



CUS Workshops Shutb, Asyut

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Report on the activities and the product of the group's 10 days presence in Shutb, Asyut during the period from 1st to 14th of december 2018.

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1 INTRODUCTION:

Cairo urban Sketchers (CUS) is a collaboration platform for independent architects and artists who share interest in urban settlements. The aim of the platform is to explore the tangible and intangible qualities of the urban spaces. CUS creates opportunities where practitioners and laymen meet and interact through small scale public activities. CUS is a branch activity of Cairo Urban Research community (CURC); an academic research hub based in Downtown Cairo.

CUS collaborated with the British Museum's mission in Shutb since April 2017. The aims of this first mission were to introduce the CUS team to the village and build trust with the local community. We started with performing urban sketching tours by our team and organised artistic exercises with a spontaneous sample of young kids (7-10 years old) in the village.



FIGURE 1 - APRIL 2017 SKETCH BY SHADY ABDEL TAWAB FROM S-CUBE ARCHITECTS

In November 2017 another watercolor art workshop was organized in conjunction with a story telling event about the Eloquent Peasant, an ancient tale of Pharaonic origins. This mission built on the strong affiliation among the locals to Shutb's Pharaonic history to introduce them to heritage focused activities.

In April 2018 we organised with Shutb Preparatory School a three-day design workshop with 22 preparatory year students (12-15 years old). The theme of the workshop was **The Dream House versus The Shutbi House**. The workshop exposed the students to the fundamental components of building facades. They observed their surrounding *urbanscape* and discussed the aesthetics of the heritage buildings against the newly constructed houses. In addition, CUS

team painted a mural portraying two houses of heritage significance on Shutb's train station building. Our activities were well received and a clear interest in the village's more recent, yet endangered, heritage was emerging.



FIGURE 2 - APRIL 2018 RADWA ELHASSANY FROM CUS TEAM DISCUSSES WITH A STUDENT HER DRAWING OF THE DREAM HOUSE



FIGURE 3 - APRIL 2018 NIGHT PHOTO OF THE FINISHED WORK BY AHMED MOSTAFA

1.1 MISSION AIMS AND ACTIVITIES

During the last mission, the conceptual importance of the village's architectural heritage was emphasized thanks to the exposure of the mural in the train station. It is necessary to cement this spirit by a more concrete exercise and more profound experience. The heritage architecture of the village is rich in aesthetics, but it needs to be simplified for laymen to be comprehensible and therefore replicable and developable. In addition, further emphasis on the importance of the village's recent architectural heritage is needed to preserve this culture amidst today's construction progressions.

The following activities were planned to fulfill these aims:

- Pattern and Terrace design workshop
- Mosaic patterns tablets
- Mural at the village entrance
- Shutb village Drawing book
- Train Station Façade renovation

The involved team members:

Ameer Abdurrahman	Architect
Nashwa Salama	Architect
Omar Abotaleb	Architect
Mona Mohamed	Mosaics Artist
Mohamed Wahba	Urban Sketching Artist
Nada el Mergawi	Mural Artist

2 TERRACE WORKSHOP

2.1 TERRACE DESIGN

During our visits to the village, we noticed that terraces exhibited very diverse façade treatments. They are the immediate space of the apartment that is displayed to the public. It is possible to assume that owners express their sense of aesthetics through the terrace's design. Being a small scale space which is commonly found in all buildings qualified it to be the subject of the design workshop.

The exercise followed the common building culture of exposed brick walls. The objective was to utilize the masonry bonds to imitate the language vernacular architecture. Template for the terrace was developed to help the students focus on the understanding and adaptation of the masonry based shapes and patterns.

The elements of the terrace composition were defined to the use of a pattern as the border element and the use of decorative figures as the central object.

Several notable designs emerged throughout the exercise. While the central figure was relatively difficult, five original patterns emerged that can be clearly related to the vernacular language.



FIGURE 5 STUDENTS WORKING ON PATTERN UNIT - PHOTO BY AHMED DREAM



FIGURE 4 STUDENT WORKING ON TERRACE DESIGN-- PHOTO BY AHMED DREAM

2.2 MOSAIC TABLETS

After the students developed their designs they moved to a mosaic composition exercise. After reviewing their work, one pattern was selected as the subject of the mosaic exercise. In this second part they learnt about the mosaics technique, matching mosaic colors and the needed materials and tools. Eight mosaic tablets were targeted as the product of this workshop. The tablets were planned to be a part of the anticipated mural to follow.



