





# The Beauty in Between

## Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongawera

One of the most fundamental concepts of New Zealand is its dichotomy with the rest of the world. Appropriately from this concept comes the different understanding of society, culture and history, and from this a new possibility of being arises. The richness and uniqueness of the country is grounded in this particular concept of 'polarity'.

For this reason it is necessary to discover a pattern, an order, a language which is capable of holding together the 'two worlds'.

The principles of our project are based on the understanding of this extraordinary condition. In order to synthesise these ideals we propose to shift into the intersection of Maori with White culture, and the intersection of natural with artificial environment, which means between landscape and city. Oriental Bay and Point Jerningham – the place where the mountains reach the water – marks the threshold between the Lambton Harbour and Port Nicholson, a symbolic place between Wellington and New Zealand, and New Zealand and the 'wider world' across the oceans.

*Between land and water.* The myth of beauty, the Goddess Venus and all life arises from the water.

We start from the water as a generator of our project, because we consider the great relevance of this element to the country as the origin that contains the heritage of all culture and the expressive and peculiar forms of the land.

*Between up and down.* The water's surface will be treated in order to reflect the continuity of the landscape. As the mountains rise out of the landscape like blade their image will be mirrored in the cavity of the water like a cut. The building shapes this cavity, as an extension of the landscape, creating the edge between the void and the water.

*Between solid and void.* The bulk of the building, containing its void, will be floating almost completely sunk in the ocean, at the same time materialising a new horizon. The quality of this image simultaneously resides in the presence as well as the absence of figure. The uniqueness of that figure is the beginning of what raises this building into the ranks of the big museums of the world.

*R Rizzi in collaboration with  
T Leaser and Sinclair Group  
Architects.  
Model B Borgini and A Oradini.*

*This project was for the  
competition to become the  
architect of the Museum of New  
Zealand Te Papa Tongawera.  
The model was not submitted for  
the purposes of this competition  
but was rather developed for an  
exhibition in Italy. The text is an  
abstract from the report that the  
architects submitted.*

*Between centre and edge.* The irregular shape of the building, long and narrow like an island extending Point Jerningham into the bay is constituted by two main elements.

The border – on the edge – like a thick wall, contains most of the interior museum functions, separates the surrounding water from its central void. It will be seen to project above the sea level only just enough to protect itself.

The void – in the centre – reaching way down below the level of the water, where it is confined by a horizontal major exhibition space, relating it to the continuous thick border of the floating building. This empty void, like the imprint of a prehistoric landscape, is ready to be 're-inhabited'. It is also filled with the symbolism of the Marae, reinterpreted through cutting it from its traditional context and shifting it into the new context of water, giving it back new value.

*Between strength and silence.* The simplicity and clarity of the project is well understood from the view corridor of the Wellington Harbour and the city. It is in balance with New Zealand's landscape through the quietness of its horizontality. The implied notion of invisibility recalls a mysterious sacredness.

At the same time the strength of the figure creates a new aesthetic datum in the vertical dimension.

The visible environment of the cavity will be an extraordinary architectural experience offering the new comprehension of the values and the origin of the country. The richness resides in the void and precisely this image of the absence will be recognised in the entire world.

*Between past and future.* Instead of being grounded on the earth, the floating structure of the museum is linked on the one hand to the old tradition of boat building, on the other hand it involves the necessity to apply the most advanced technologies available today (e.g. Concrete Gravity Substructures). This technology in our project will allow us to deal with the fundamental problems of seismic movement and shock in a new way. Rather than setting power against power, or force against force, we utilise the water as an absorber of subterranean movement in a passive way. This soft approach to found the building implies a new sensibility and respect towards nature.

*Between desire and reality.* We understand and are aware that this project requires to go beyond most projects being undertaken anywhere in the world. We also know, that our proposal goes beyond some of the restrictions of the competition. But we seriously believe in the goals of this Museum which are the goals of New Zealand. And we further believe that the achievement of these goals imply a big risk: the risk of honesty and truth.



