

## MARHABAN ALF: The DAH Architecture Department Takes on Asir!

On November 30th, Dr Anna Klingmann, chair of the architecture department, along with volunteers from both faculty and students of the department arrived to the city of Abha with the mission of promoting the Reinventing Asir project. This initiative aims to preserve the historical villages of the region using advanced technologies and contemporary art. This project seeks to engage international and local artists, curators, designers, architects, and community stakeholders as well as scholars in a collaboration that explores various ways to carry the rich heritage of Asir into its future. With the partnership of the Saudi Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, the Reinventing Asir project will position Asir as a signature region for progressive preservation.

The Reinventing Asir program proposes two plans; the long term plan being a design competition for a cultural center for arts and technologies amongst the studio III students of the architecture department. The short term plan, which was the focus of this trip, is an art installation taking place in Al-Okas village, one of the many historical villages nearby Abha. This event will include light projections, artwork, and photography by artists such as Theiry Mauger, Anne Sensated, Ahmed Mater, Ibrahim Abumsmar, and others as well as talks with the artists themselves.



The team with local artist, Ibrahim Abumsmar

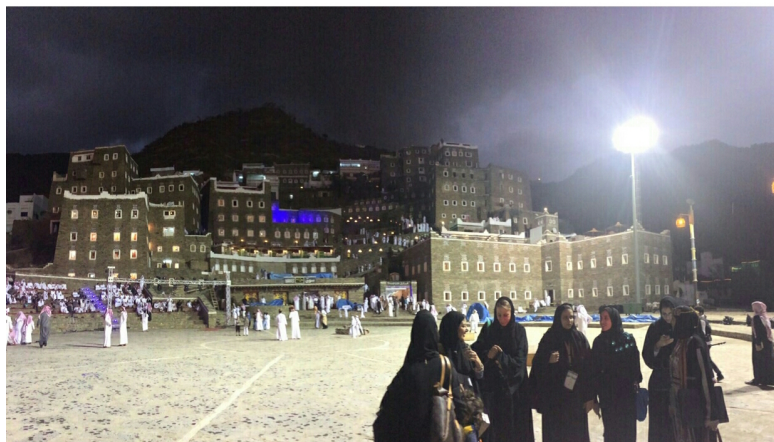
With this goal in mind, the Dar Al-Hekma team participated in the Fourth National Heritage Forum, setting up a booth to publicize the event and attract locals and contributors to the preservation plan. The forum took place in Al Muftaha village, the artistic center of Abha, and hosted lectures and talks with international scholars and architects who shared their interest in cultural heritage preservation. Through the stand, students were able to communicate with local residents and international visitors as well as listen to their feedback and opinion on the project. We received a great response from renowned figures starting with his highness, prince Sultan Bin Salman and her highness, princess Adilah bint Abdullah. The mere idea of having students from Dar Al Hekma in Jeddah produce a project in support of the Asir region also opened doors for future collaborations with other visionaries who support the same cause. Amongst these visionaries was Dr Khalid Taher, the mayor of Al Madinah al Munawwarah, who gladly invited the students to collaborate on a project in Al Madinah in the near future. The forum was a great success not only for the project but also the students who demonstrated great skill,

determination, and persistence as well as learning new skills such as project management and promotion.



The team in Almuftaha, the art central of Abha

The team was also able to experience the heritage firsthand through cultural events held by the SCTA. Amongst these events was a visit to Rijal Almaa, a well preserved village in Asir. The village lies at the bottom of the Sooda valley and is accessed through a telefeak. The ten-minute ride displays the beautiful vistas of Al Sooda mountain, an experience that is considered truly welcoming to the village. The event of dance and drumming ended with a traditional bonfire dinner and extremely delicious tea. The team was also able to visit Ibn Hamsan, a castle located in Khamees Mushait that was built following the traditional architecture of Asir. There, the group was able to marvel at the heritage of the region through its vibrant colors, hospitality, and the poetic drumming show.



A view from Rijal Alma's amphitheater

Overall, the trip was truly beneficial and unforgettable, but it does not mark the end of this project; in fact, it was just the beginning. With this project, we team members aim to create a connection between heritage, culture, and art that not only attracts the people of Asir but rather anyone with a love for art and interest in cultures. This, dear reader, is where you play a great roll in volunteering in this project and spreading the word. Simply show your support by following the project's Instagram account (@reinventing\_asir) where we keep you updated on how you, as an individual, can help with the conservation and reinventing of Asir. Marhaban Alf!