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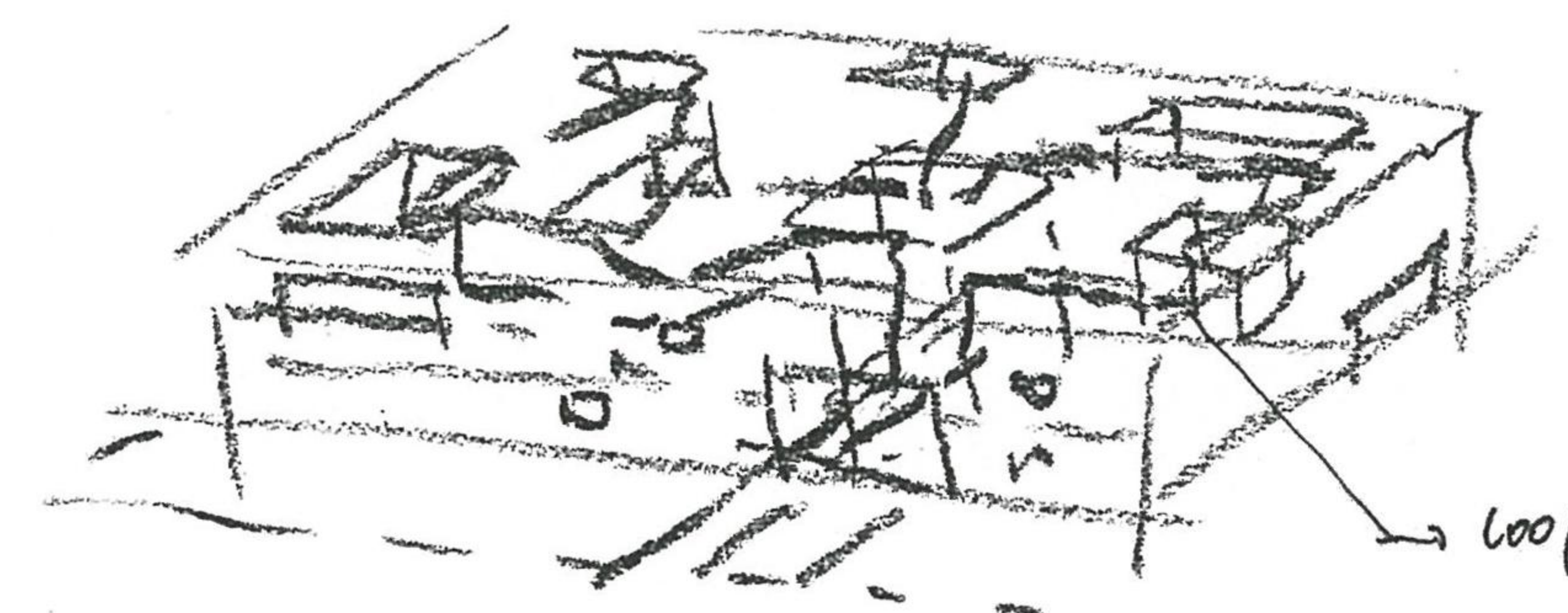
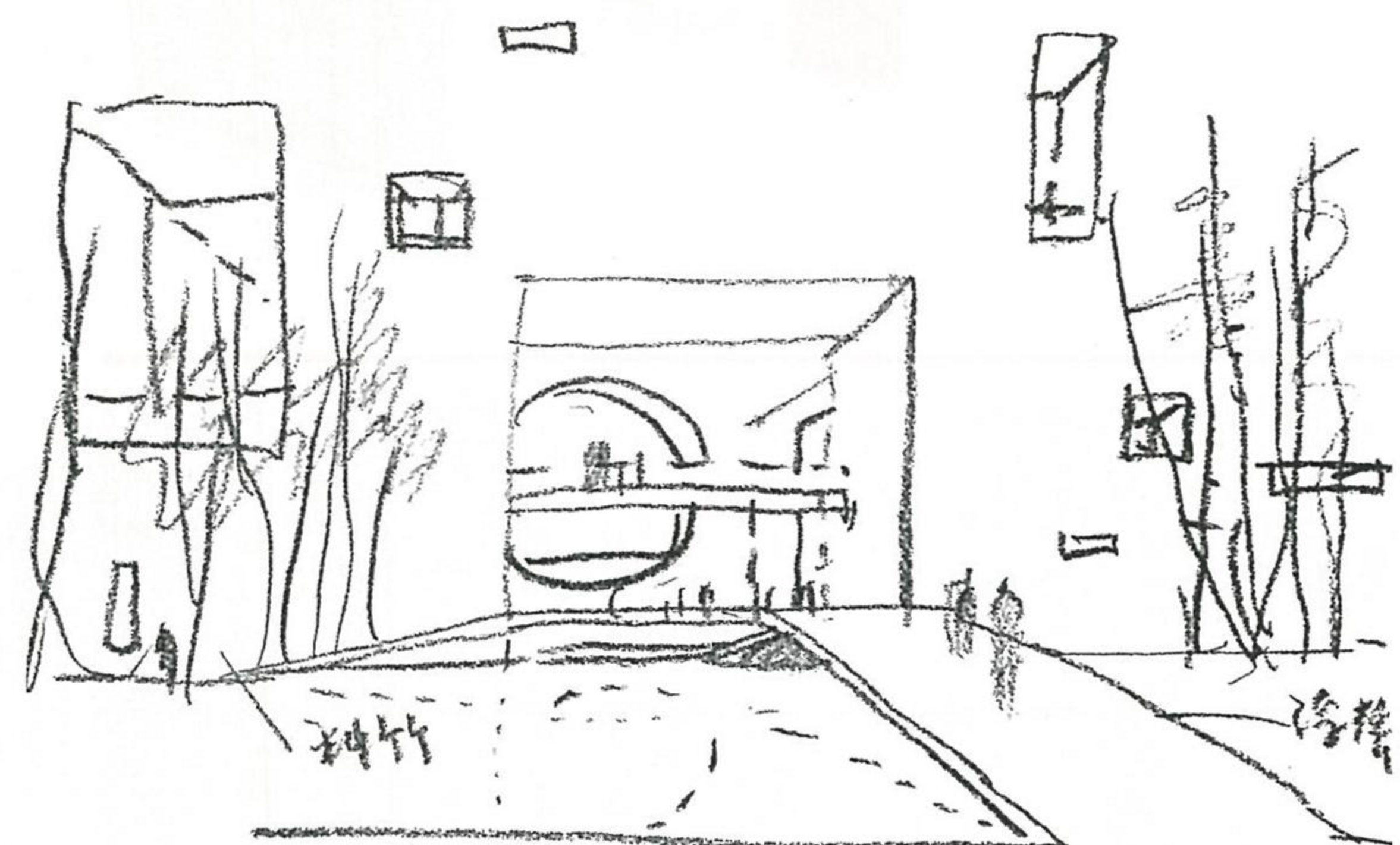


