



Kunstsilo
Mestres Wåge, BAX
and Mendoza Partida

FROM GRAIN TO GALLERY: THE ADAPTIVE REUSE OF NORWAY'S FUNCTIONALIST ICON

Posted on April 1, 2025 by Dima Fadel



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Kunstsilo is the result of a rehabilitation and transformation of a grain elevator on Odderøya in Kristiansand into a contemporary art museum. The original silo, designed by Korsmo and Aarsland Architects—leading figures in Norway's functionalist movement—was constructed in stages beginning in 1935. The initial phase included 15 cylindrical silos, a stair tower, and a wooden storage building. In 1939, an additional 15 cylinders were added to the south, and by 1956, the storage building on the quay was extended along the full length of the silo. Unlike the original, the extension was built in concrete rather than timber. The entire complex is now heritage-listed.

Positioned adjacent to the Kilden Performing Arts Centre, the silo is a cornerstone of Kristiansand's emerging cultural quarter, which includes Kilden Theatre and Concert Hall, the KNUDEN culture school, and the Kunstsilo museum.

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The project originated from the winning entry in an open international architectural competition held in 2016.

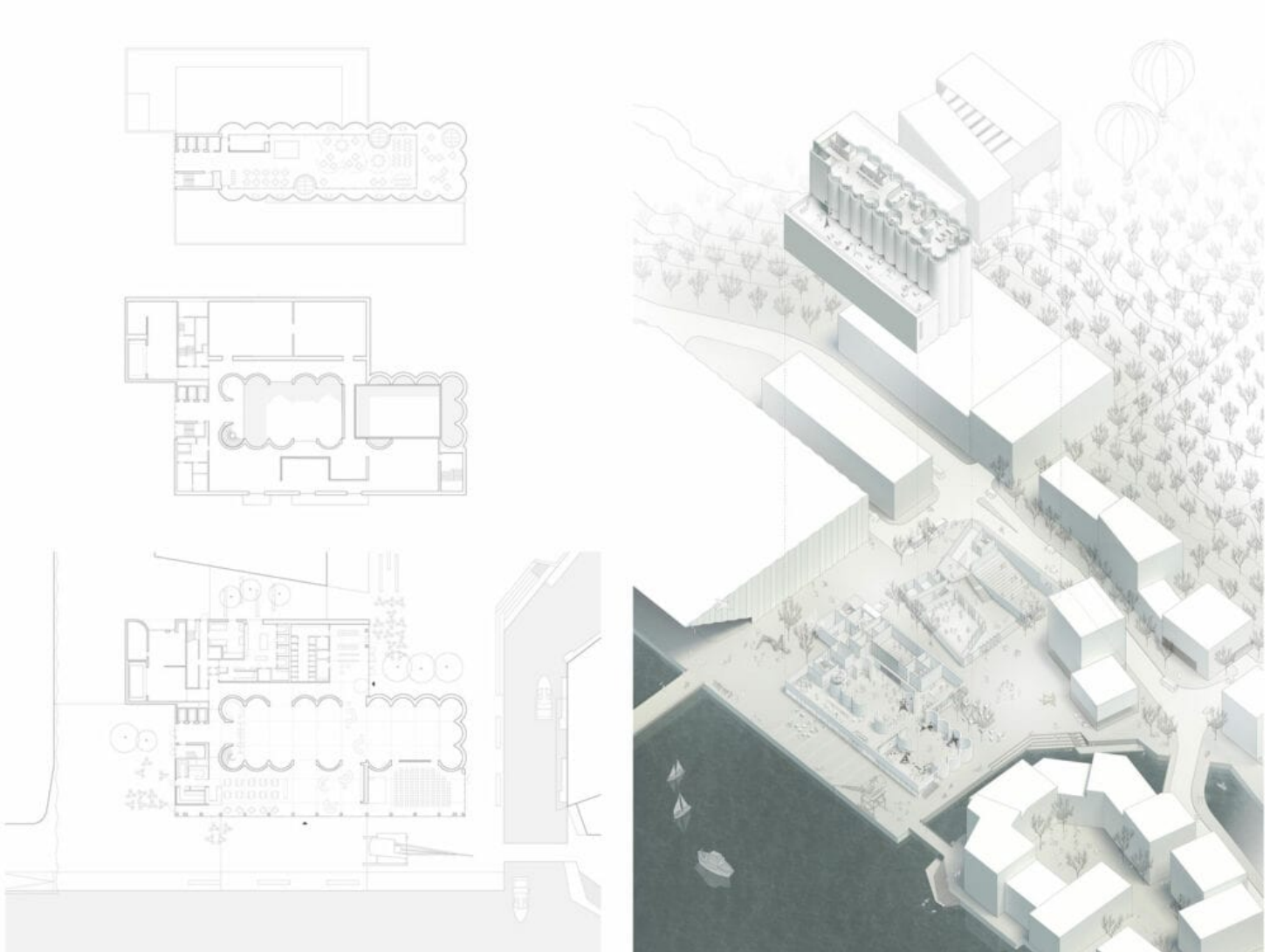
"The Kunstsilo proposal harnesses all the expressive power of a silo... The project strikes an elegant balance by combining respect for the qualities of the silo building with an imaginative attitude to the inherently sculptural and spatial experiences it offers. With a few cuts into the interior of the silo, an understated yet monumental volume is opened up with controlled top-lighting that gives the future museum a strong and unique character." - The competition jury report

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New architectural elements have been added in the form of modest, precisely proportioned industrial extensions. These clear, readable volumes maintain the architectural language of the original structure. The additional built mass introduces variation to the urban landscape and allows the southeastern silos to descend fully to the ground.



