

ALULA VHASEP

PRINCE SULTAN UNIVERSITY

Alsarab

A STORY OF WATER.

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ALAA ARABI

Alula Villa Hegra Architecture Student Exchange Program

A partnership with

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A STORY OF WATER.

Alsarab: A Story of Water.

In the vast deserts of AlUla, there is a place where the heat dances on the horizon, and the earth shimmers with the illusion of water—a mirage, deceiving the thirsty traveler. Al Sarab—the name itself means "the mirage"—captures this very essence, embodying the eternal human quest for water in this harsh land. The project is a reflection of that relentless search, where water remains just out of reach, much like the mirages that seem to vanish the closer you get.

Nestled in the heart of AlUla, this site is not just a location; it is the pulse of the city, at the crossroads of two ancient roads: The Incense Road (King Fahd Road) and the road leading from Villa Hegra (King Abdullah Road). These two axes trace the paths once taken by locals in their journey to fetch water from distant wells, bringing it to the center where life flourishes.

The site itself is divided into three distinct zones: the historic zone, home to the museum; the religious zone, where the masjid stands; and the commercial zone, each separated by a towering rock. Yet, the design unites these three zones, not by mere connections, but by carving a path through the rock itself, an emblem of water's deep ties to history, religion, and commerce

As visitors approach, their journey can begin wherever they choose, each entrance telling a unique story. One might start at the museum, walking through its exhibits, or choose to climb toward the top of the rock, where the design carves its way through the stone, offering a vantage point like no other. Another path might begin in the religious or commercial zones, where plazas filled with life and activity draw visitors back in time to when these spaces were hubs for trade and worship.

Alsarab

Vertical pathways, one in each zone, lead visitors upward into the carved landscape, connecting them to the history etched into the rock. These carvings tell the tale of AIUla's rich past, while also symbolizing the enduring relationship between the people and the water that sustains them. Along the way, visitors are immersed in the textures, sounds, sights, and lighting of the space, all designed to evoke the sensation of water—sometimes present, sometimes elusive. The design also allows for spaces dedicated to exhibits, events, and philosophical reflections on water's role in shaping life and culture.

The journey leads through different water preservation systems that have defined AIUla's history. The wells, represented by two large, circular structures, hint at the wells at the ends of the two axes, mirroring the locals' journey for water. The qanawat system is revealed in both section and plan: in section, the design is carved directly into the rock in the shape of qanawat, with skylights above allowing the sunlight to filter through, much like water flowing through ancient channels. In plan, the visitors' movements through the tunnels mimic the flow of water within these underground aqueducts.

Near the end of the path, visitors encounter the dam triangular form that stands in relation to the three towering rock structures at the peak. The dam-like walls suggest the presence of water above, where moisture seeps from the rock, sparking curiosity and urging visitors to complete their journey and explore the top of the rock.

Finally, visitors arrive at the end of the carvings, where they are faced with a choice: to ascend to the summit or descend into the museum. As they climb higher, they are rewarded with stunning views of AIUla—vast mountain ranges, sculpted by wind and water over millennia, stretch out before them. And when they reach the top, the hidden water they have been searching for is revealed, stretching out before them in an unexpected, endless expanse. It is a moment of revelation—water reflecting the sky, the soft ripples of the surface disturbed by the breeze, the scent of fresh air, and the breathtaking panoramic view of AIUla.

This, the visitor realizes, is the end of their journey—a journey that was as much about the search as the discovery itself. And in that moment, the thirst they have felt throughout the entire experience is finally quenched.



SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH



SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

LOCATION



SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

PHENOMENOLOGY

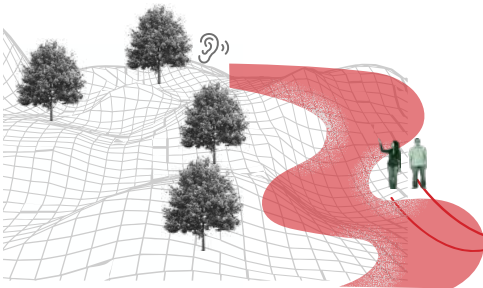
FOCUSES ON CREATING SPACES THAT ENHANCE HUMAN EXPERIENCE BY EMPHASIZING SENSORY PERCEPTION, MATERIALITY, LIGHT, AND THE EMOTIONAL CONNECTION BETWEEN PEOPLE AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT.