SHOU COUNTY  
CULTURE AND  
ART CENTER

# A METAPHOR OF THE CITY

SHOU COUNTY,  
ANHUI, CHINA

LETTER FROM CHINA, Li Xiangning



■ Study sketches: view from the courtyard,  
façade, and axonometric view  
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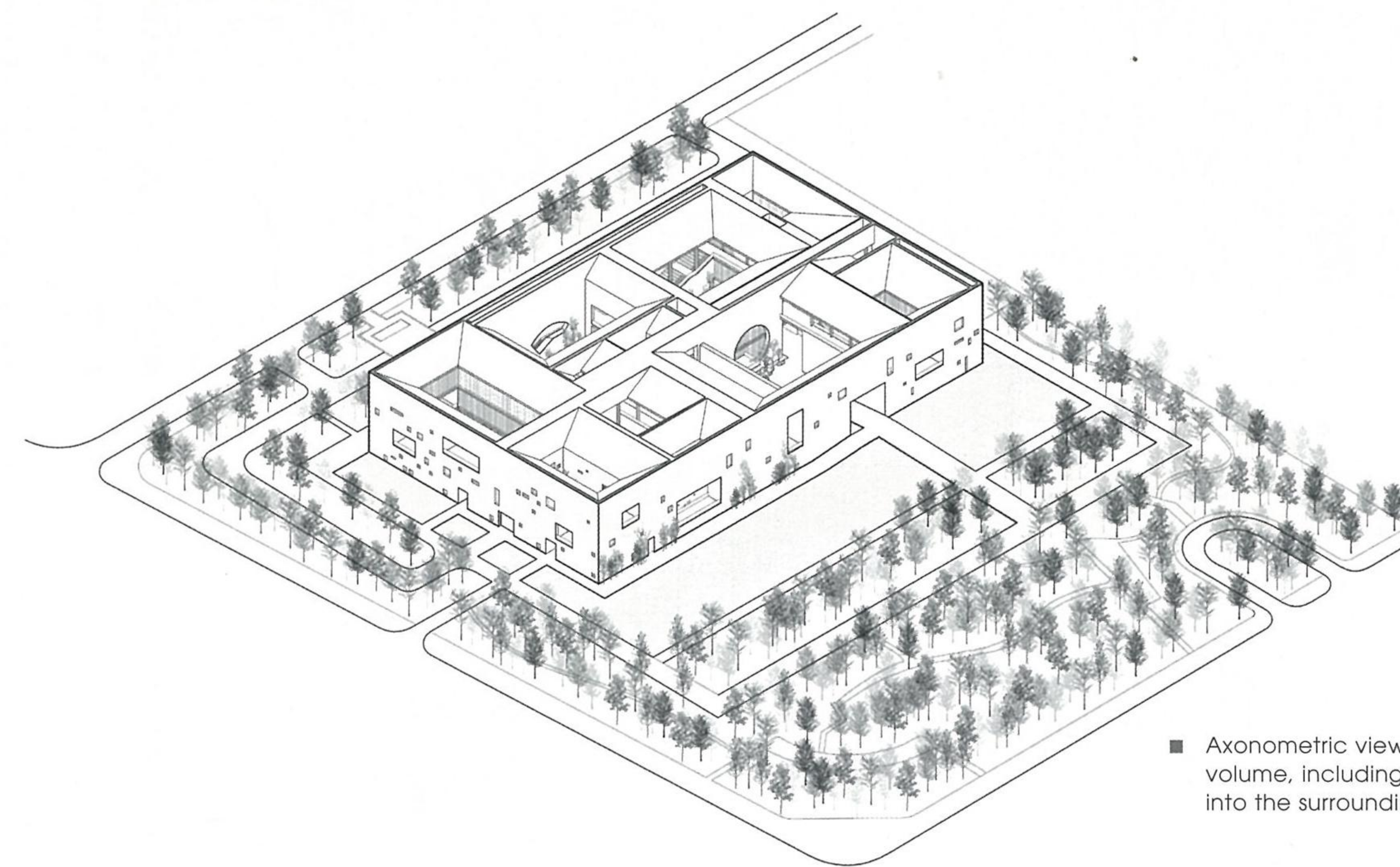
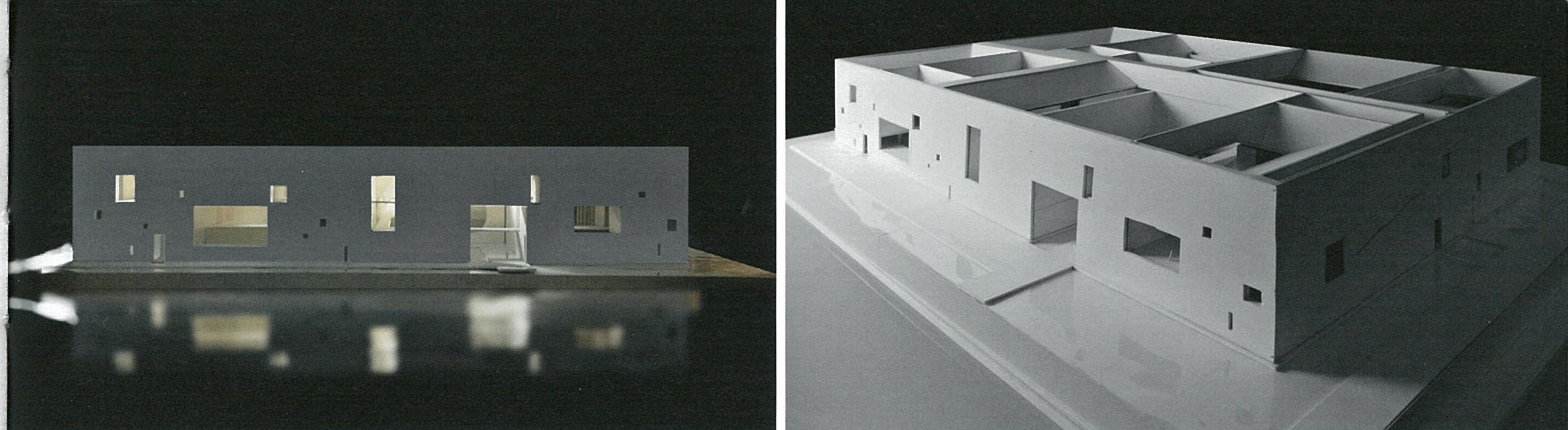