FIGURE 6 MONA DEMONSTRATES USING GLUE - PHOTO BY AHMED DREAM



FIGURE 7 CUS TEAM EXPERIMENTING WITH SELECTED PATTERNS



FIGURE 8 STUDENTS APPLYING PATTERNS WITH MOSAICS - PHOTO BY AHMED DRE



FIGURE 9 CUS TEAM REVIEWING THE WORK DONE BY STUDENTS - PHOTO BY AHMED DREAM

3 SHUTB VILLAGE DRAWING BOOK

Art always had its charm on people. Part of our objective was to allow the locals to have a fresh eye at their village. Reintroducing their village to them in an artistic manner can help them behold the aesthetics it carries behind the mask of degradation. This book can entice the local sense of identity represented in the image of the village which in turn reinforces place attachment. It is possible to suggest that eventually this can lead to autonomous local preservation and evolution of character. A case is elaborated below which can support such suggestion.

Shutb Village drawing book represents the urban features of the village like the typical streets of the old core, the high houses which used to be at the edge of the village and the old mosque and its minaret. A specific section of the book is dedicated to record the houses of heritage significance and an interview with their owners. Through the interview the team tried to capture the story behind the building and character is followed. Four owners were approached of which one owned a newly constructed building. That owner used a simplified pattern inspired from the vernacular architecture in his new house, a case which suggests a potential influence of previous BM missions.



FIGURE 10 CAPTURE OF THE DRAWING BOOK BY MOHMAED WABA – PHOTO MOHAMED WAHBA

4 MURAL

Murals can become a powerful urban element if it has the right exposure, the right size and a powerful message. While the mural we made at the train station had considerable exposure it did not have any symbolic exposure to the locals. This mission we agreed with the local council to make a mural at the west vehicular entrance of the village.

4.1 INITIAL DESIGN

The local council was initially interested in having a typical image of the Pharaoh God Sha' as the sole figure of the mural. As our team meet with the council head we explained that the importance of the message originality and uniqueness. We prepared a design which introduced an abstract female figure

wearing the traditional attire of upper Egyptian women. The figure was the central element of the composition and the painting displayed an aerial view showing the landscape of the village. Since Shutb has a very long history it is anticipated to have heritage from all layers of its history including the Pharaonic, Roman and Ottoman. This was represented in the design through using symbols from these different eras. Eventually the composition was framed with pattern from the current vernacular architecture. The pattern designed by the students and made into the mosaic tablets would eventually crown the mural.

Halfway through the progress of the mural, rising voices of opposition to the mural design indicated a necessity of design revision. Meetings were held with representatives of the local community to discuss the message of the mural.



FIGURE 11 THE ORIGINAL DESIGN FEATURING A CENTRAL WOMAN FIGURE - PHOTO BY AHMED DREAM

4.2 ADAPTED DESIGN

The centrality of Pharaonic identity was a clear and common demand by all the locals. The Pharaoh deities of Khnum and Seth were both associated with Shutb. As we discussed, they initially chose Khnum as the figure to be used. As we used a more realistic ram image to represent Khnum the locals rejected it and asked to draw Seth instead. It became clear that their attachment to the pharaoh heritage is merely to its graphics. Nevertheless, they acknowledged the necessity of representing the more recent and endangered vernacular architecture.

The exercise of the mural can be considered as workshop which arguably engaged the whole village. The subject of the mural brought forward the question of what represents the village. The duality represented in the ancient deity and the recent heritage in spite of its decay, supports the case of the vernacular architecture. The inclusion of the works of the students from the design workshop will fuel the case even further as the students and their parents speak about the participation in it.



FIGURE 12 THE FINAL DESIGN FEATURING SETH AS A CENTRAL FIGURE, THE TRADITIONAL PATTERNS AND THE DESIGN WRKSHOP OUTPUT

5 SHUTB TRAIN STATION WORKS

The mural we did in April stands untouched and in good shape. However, parts of the station façade were stained and other parts had the paint falling off the wall. This mission we planned to complete the whole façade of the train station to act as a complete example of getting inspired by the vernacular architecture. The design of the façade used the patterns to create figures and to create running ribbons of diverse designs. The selected pattern designed by the students in the first activity mentioned above was included among the utilized patterns.



FIGURE 13 TRAIN STATION FACADE FULLY DESIGNED - PHOTO BY AHMED DREAM



FIGURE 14 TRAIN STATION FULLY DESIGNED - PHOTO BY AHMED DREAM

6 CONCLUSION

Eventually, the CUS's mission was successful in promoting the case of the endangered heritage a step further. It is clear that the locals acknowledge the importance of the vernacular architecture and are willing to adopt it. It can be argued that a concrete construction pilot project can be divisive in capturing this spirit and taking it towards realization. Through this pilot project it is possible to engage with the construction workers and expand their capacities. Success in such a pilot project can impact places beyond the limits of Shutb.