PROMOTING A SENSE OF PLACE



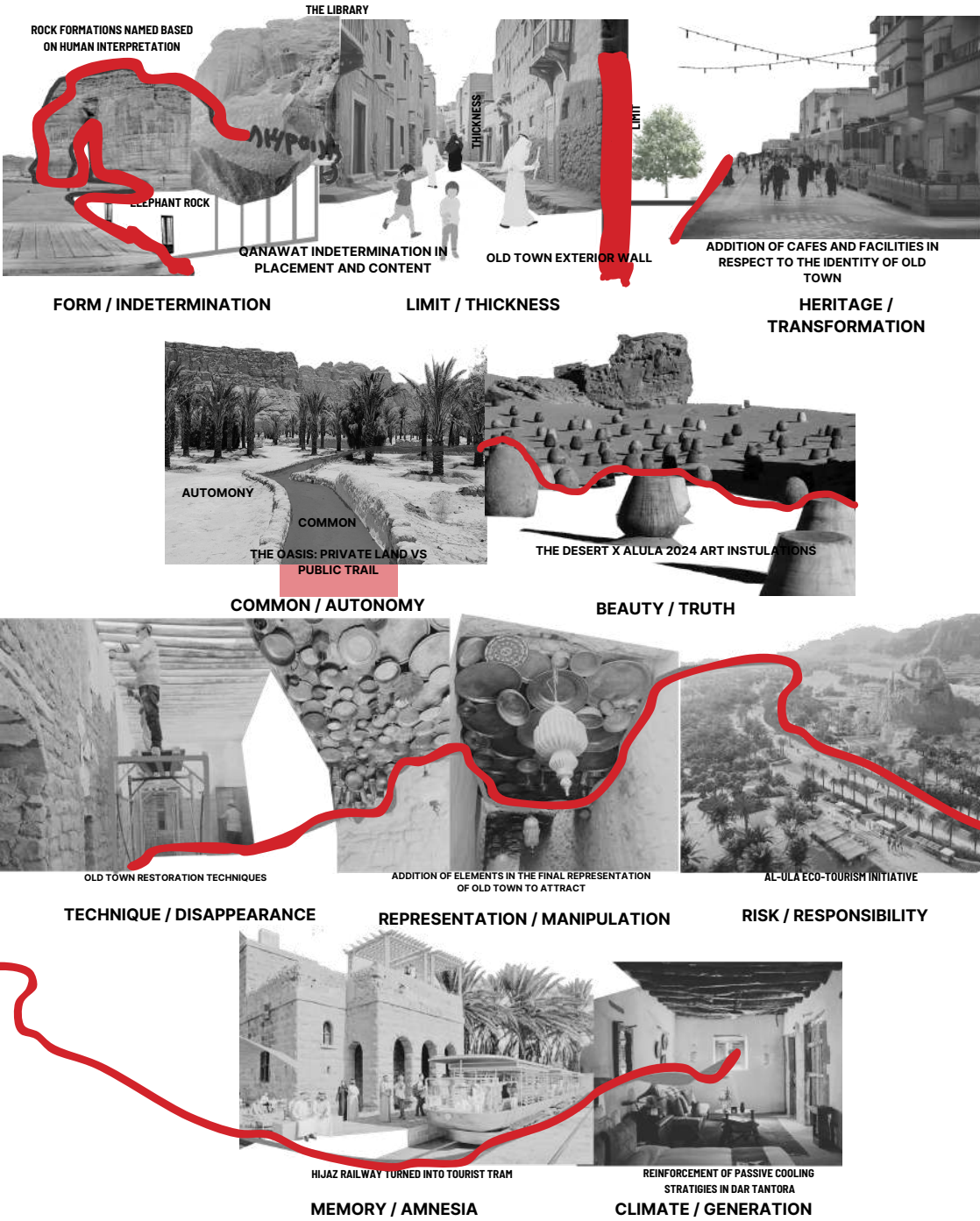
ENHANCING HUMAN EXPERIENCE

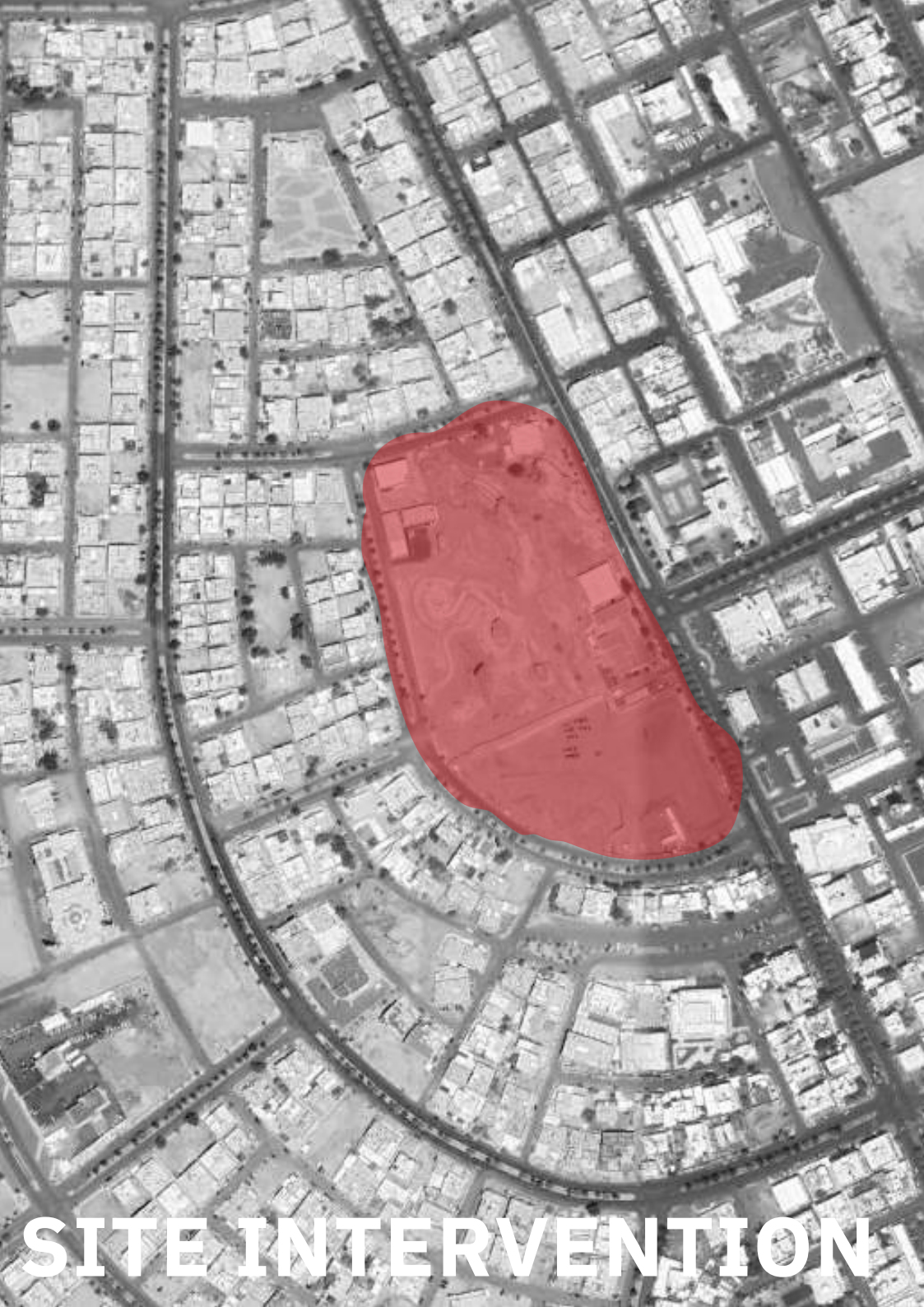


CREATING EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS



ENCOURAGING SUSTAINABILITY