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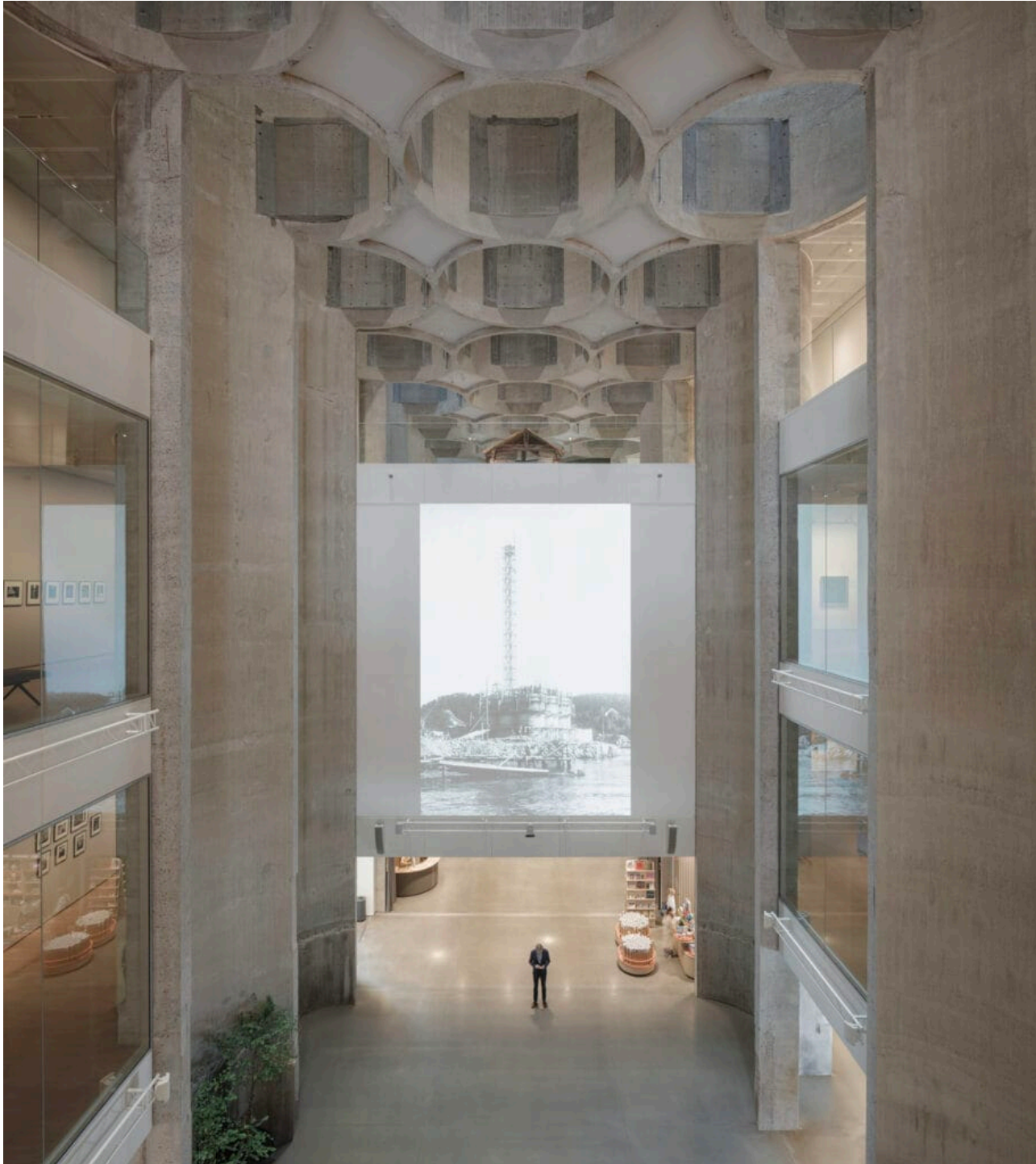
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The silo remains a central sculptural element, around which the museum is organized—through, under, and over. A 21-meter-high basilica-like space carved beneath the cylinders, known as the Silo Hall, forms the heart of the museum. The exposed lower sections of the cylinders visually define this space. Some cylinders are capped with walkable glass, revealing the sky above, while others retain their original concrete tops. Lateral perforations in the silo allow floors to intersect the cylinder mass, linking the east and west sides.

The original concrete surfaces preserve material traces of the building's former life: formwork impressions, grain-polished textures, and saw marks from cut sections all remain visible. This tactile, visual memory coexists in dialogue with the quieter, more restrained expression of the new architectural components.

Glass elements are used to connect interior and exterior spaces. A horizontal ribbon window offers views from the Silo Hall to the harbor promenade, while a vertical glass façade on the northern stair tower provides orientation towards the city center. Topping the silos, a cylindrical glass structure acts as a symbolic "lighthouse" for Kristiansand.

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At ground level, the Silo Hall is surrounded by the museum's most public functions, including a shop, auditorium, café, and temporary exhibition areas. Main entrances on the east and west façades

ensure accessibility and permeability, transforming the ground floor into an active, inviting interior urban plaza for the cultural district.

Exhibition spaces are distributed around the Silo Hall across the second, third, and fourth floors. Each level features a foyer from which visitors circulate around and through the silo structure. Windows at key points frame views of the surrounding environment. The east and west wings house classic white-box galleries of varying dimensions, while the raw materiality of the silo offers opportunities for more site-specific installations.

The fifth floor hosts an outdoor sculpture terrace with expansive views over the sea. Crowning the building is a transparent, multipurpose event space offering panoramic vistas of the city and, in select silos, vertiginous views down to the Silo Hall through glass floors.

