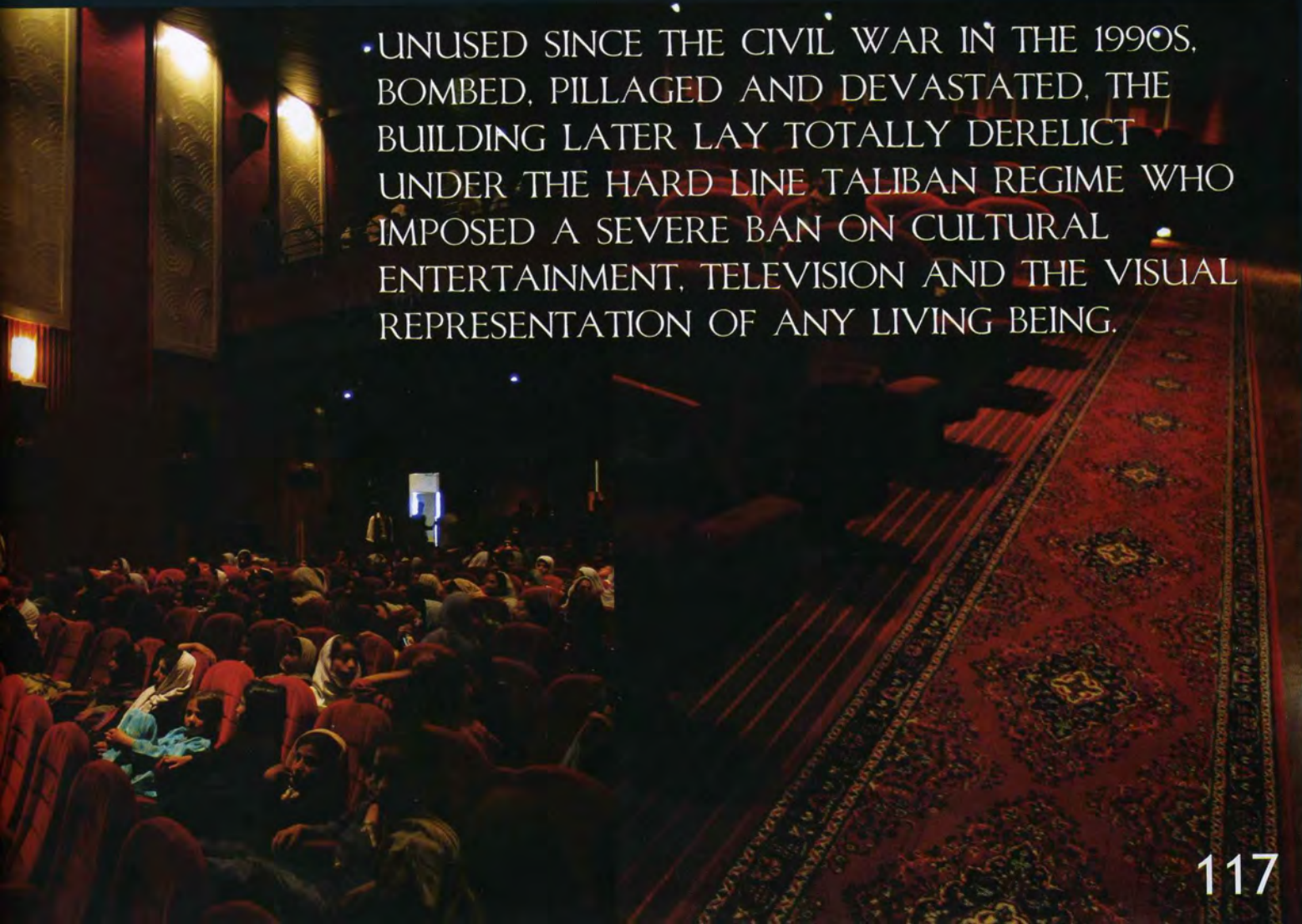




RESURRECTING KABUL

• UNUSED SINCE THE CIVIL WAR IN THE 1990S, BOMBED, PILLAGED AND DEVASTATED, THE BUILDING LATER LAY TOTALLY DERELICT UNDER THE HARD LINE TALIBAN REGIME WHO IMPOSED A SEVERE BAN ON CULTURAL ENTERTAINMENT, TELEVISION AND THE VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF ANY LIVING BEING.





Built in 1972, Cinema Ariana was one of the most fashionable hangouts in Kabul and known for its screening of local and international films. Unused since the civil war in the 1990s, bombed, pillaged and devastated, the building later lay totally derelict under the hard line Taliban regime who imposed a severe ban on culture, entertainment, television and the visual representation of any kind of being.

Rebuilt and re-launched in May 2004 by the French and Afghan ministries of Culture and the Mayor of Kabul, Ariana on Pashtunistan Square - the brainchild of Un cinéma pour Kaboul (A cinema for Kabul) Association - has once again opened its doors to entertain the masses.

The US\$ 1 million renovation project was funded by the ceaseless efforts of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the French movie industry. The renovation was further made possible thanks to the entire project team, including the local designers and workers on and off site, who all provided their services without remuneration.

As part of the rebuilding plan, the existing architectural style was retained, though French architects Frédéric Namur and Jean-Marc Lalo modernised the design and gave the cinema its new award winning look and thus came into being the new Afghan cinema room, with contemporary details and colours.

The new structure boasts of a main cinema auditorium with a seating capacity of 600, complete with balcony and boxes and a projection room that complies with international standards. Symmetry in the plan dictates two entrances, two large stairs and lobbies leading to the front of the main auditorium that is finished with stylish parquet flooring, red velvet seats and an improved acoustical system. All materials for the re-construction were sourced locally from Afghanistan or from neighbouring countries including Iran, Pakistan and the UAE. Technical equipment and machinery was procured from Europe for a cinema that now screens local, Asian and European movies.

A key aspect of the re-design is the new illumination concept for the lobby, access spaces and the auditorium that developed analogous to the reformation works. The curved ceiling in the auditorium underlined by cold cathode lamps, the wall luminaries and the niches lit up by 20-watt compact fluorescent lamps equipped with shade filters, and the facade backlit by a series of coloured niches on the interior visible through the mashrabiya wall, all combine to give Cinema Ariana a warm, ethnic and inviting manifestation. Text: Images: Jean-Marc Lalo, Frederic Namur (Architecture et développement)

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