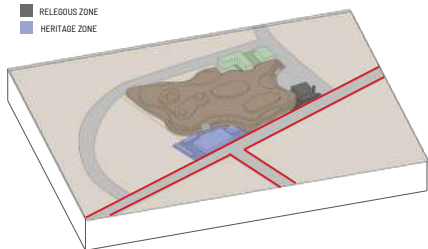




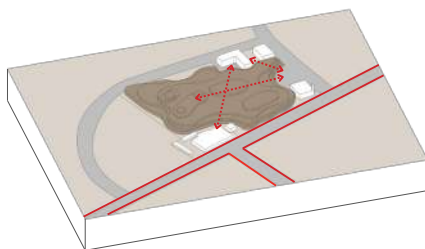
SITE INTERVENTION



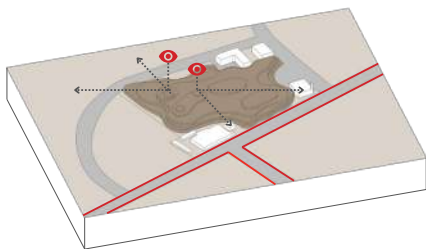
■ COMMUNITY ZONE
 ■ RELEGIOUS ZONE
 ■ HERITAGE ZONE



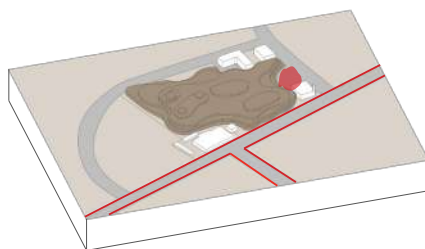
1 MAXIMISE THE VIEW



