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A BRIDGE BETWEEN THE PAST AND FUTURE IN ASIR

It's just after sunset and night is falling over the small abandoned village of Al Okas in the Abha region of Asir. This once lively village is now empty, the owners of these proud stone buildings having moved to larger cities, or opted for modern housing in a new village.

Now all is quiet and still, but it won't be for long as crowds gather to witness the start of a project to reinvent Asir. Suddenly, the stone walls are transformed into vibrant canvases of projected color, and sound fills the air, echoing off the buildings. This energetic outdoor display is known as environmental art, and is just one example of the numerous art exhibitions that took place from February 18 to 20th.

Abha, a region known for producing

artists, is the logical choice for such an exhibition, which drew the talents of 17 artists from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, along with the participation of several artists from the United States and France. In addition to the projections, there were also several other art styles and exhibitions on display that ranged from fashion displays and photo galleries, to live nagash majlis paintings and standup comedy.

Perhaps the least celebrated, but most important part of the event, was the chance it gave for local Asir residents to tell their stories about the past and share historical images with all those gathered. There could be no greater testament to the importance of revitalizing the region than these firsthand

accounts of the region's rich history, how it is changing, and what the Kingdom is in danger of losing if it does not find a way to 'reinvent' Asir.

Dr. Anna Klingmann, Department Chair for Architecture at Dar Al-Hekma University is working with her students and other faculty, the SCTA, and local participants on the reinventing Asir project. She explained that these abandoned buildings have great potential beyond their historical significance and possibilities for the tourism industry. The buildings themselves were the original sustainable structures, efficiently designed and already ideally suited to the climate. They stay cool in the hot summers and retain warmth

in winter. Rather

than retrofit them with technologies like plumbing and electricity, they are perfectly positioned to pioneer environmentally friendly techniques like solar power, and brown water recycling.

At the closing ceremony, Dr. Klingmann's students had a chance to present their design ideas for a Center for Arts Crafts and Technologies that would serve as a model for developing reuse strategies, exhibit artwork, and serve as an exploratory center for new science technology and ecology. The center and the efforts of the students alongside the SCTA and local stakeholders are the first steps in an effort to bridge the past of Asir with a meaningful future by merging ancient wisdom with cutting edge trends. ■

BELOW ENVIRONMENTAL ART IN AL OKAS.

