

Leüthenhaven Reclaimed

MIST - Museums in Sør-Trøndelag, is getting a new, co-located museum in the heart of Trondheim. The new building will house both Trondheim Art Museum and Nordenfjeldske Museum of Decorative Arts and Design, while also serving as an active and cultural meeting place.

Key Concepts:

- The entire museum is located underground, within the transformed parking garage. This liberates the street level and gives new life to an existing structure.
- A new urban floor – both above and below ground – is connected through openings, stairs, and light shafts. It becomes a public arena for the city, open to everyone.
- The architecture is flexible and inviting. The museum can adapt to changing needs over time, both physically and socially.

Where traditional museums often appear closed and introverted, the new museum will be the opposite – an open invitation to the city. The site at Leüthenhaven already contains a large underground parking facility. This is repurposed as the museum's main volume, while the ground level is opened and activated as public urban space. Rather than erecting a new monument, the museum is placed below ground, freeing the entire ground level for public use. The city's structure is expanded with new connections, meeting places, and programmed spaces, activating the street level and creating an inclusive, accessible landscape – continuing Trondheim's tradition of passageways and offering space for art, production, engagement, and daily life. The result is a museum for art, community, and participation – a building for Trondheim today and for generations to come.

Urban Ground Level – Connected and Accessible

Challenge:

How can the museum open itself to the city while strengthening its role as a public meeting space?

Solution:

By creating two interconnected, accessible, and flexible ground levels, the museum offers open platforms for art and society, forging new links between culture and urban life.

A shared space beneath the ground level becomes a point of connection and interaction between city and museum. At street level, a public arena with workshops, pavilions, and open spaces is created. A variety of rooms and plaza-like places emerge between buildings, maintaining pedestrian routes across the site. This allows passersby to engage spontaneously with the museum and its activities.

The underground urban floor is directly connected to the surface. The museum entrance is located at the new cultural square – a shared plaza between the museum and

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Trøndelag Theatre. Visitors are invited down via a generous staircase into the public forum. This space allows people to enter without a ticket. The subterranean space is multifunctional – for events, exhibitions, and meetings – and serves as a low-threshold entry point to the museum. These spaces together form an urban landscape that connects, invites, and engages. Activities may be curated or spontaneous in a room that extends the ground floor and creates a unified public surface, active throughout the day.

A Building for the Future – with Flexibility and Reuse

Challenge:

How do you create a building that can evolve with society while conserving existing resources?

Solution:

By reusing existing structures and applying a material reuse strategy, the project reduces emissions, resource use, and waste. Embracing what exists and seeing opportunity in current elements creates a flexible, future-oriented museum with lower environmental impact.

The museum is based on the underground parking structure, fully repurposed for the new use. No additional excavation is planned – a conscious decision to minimize ground disturbance and reduce emissions related to earthworks. Closed facades at street level are avoided, opening the museum to the city. Most concrete columns are retained; where removed, traces are left as visible marks of the building's history.

The only permanent elements in the building are the existing concrete columns and three new cores that accommodate vertical circulation and support functions. The central hall is also a fixed structure, acting as a solid anchor point, which flexible exhibition spaces can evolve and adapt over time. Apart from the three new cores, no additional load-bearing walls are added. The former garage becomes a robust, high-quality exhibition space. Where the underground hall is established, the ceiling is opened to create a generous room. Columns are preserved. Concrete and other materials from the transformation are reused as stairs, benches, or building elements.

The former bus terminal at Erling Skakkes gate 40 is partially preserved. Its rational concrete structure allows selective reuse and transformation. It will house a café/bar, art shop, and artist residences. The facade is replaced with one of a more public character, while the building's form and silhouette are retained, giving it a renewed, place-defining role rooted in its history.

Program and Spatial Qualities

Challenge:

How can a museum support diverse forms of art, interaction, and public experience?

Solution:

Through an architecture of flexible spatial structures, varied lighting, and programmable rooms, the project enables a rich and diverse encounter with art.

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The lower level houses permanent and temporary exhibitions, collections, galleries, and support functions. Spatial qualities range from dark, intimate spaces referencing the building's origin to bright, open white-box environments. This variation allows for adaptability and supports different artistic expressions.