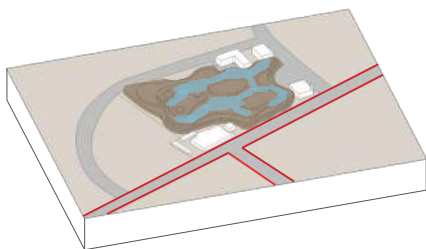
2 CREATE CONECTIVITY



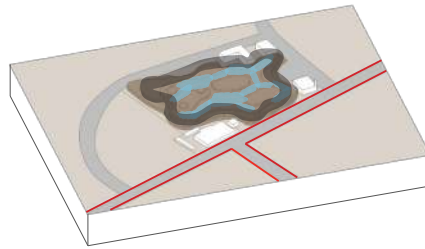
3 MAXIMISE THE VIEW



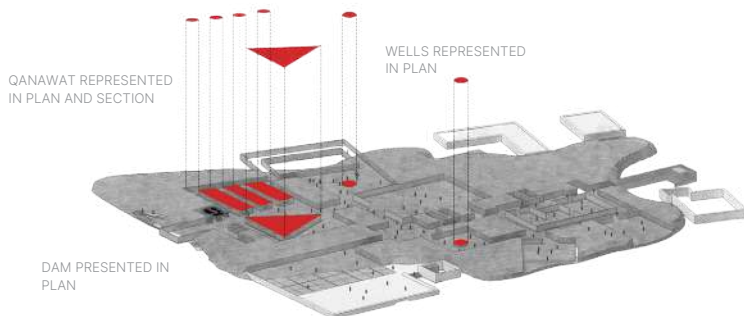
4 ACTIVATE PLAZA



5 CREATE WATER SURFACE



6 CREATE PATHWAY AROUND THE WATER