Architects in modern China have always sought to answer questions about the time and space coordinates of their design work; in other words, how to define their own practice strung between West and East, or between tradition and modernity. With his new work, Shou County Culture and Art Center, Zhu Pei has provided his own particular answer to these questions.

As an ancient cultural city, Shou County still has its original four square city walls made of rammed earth faced with brick. Within these walls, the streets form an intersecting longitudinal and latitudinal grid redolent with the history of daily life down the centuries. The connecting courtyards make the city resemble a huge sponge with countless holes, all bustling with people going about their daily business. Indeed, Zhu Pei's Culture and Art Center could be seen as a metaphor of the whole city, or the reconstruction of the urban typology on a micro scale. Several features bear this out.

Firstly, the Culture and Art Center is a complex comprising an art gallery, cultural center, library and archives that will provide a brand new cultural gathering place for the city and help sustain the cultural spirit of the city. Although a medley of different cultural activities, Zhu Pei has not chosen to vary - in respect of the built environment - the size and height of the volume. Quite the opposite. The building, which is located inside the new city district, is tightly wrapped round by a square wall like that of the old city itself, and contains the different functions in a holistic mass that rivals the plain and stark new city landscape outside the old city. The façade of the building is more like a city wall than a building frontage. Large and small windows and recesses in the walls suggest the scale of a tall battlement. The water surrounding the main entrance and the slightly sloping bridge strongly resemble a castle moat and draw bridge. Secondly, if the building is a metaphor of the city and it is itself is more like a positive object, then the space inside the building is negative. People wandering inside feel almost as if they are walking through a series of city squares with changing scales rather than a series of building courtyards. The American literary critic Fredric Jameson once described the Westin Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles designed by John C. Portman Jr. as a micro-city. Here, Zhu Pei has completely created a micro-urban experience to rival it. An aerial view of the courtyards within the building shows the plan's strong resemblance to the interweave and stacking of traditional Chinese courtyards. It is these courtyards, not the physical spaces, that provide the spirit of this Culture and Art Center. Of course, the language of this architectural/urban complex reflects several traditional features, such as the corridors through different levels, or the traditional round moon door giving on to traditional Chinese gardens. However, Zhu Pei has deliberately avoided any irregular curves, whether on plan or elevation that may make the entrance courtyard, which as a garden character seem a contemporary transformation or an exercise in defamiliarization, and therefore alienation. The rockery in the courtyard has an abstract feel about it and in some sense is reminiscent of a Japanese rock garden.

Nowadays, the young generation living in the era of globalization can easily get any architectural information from anywhere on the Internet without going abroad, with the result that geographic and cultural differences may not be distinguishing points for them. However, the generation of Zhu Pei was strongly influenced by the West. Sensitivity to and awareness of culture are part of their make-up so much so that they pursue a contemporary interpretation of the Chinese architectural tradition steeped in deep cultural values. This is exactly what the Shou County Culture and Art Center presents to us.



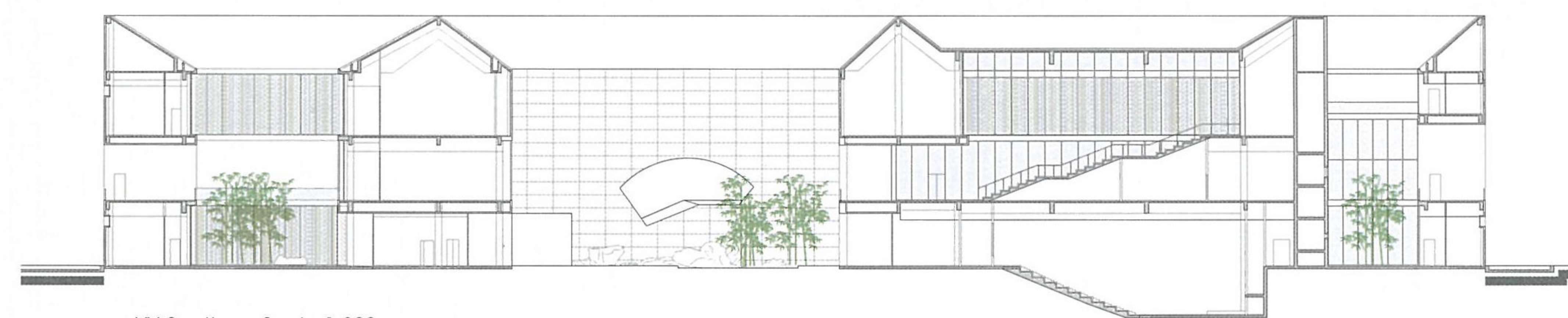
■ Axonometric view of the volume, including how it fits into the surroundings and study models



