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The Center for Art in Wood is awarded major grant from The Pew Center for Art & Heritage; grant will fund community- and research-based project on wood-turned Islamic architecture of Cairo

The Mashrabiya Project centers the living craft of wood turning and the architectural form of the mashrabiya. It details the mashrabiya's origins and the evolution into vernacular architecture throughout the regions of the Maghreb, Egypt, Middle East, and beyond. Wood turning, an ancient craft believed to have originated in Egypt, now supports the country's makers of today, and initiates a critical, universal discussion about craft-based economies and communities.

— Jennifer-Navva Milliken, Artistic Director of the Center for Art in Wood

PHILADELPHIA, PA — The Center for Art in Wood has been awarded a significant project grant from The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage. *The Mashrabiya Project*, which comprises a shared making experience, exhibition, publication, immersive digital experience, and more, celebrates ancient and contemporary craft heritage.

A symbol of Islamic architecture, the mashrabiya comprises interlocking wood turnings in the form of scalable screens used to divide internal spaces or provide ventilation. In the course of the project, artisans from Egypt will take residency at the Center for Art in Wood and instruct local woodturners in the making and construction of the mashrabiya in preparation for a communal making project in the Center's main gallery. An exhibition, titled *Seeing Through Space*, will interpret the concepts evoked by the mashrabiya through the experiences of women artists, who have traditionally been cut off from society by the division of spaces. Virtual tools exploring the heritage and spatial magnitude of the wooden mashrabiya will accompany the project, along with dedicated programming space for hospitality, exchange, and cultural dialogue. This multivalent and experiential project presents a 360-degree view of a distinctly Egyptian and Islamic-influenced craft, and invites Philadelphia, home to its own legacy of woodworking, to connect with another woodworking culture while engaging the local Muslim community. *The Mashrabiya Project* opens to the public on November 4, 2022, and runs through February 18, 2023.

Such a project, presented to a public so far from its original geographic context, will spark interest in the art and culture of the Middle East, taking audiences on a journey of discovery, exploration, and inspiration.

— Dr. Seif El Rashidi, architectural historian and expert on preservation and heritage craft communities

Project partner and architect, conservationist, and writer Agniewzka Dobrowolska of ARCHINOS Architecture, Cairo, Egypt, notes: *Throughout the many years of my work as a conservation architect in Historic Cairo, we always were lucky to use the skills of local traditional craftsmen, who passed*

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knowledge down generationally. These trades are a unique and extremely valuable intangible heritage, but these skilled people are increasingly difficult to find. Thus, we have built our practice on the protection and promotion of traditional crafts of Cairo. I am extremely happy to participate in The Mashrabiya Project, which will highlight Cairo's woodworkers, promote their work in Egypt and beyond, and bring artistic creativity and contemporary art to our work and craft.

Joining the Center for Art in Wood in *The Mashrabiya Project* are local partners Twelve Gates Arts, CAIR Philadelphia, Fairmount Parks and Recreation, Keystone Wood Turners, Bucks Wood Turners, and more. Artists Dana Awartani, Nidaa Badwan, Susan Hefuna, Nadia Kaabi-Linke, Majida Khattari, and Hoda Tawakol will create work in response to conceptual and metaphorical evocations of the mashrabiya; architectural historian and preservationist Dr. Seif El Rashidi will serve as research advisor; and a team of digital specialists will collaborate with the Center and the heritage site Bayt al-Suheymi in Cairo to create a universally accessible augmented-reality experience.

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