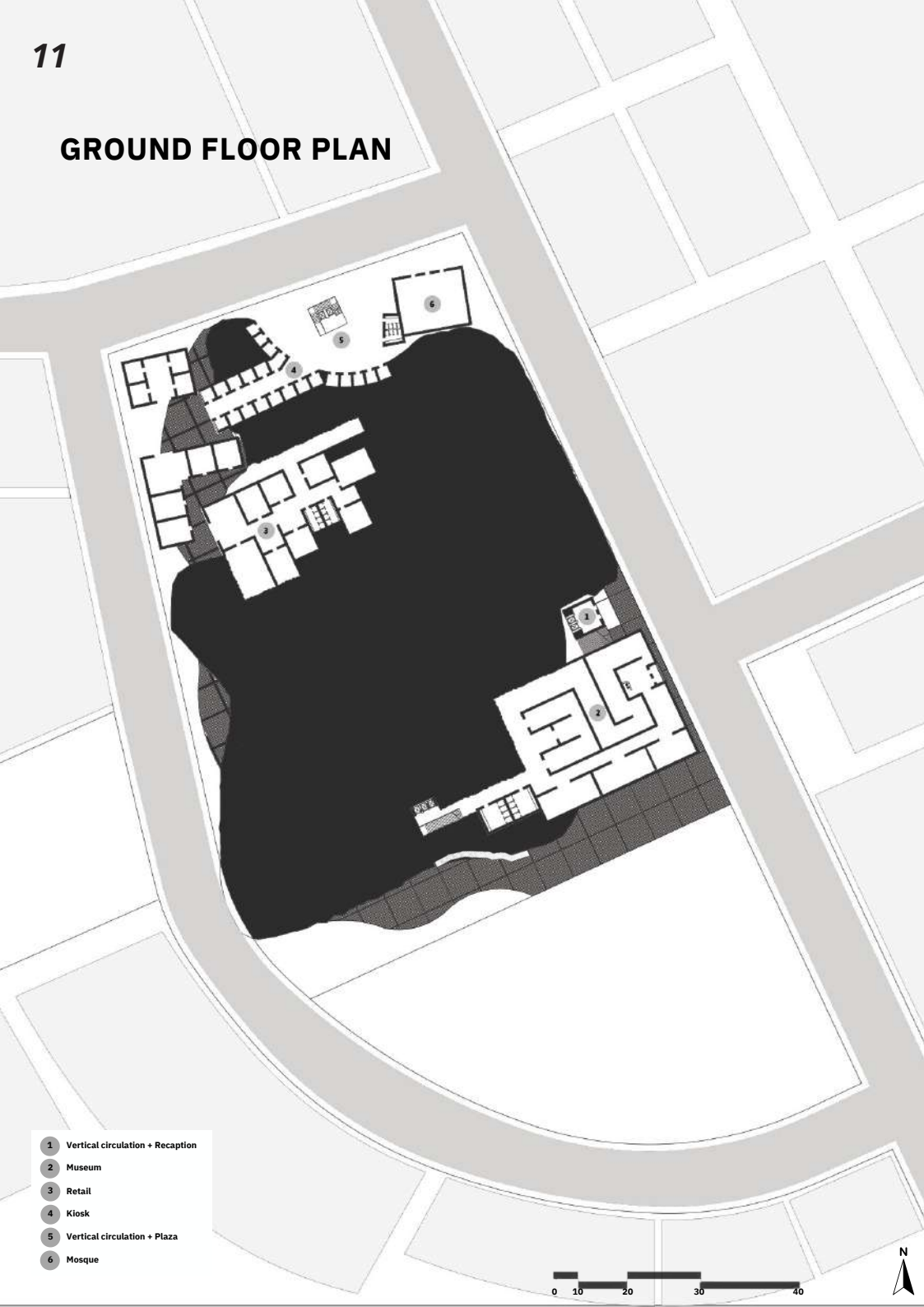


7 REPRESENTATION OF WATER

SITE PLAN



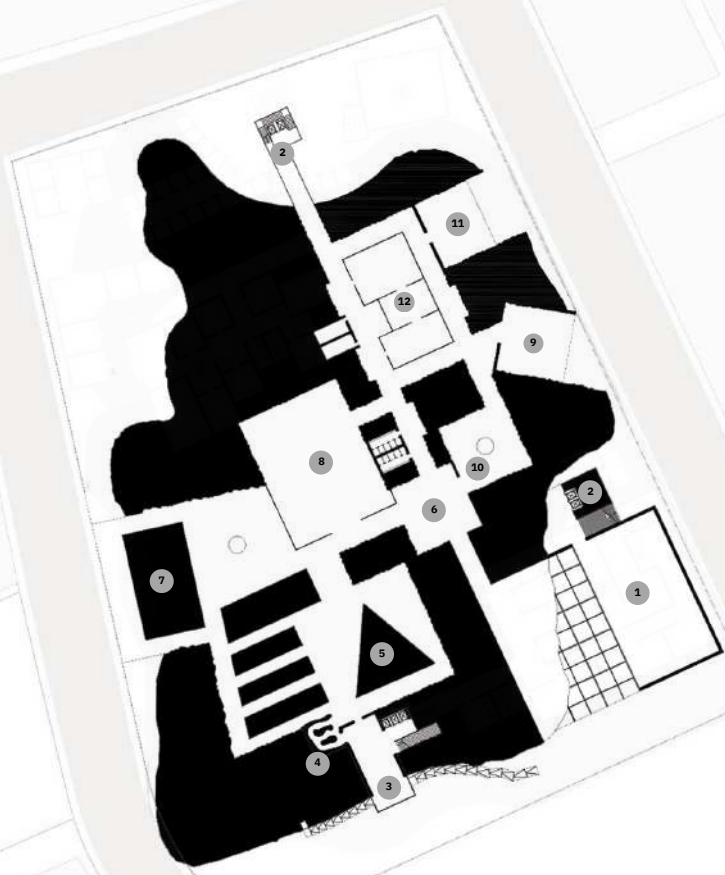
GROUND FLOOR PLAN



- 1 Vertical circulation + Reception
- 2 Museum
- 3 Retail
- 4 Kiosk
- 5 Vertical circulation + Plaza
- 6 Mosque