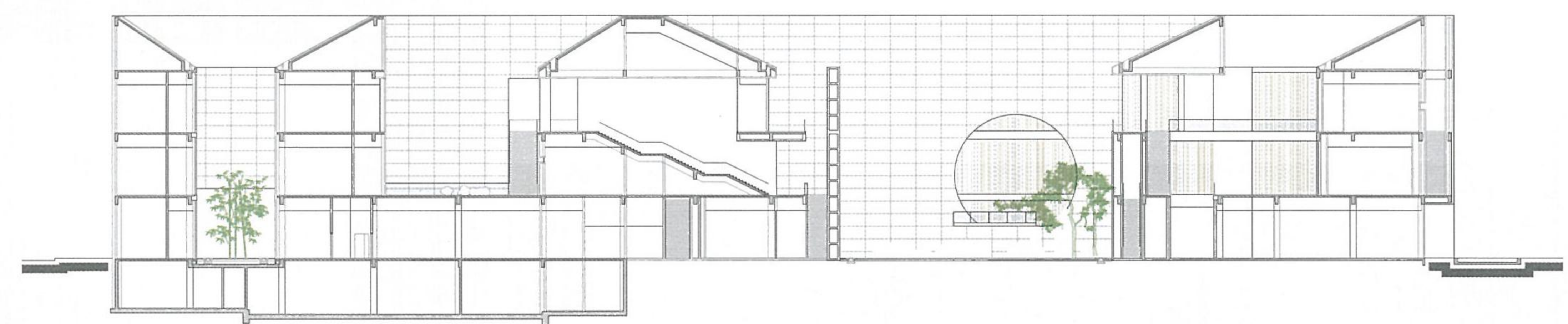




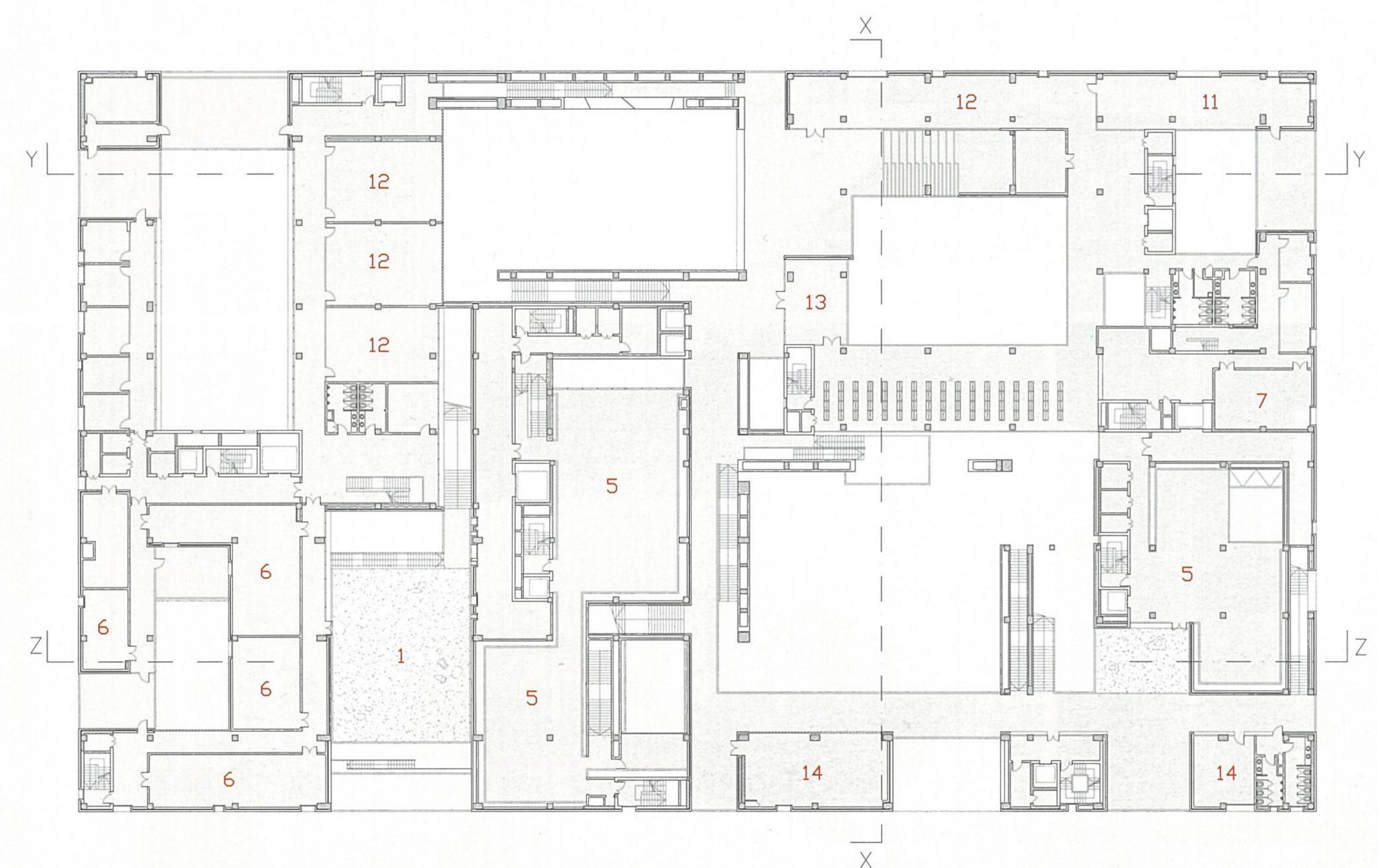
■ Ground floor plan - Scale 1:800



■ YY Section - Scale 1:800



■ ZZ Section - Scale 1:800



■ 1<sup>st</sup> Floor plan - Scale 1:800

**Art Gallery**

- 1- Courtyard
- 2- Reception
- 3- Café
- 4- Bookshop
