

# Landscape

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**T**his project focuses on the Reinvention of the Vernacular by taking the rich traditions and heritage of the Asir Region as an area of intervention. Asir not only provides a temperate climate and stunning mountains, but also boasts a rich regional culture with beautiful vernacular architecture made of slate, stone and mud bricks.

Specifically, this initiative intends to raise awareness of the historical villages of Asir, which were gradually abandoned by their residents over the course of the last 20 years in favour of modern more luxurious villas.

Over the course of the last two decades, the national economy, a booming tourism industry and the extensive road-building



# Reinventing the vernacular

A visionary project at the intersection of art – architecture – science

A Partnership between Dar Al Hekma University & The Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities



program throughout Saudi Arabia have drawn Asir steadily into the Kingdom's mainstream. While Asir is now entering a period of rapid transition due not only to tourism but also to rapid real estate development, most traditional villages are falling into decay. Our goal is to provide effective incentives to residents and the local government to preserve this important architectural heritage for future generations.

Our mission is therefore to position Asir as a signature region for progressive preservation by weaving local tradition and history into the global context of new media science, art, and technology - where conservation is not a goal in itself but a means to reinvent the vernacular.

Since the Asiris people always proudly lived off the land and built their houses in a self-sustained manner, they are in fact again at the forefront of what are considered globally cutting-edge trends. The question is now how we can bring Asir's legacy of a self-sufficient

independent proud lifestyle into a meaningful future along with their rich tradition in the arts.

Beyond typical modes of conservation, we will research innovative modes of reinventing the vernacular with contemporary art and sustainable technologies. This is particularly interesting in a post-colonial climate of cross-cultural fertilization, where western artists, designers and architects seek inspiration from vernacular techniques and self-sustained living and where artists and architects in Saudi Arabia are seeking opportunities to enhance their own cultural resources with advanced technologies and local intelligence.

#### ART AS GENERATOR

The fact is that any true identity emerges from both: the past and the future, memory and invention. If we prioritize one over the other, neglecting either memory or invention—the future or the past—part of our identity suffers. Hence the challenge becomes how we can reinvent the vernacular

# ARCHITECTURE



in inventive and unexpected ways to bring the past into the future, and the future into the past to create a continuum. By redefining the experience of vernacular architecture through contemporary art interventions and sustainable technologies, our aim is to start a movement of awareness and engagement of the regional culture of Asir here in Saudi Arabia and beyond.

Art creates an awareness of places formerly unknown. Art creates a new identity of places by linking the past with the present and the future through reinvention. By creating cultural platforms and creative interventions, art gradually raises the perception, value and experience of a region.



## PROJECT

Phase 1: short term vision and kick start

Site-specific art installation in one abandoned village

As a pioneer bridge building project, we envision to transform one abandoned village in the Abha region of Asir into a multi-sensorial art installation animated by projections, color and sound.

Our ambition is not to emulate the vernacular in a clichéd manner as a typical “touristic” village in a conserved manner but rather create an evocative statement of how to bring the rich heritage of Asir into a meaningful future.

Therefore, our goal is to demonstrate of how one might redefine and reclaim a historical village with advanced technologies and

combine traditional architecture with contemporary art in a unique setting.

In essence, we want to raise a desire to reinhabit these houses by connecting the long-standing culture of Asir effectively with new science and technology along with an ecological awareness, which relates to Asir’s past as an independent and self-sustained region that lived proudly off the land. These are cutting-edge trends that are currently capturing the world’s attention.

## THE SITE

The site we selected is Al Okas, which is a small village in a beautiful mountainous setting very close to Abha, which is currently under consideration by The Saudi Ministry of Tourism and the Abha Amana for potential redevelopment. The village is a traditional stone village, which has been abandoned by its former owners who have either moved away or live in modern houses located in proximity to the old village.