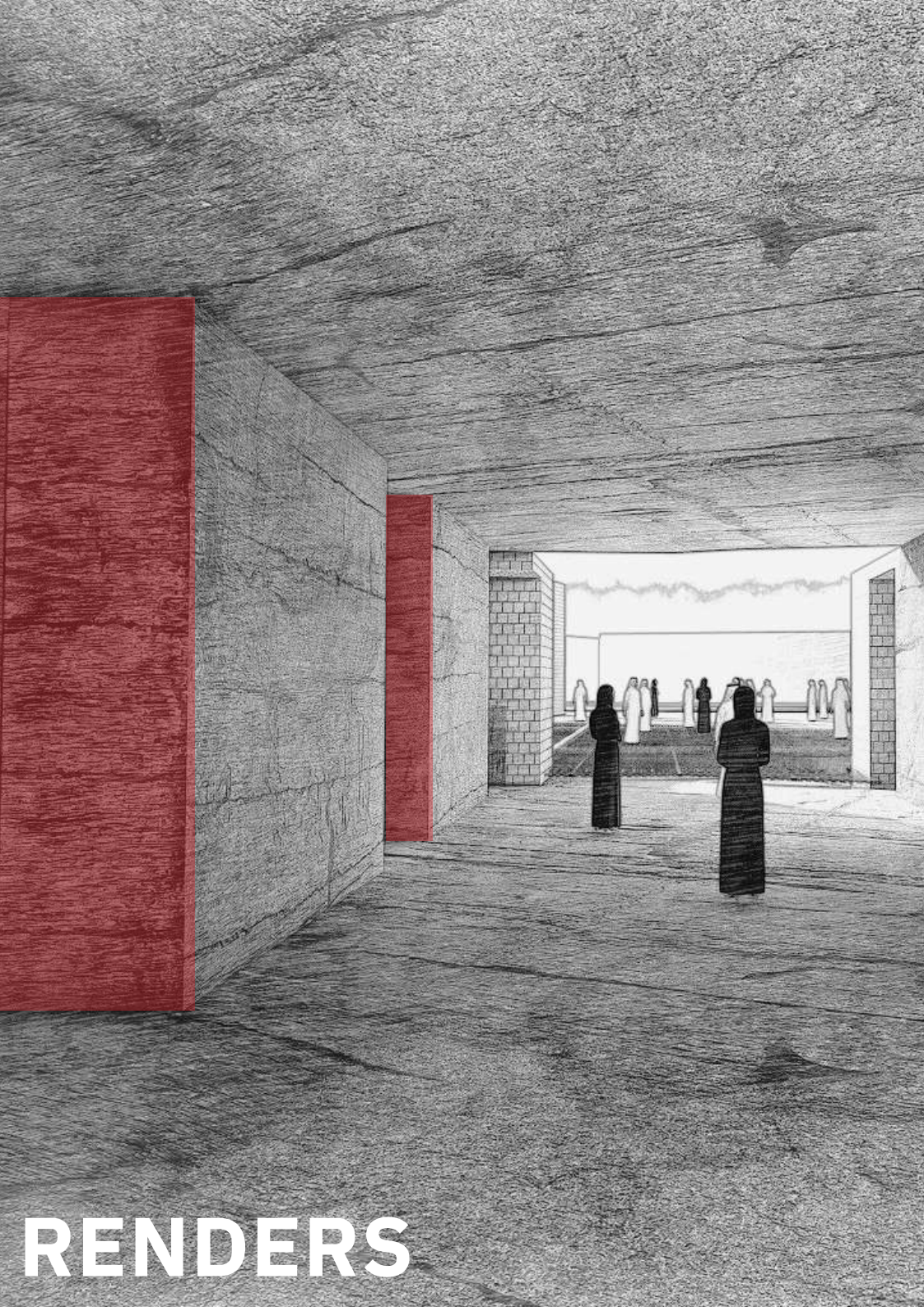


FIRST FLOOR PLAN



- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 Museum entrance plaza | 7 Flying bridge viewpoint |
| 2 Vertical circulation | 8 Event Space |
| 3 Exit pop-out | 9 Cafe |
| 4 Souvenirs shop | 10 Well Exhibition Space |
| 5 The Dam Exhibition | 11 Restaurant |
| 6 Main connection plaza | 12 Exhibition Space |





RENDERS

