Exhibition areas are organized in two parallel routes, offering flexibility in use and experience. Some rooms can be closed off and adapted for changing programs. In several places, rooms open to street level, establishing visual connections between city and museum. Visitors navigate the space easily, while passersby glimpse exhibitions – a low-threshold invitation to engage.

A restaurant, auditorium, and library are located on the second floor, directly connected to the underground forum. These can operate independently, expanding the museum's flexibility. Storage and workshops are directly linked to exhibition areas. Conservation studios have large skylights for working conditions and public transparency. Deliveries occur at street level, and all offices are consolidated in the same building. Vertical circulation ensures efficient logistics throughout.

Architecture and Materials

Challenge:

How can material use and construction support a flexible, sustainable, and lasting museum?

Solution:

By combining reused underground structures with new timber construction and sustainable systems above ground, the architecture achieves low climate impact, high adaptability, and long life.

The design emphasizes structural clarity and material honesty. Underground, the column grid is preserved and reused as the load-bearing system. Traces of removed elements add a layered, narrative character.

Above ground, lightweight timber volumes bring warmth and tactility, allow for prefabrication, and create adaptable spaces. The distinction between fixed structure and movable content enables future adjustments. Locally sourced timber ensures a low carbon footprint. Partially transparent glass facades invite curiosity and create openness. The balance between heavy and light materials – concrete and wood, closed and open – gives the building both weight and lightness.

Sustainability is central: low-tech solutions, energy-efficient systems, natural ventilation, daylight access, and local, recyclable materials all reduce environmental impact and support reuse.

A Cultural Square for the City

Challenge:

How can the museum connect with and strengthen the city's wider cultural scene?

Solution:

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By serving as an open interface and offering space for new users at street level, the museum becomes a cultural square, uniting institutions, audiences, and everyday life. MIST fosters collaboration with Trøndelag Theatre, NTNU Kalvskinnet, Byscenen, and the University Museum. Functions at ground level operate independently of core museum activities: shared workshops, design shop, open studios, artist housing, café, and a low-threshold gallery aimed at students and emerging creatives. These are spaces for mending, making, and meeting – accessible to everyone.

Ground-level exhibition areas offer flexible space for NTNU, students, and community groups. Engineering students might display semester projects while book talks or drop-in workshops unfold nearby. The project makes such activity visible, underscoring that the museum is open, dynamic, and in dialogue with the city. Programming is developed with local partners, encouraging spontaneous and experimental expression alongside institutional collaborations.

An Urban Landscape with Green Qualities

Challenge:

How can an inclusive and year-round public outdoor space be created?

Solution:

By combining green elements, robust materials, universal design, and open spaces for both programmed and spontaneous activity, an inviting urban landscape emerges.

Outdoor spaces are extensions of the museum, forming a new cityscape with plazas, passages, and intimate spots. The plaza shared with Trøndelag Theatre is the main entrance, supporting encounters, outdoor seating, and overlapping events.

Workshops extend outside, enabling informal activity in public space. Green features provide microclimate benefits and recreational value. Nature-based drainage and durable local materials ensure sustainability and low maintenance. The building is not fully transparent, but selectively open. Opening in the facades invite attention, while some facades remain closed to protect art or room quality. Selective visibility creates curiosity and lowers the barrier for participation.

Outdoor areas host both programmed and spontaneous use. A bench invites lunch, a plaza may hold a pop-up show, and a quiet garden offers pause between events. With its flexibility and accessibility, the landscape becomes as vital as the museum's interior.

Conclusion

The new museum is more than an exhibition space. It is a venue for community, dialogue, and cultural production. Visitors may enter without a ticket, experience art, attend talks or workshops, or simply spend time. The museum takes on an expanded social role, welcoming people across age, background, and intent. By transforming a former parking garage into a public meeting place, it brings together two institutions, connects with its surroundings, and offers open, flexible, and inclusive spaces inside and out. It represents a new generation of museums – democratic, vibrant, and deeply rooted in the city.