- 5- Exhibition hall

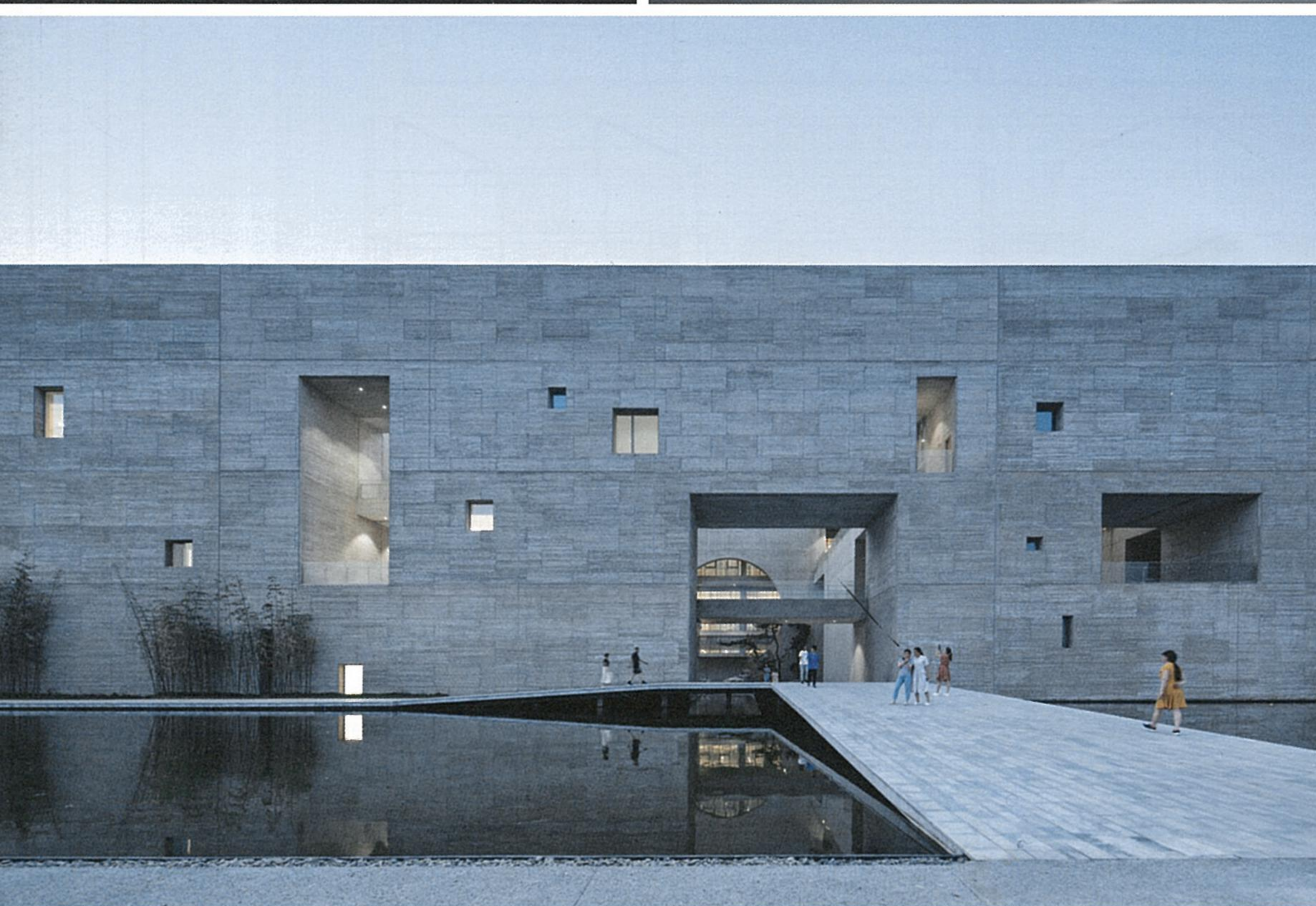
**Archives**

- 6- Archive
- 7- Storage
- 8- Classroom
- Library**
- 9- Lecture hall

**10-Reading room**

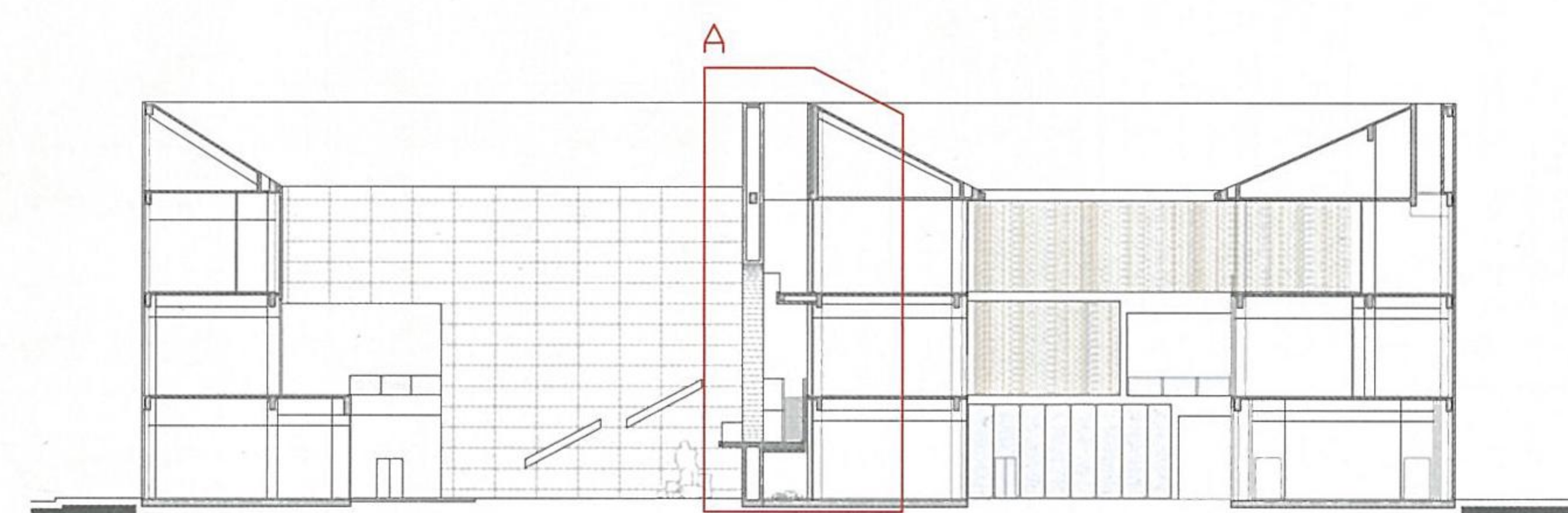
- Cultural Center**
- 11-Multifunctional room
- 12-Multimedia room
- 13-Activity room
- 14-Studio