For a week, this site will be transformed by color, light projections and sound installations, which will bring this village to the forefront of attention and transform this village into a multisensorial experience. The village will yet again become a lively place where people start conversations, remember their past but also discuss a potential future.



Public events will be hosted by the artists, Dar al Hekma University and the SCTA to help raise awareness to this village, spur new ideas of redevelopment and simply start conversations between the surrounding communities, owners, architects and institutions both on a local and national level.

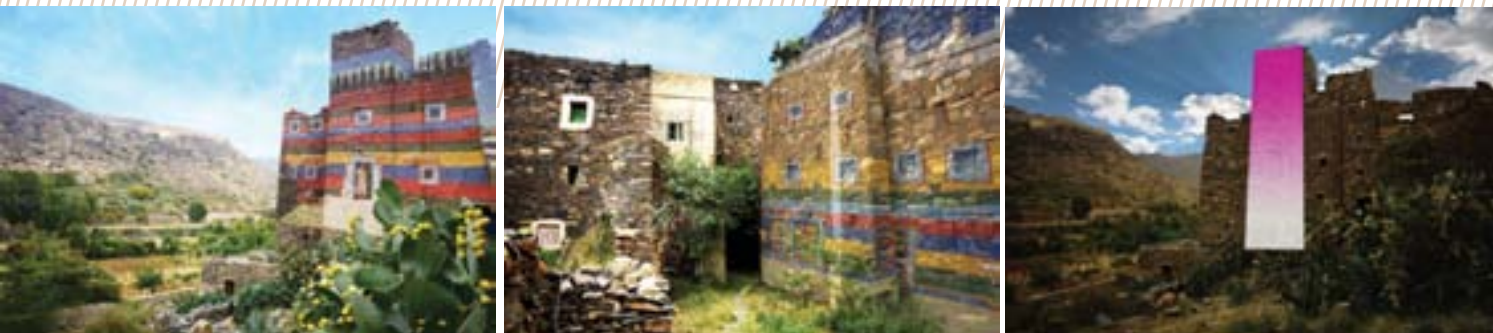
## CROSS CULTURAL MIX OF LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS

A cross-cultural mix of ten contemporary and traditional environmental artists will be invited from the Abha region, the US, France and Germany to participate in a site-specific series of installations that will transform Al Okas into a multi-sensorial experience with color, images, sound and patterns. For three days, this historical site will become a place for unique events and happenings.

## PHASE II: Contemporary Art Foundation & Center for New Technologies

In the second phase, we would like to take the same site and convert it into a Contemporary Art Foundation and Center for New Technologies. This foundation will house a permanent collection of art, changing exhibitions along with an exploratory center for new science, technology and ecology.

It will become a forum for scholars, artists and architects who will research ways to bridge the past of Asir with a meaningful future by merging ancient wisdom with cutting edge trends. Currently, students of Dar Al Hekma are exploring new experimental ideas for this center, which will be exhibited at the village and opened for further discussion.



### STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN SITE-SPECIFIC ART & ARCHITECTURE

The challenge of bringing young female students into the international art and architecture world has been a perennial one for educational institutions in Saudi Arabia. With access to online streaming media and personal entertainment devices, many of today's students pass through their undergraduate years without having a meaningful experience in the arts and sciences. Yet new discoveries in learning sciences are revealing the importance of arts participation for creative thinking,

cross-cultural understanding and personal enrichment. Through this interdisciplinary cross cultural initiative, students from Dar Al Hekma University and other academic institutions in JedDar will have the opportunity to engage with a group of well-renowned international artists, scholars and architects outside of their usual academic curriculum within a framework of conceptual relevance both in and outside of the Middle East. Site visits, artist talks, interactive workshops, exhibitions, tutorials and other collaborative events with different architects, scholars and

artists foster interaction and collaboration within and across contexts. The Reinvention of the Vernacular will be hosted by Dar Al Hekma University in collaboration with the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities and will engage with a range of cultural and creative partners in the Kingdom. ●

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**Portfolio**

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