive to the new generations?

A convent is a city within another city, but nowadays there is no link between both. These institutions have stayed in the past and they are like islands inside society. This sacred building must be a homothety of the city. Just like this, citizens will pay attention to this institution again. We have to catch the main values of the town and then we have to translate them into the project idea.

Naples, like its name says (Nea-Polis), was created by the Romans using their colony structure: Cardo and Decumanus. The main structure of the city is still there, but other parts are underground like the catacombs. Actually, there are two worlds (overground/underground) and churches are the connection between both. The church's role is key in Naples: they are eye-catching in the old city with their domes and around them, the public spaces are generated.

This project translates these concepts to the new convent in Nisida Islet, even though the project also takes into account the main values of this ancient institution and the prevailing character of the place (*genius loci*).

The convent is a journey through the history of this typology: from massiveness of the caves in their origins to topological relationships between their pieces in the Plan of Saint Gall.

In Nisida, all the buildings are located at the top of this island to take advantage of the views and the convent tops off the main street at the lowest point of the top.

The project is conceived as a platform that generates a public space for the islet. Five volumes emerge from this platform: church, library, chapter house, refectory and cells. They are growing up in height continuing the circular form of the island and adapting to ground surface.

Every piece has the best orientation for their uses: cells and refectory to Southeast, chapter house to Southwest, library to Northwest and church to sky, to God.

The spaces between these volumes frame the views and this platform is covered by a wooden light lattice structure. This structure has a double function: acting as the eye catcher and giving shadow to the public space.

The cloister has a singular place in the heart of the building, it is the space where you connect with the site and with your soul. There you can hear the waves of the sea by a hole connected with the grotto; you can touch the texture of limestone, you can feel the warmth of the sun... Generating the perfect space to reflect.

Like Naples, the project has two worlds: the overground part that contains the secular program of the convent and the underground part that contains religious program.

Underground part looks rough like the catacombs where the light guides you, between their cyclopean concrete walls, to the main spaces.

Overground part recovers the importance of the convent as cultural centre in the Middle Ages: the library opens to visitors, creation of research capsule for scientists, the chapter hall can be converted into a concert hall host Gregorian chant shows...

In the current world, where image has more value than concepts, that is what a convent should be in this century: the place to reconnect with yourself, with your values, with your origins.