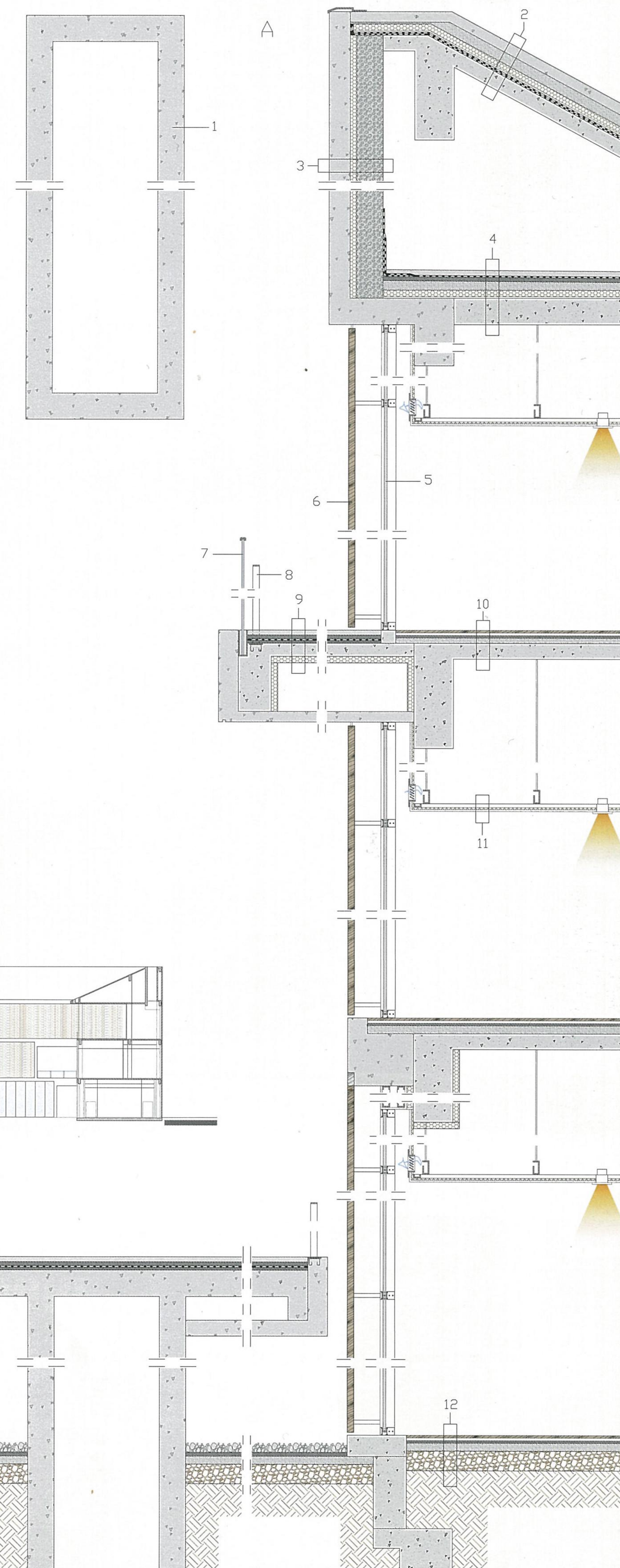


# Detail A: Construction system Vertical section - Scale 1:40

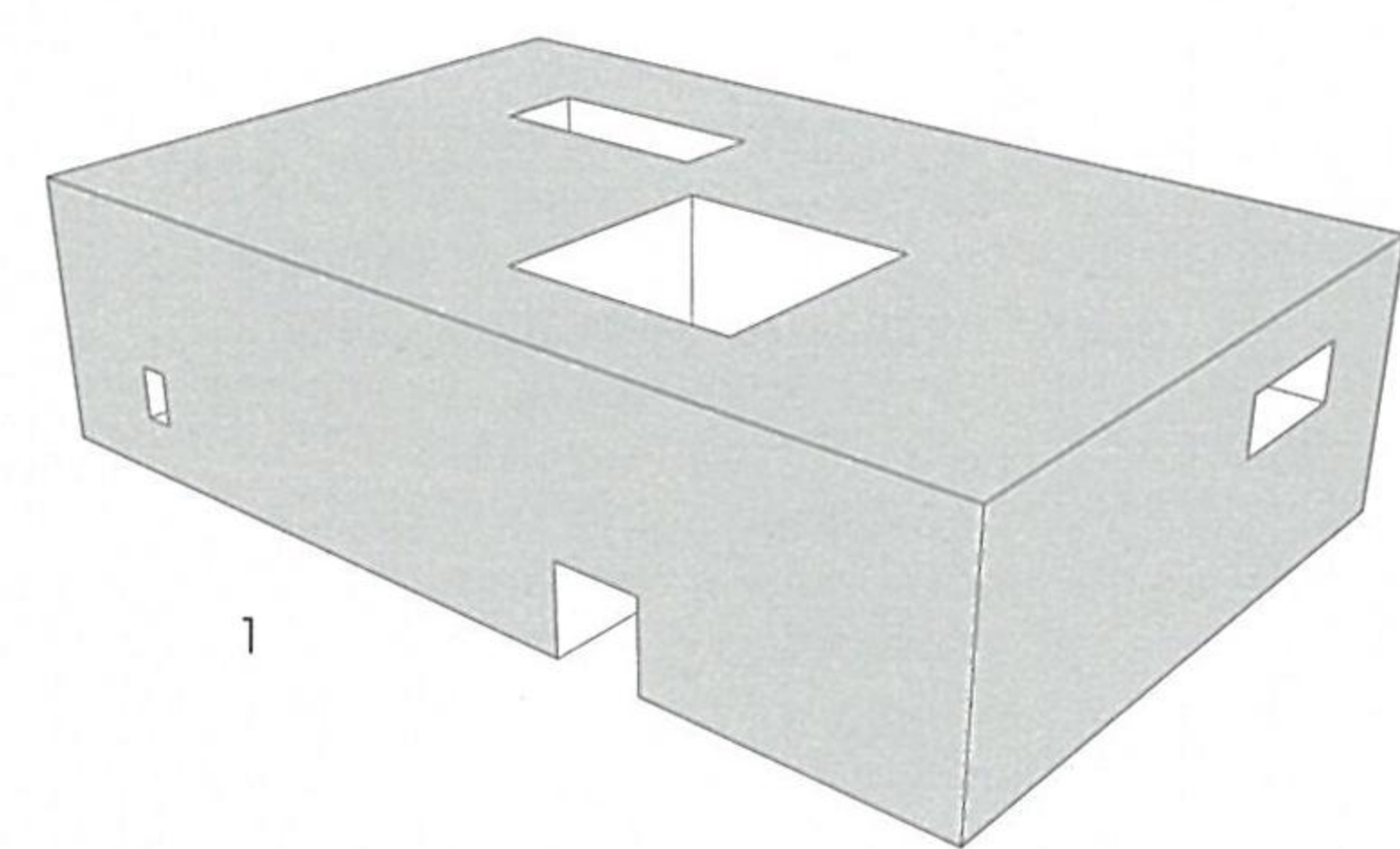
- 1- Hollow structure of 7 7/8" (200 mm) exposed reinforced concrete
- 2- Roof comprising 3 1/8" (80 mm) exposed reinforced concrete panels, 3 1/8" (80 mm) concrete fill, 2" (50 mm) extruded polystyrene rigid insulation, polyethylene film, double waterproofing membrane, 4 3/4" (120 mm) reinforced concrete slab
- 3- Façade comprising 6 1/4" (160 mm) exposed reinforced concrete, 2" (50 mm) rigid insulation, 7 7/8" (200 mm) aerated concrete blocks
- 4- 1 5/8" (40 mm) concrete sheet flooring, waterproofing membrane, 1 1/8" (30 mm) mortar layer, 2 3/8" (60 mm) screed, 2" (50 mm) rigid insulation, polyethylene film, 7 7/8" (200 mm) reinforced concrete slab
- 5- Glazed curtain wall with 1/4 - 1/2 - 1/4" (6/12/6 mm) aluminum glazing units
- 6- Wooden grill sun shading
- 7- Railing comprising 1/4 + 1/4" (6+6 mm) laminated glass in steel U-profile mounts
- 8- Railing with steel profiles
- 9- 1 5/8" (40 mm) concrete slab paving, mortar layer sandwiching waterproofing membrane, 4" (100 mm) reinforced concrete slab, 2" (50 mm) rigid insulation
- 10- Floorboards, 1/16" (5 mm) insulating matting, 3/4" (20 mm) mortar layer, 2 3/8" (60 mm) screed, 4 3/4" (120 mm) reinforced concrete slab
- 11- Suspended ceiling comprising 1/2" (12 mm) drywall, 1/2" (12 mm) flame-retardant panel, aluminum C-profile framing suspended by tie rods
- 12- Floorboards, 1/16" (5 mm) insulating matting, 3/4" (20 mm) mortar layer, 2 3/8" (60 mm) screed, 5 7/8" (150 mm) gravel layer, earth



