

Liquid Light

Our eyes need a few minutes to adjust to the contrast between the sun outside and the regulated, interior light. On entering one of these ancient, geometrically primitive constructions, it feels as though we are entering a cave, a rock. Although we are actually at street level, it feels as if we are walking into an underground grotto, a space lit up for the first time.

In this project, the skylights are always linked to the concept of erosion, of excavating the stone. That mass of Marés stone made us feel that the light would be stained as it passed through, giving the inside a cloud of colored light, impregnated by the material quality of that construction. Therefore the project sought to make the light take its time when crossing through the thick barrier between the outside and the inside.

Visitors to the museum pass through the middle of the rooms, in a half-light, until reaching a point lit up against the wall, pulling them toward it. These “sanctuaries” contain the objects on display, and are illuminated by a light opening that is out of sight. These folds and setbacks in the walls and vaults create recesses and chambers, defining the space through oblique light that escapes from the screens that hold it against the wall. The rough textures of the new surfaces create small shadows as the light passes through, continuing the etched circular surface of the Marés stone that has been accumulating marks for three centuries.

For the walls we used windows that had been forgotten and were passed down to us. Sometimes their positions did not help the exhibition, but the enormous thickness of the walls made it possible for light to enter, deviating its direction like a letter box. Seeing the light entering without seeing its source makes us feel as though we are inside somewhere far removed from the outside; we do not know how many layers or chambers the light has had to cross before reaching us. These letter boxes dematerialize the wall, taking away its gravity and making it transparent.

Unearthing certain fragments of the vault from underneath the ground that normally covers them enabled the light to slip along its always hidden convex side until sliding into the interior, making that thinnest of outer shells visible. The opening to allow the light to leave at the low point was cut away right at the base of the vaults. This decision to let the contained light escape at the exact point where the entire weight of the vault is placed makes it seem to levitate, suspended in mid-air. Again the light, as in the walls, inserts a contradiction to the whole building's weight, converting the stone into something light and almost immaterial.

With this project we began to understand and experiment with natural light as water, with the idea of liquid light. We experimented with its capacity of concentrating intensity, passing through thick stone walls, making its way to the inside, tirelessly descending, meter after meter, as found in ancient Egyptian burial chambers.