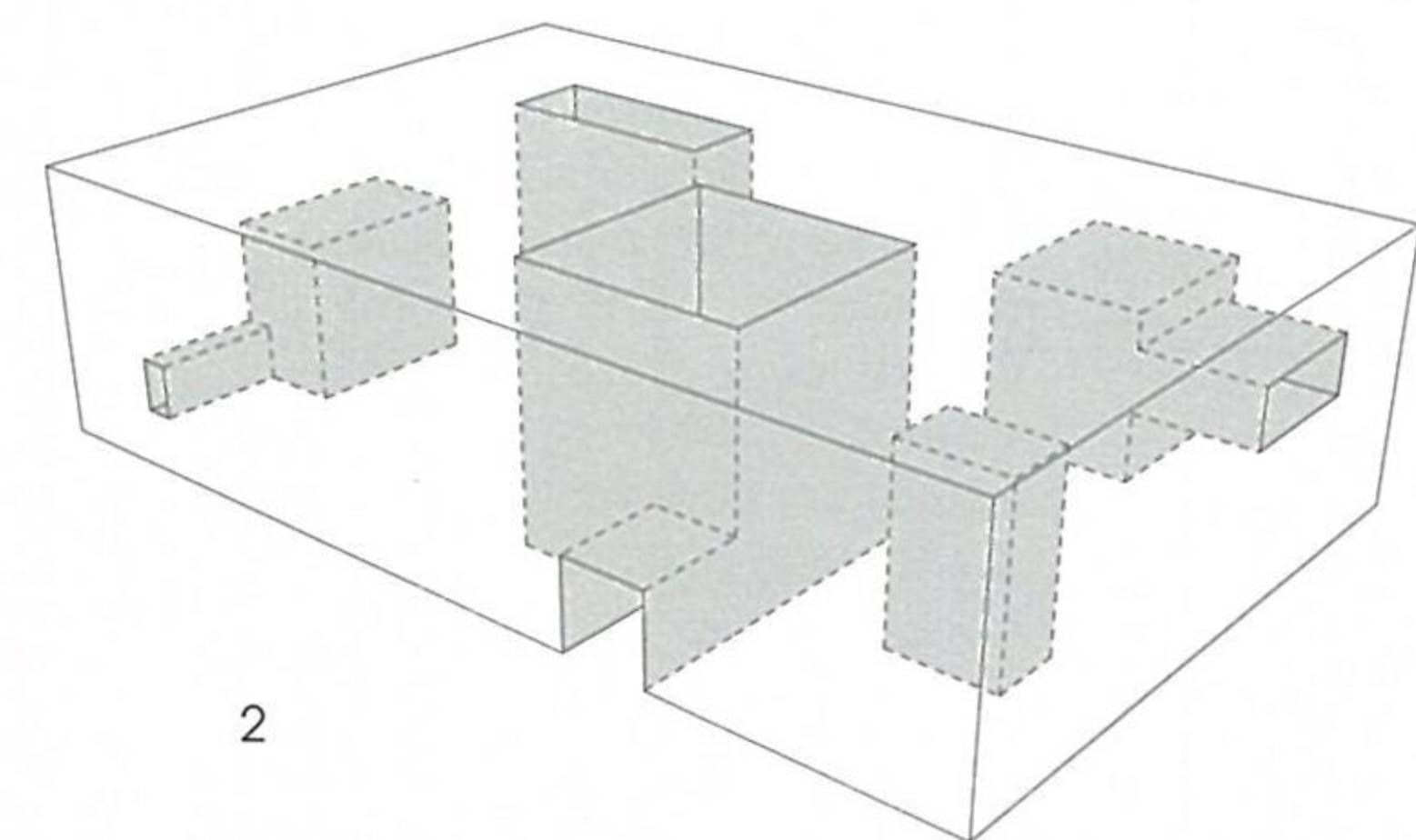
■ XX Section - Scale 1:800



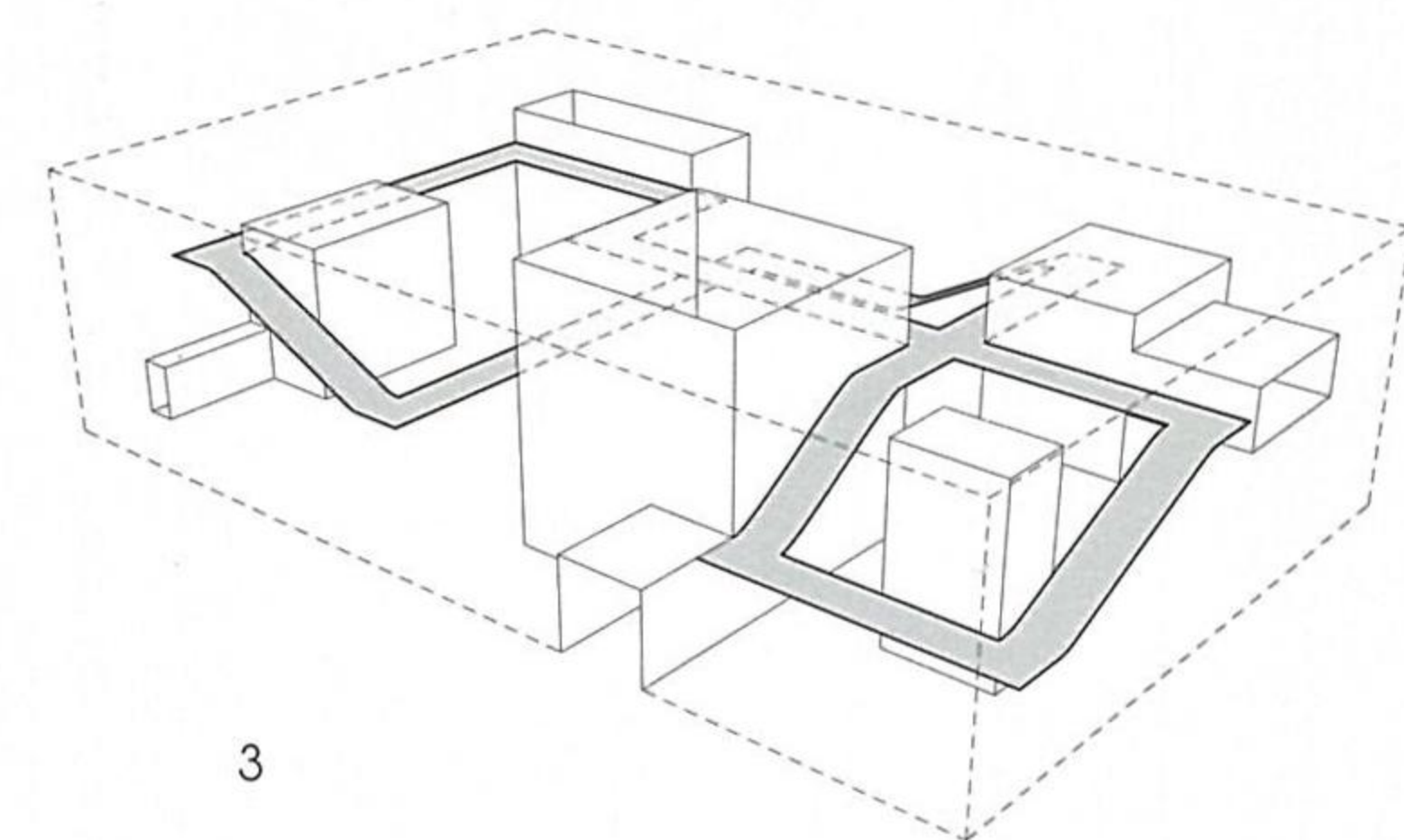




1



2



3

■ Volumetric diagram, highlighting the interplay of solids and cavities

- 1- Solid building volume
- 2- Cavities within the solid mass
- 3- Identification of pathways connecting cavities

## CREDITS

**Location:** Shou County, Anhui, China - **Client:** Shouxian Government - **Completion Date:** 2019  
**Total Area:** 30,010 m<sup>2</sup> - **Architect:** Studio Zhu-Pei - **Design Principal:** Zhu Pei - **Design Team:** You Changchen, Shuhei Nakamura, Liu Ling, Wu Zhigang, Yang Shengchen, Du Yang, Ke Jun, Ding Xinyue, Wu Zhenhe, Duyao - **Main Contractor:** ShengWo Construction Group

### Consultants

**Structural and MEP:** Biad Jama - **Landscape and Interior:** Studio Zhu-Pei, The Design Institute of Landscape & Architecture China Academy of Art

### Suppliers

**Concrete:** Anhui Huacheng Concrete - **Aluminum Curtain Wall:** Shandong Jinxiang Aluminum  
**Glass:** Wuxi Yaopi Glass Engineering - **Lighting:** Anhui Jinhao Lighting Technology  
**Glazed Tiles:** Marco Polo - **Insulation:** Shanghai Jingxuan Building Decoration Materials  
**Marble Flooring:** Shandong Xinfa Stone Factory - **Firmware:** Shanghai Likou Construction Technology

Photography by Su Shengliang, courtesy of Studio Zhu-Pei