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MUSEUM FOR ART IN WOOD UNVEILS *THE MASHRABIYA PROJECT*, AN INTERNATIONAL PRESENTATION EXPLORING INFLUENCES OF ISLAMIC WOOD-TURNED ART AND ARCHITECTURE, ON MARCH 3

The Mashrabiya Project will be on display from March 3 to July 23, 2023

Photos & Branding Images: [HERE](#)

Philadelphia, PA | February 14, 2023 – On March 3, [the Museum for Art in Wood](#) (141 N. 3rd Street, Philadelphia, PA, 19106) unveils [The Mashrabiya Project](#), an international exhibition with interactive programming, a shared-making experience, and publication, showcasing and exploring the significance of the wood-turned mashrabiya. Curated by the Museum for Art in Wood’s Executive Director and Chief Curator **Jennifer-Navva Milliken**, this will be the first effort in the U.S. to examine this architectural object and its prominence in Islamic and Egyptian woodcraft while highlighting its greater cultural significance.

To prepare for *The Mashrabiya Project*, the Museum will be closed to the public February 15 through March 2 while the exhibition space undergoes construction. However, during this time, staff will be available to process [online orders](#) for delivery or curbside pickup from the Museum Store. Visits to the Museum’s permanent collection or library and archives will be admitted after March 1 or by appointment. Contact info@museumforartinwood.org to learn more.

From March 3 to July 23, 2023, the multi-disciplinary exhibition features commissioned, never-before-seen works from six international artists and includes hybrid programming to encourage further public engagement and discussion. *The Mashrabiya Project* will be the organization’s first presentation since rebranding from the Center for Art in Wood to the Museum for Art in Wood on January 30, 2023. The move allows the Museum to be further recognized by an international community of artists, scholars, and collectors as a critical resource in studying art, craft, and design in wood. It also reinforces the Museum for Art in Wood’s mission to stimulate and nurture creative engagements surrounding wood, an organic, shapeable, sustainable, and conceptually inspiring material. Learn more about the Museum for Art in Wood’s rebrand [here](#).

The mashrabiya is a lattice screen often attached to windows or installed in interior spaces, simultaneously offering ventilation and privacy from public view. Traditionally, it was set into deep windowsills where jars of water were placed to facilitate passive, evaporative cooling brought in by the breeze, providing an early form of air-conditioning. These screens can be found throughout the Islamic world – from Africa to the Pacific Rim – bearing different names and materials, including stone, cement, or carved wood. Though the techniques and functions behind the mashrabiya originate in the ancient world, pre-dating Islam by centuries, the adaptation of Islamic geometries and decorative practice in their construction has elevated them to iconic status in the architecture of the tradition.

The mashrabiya became the framework for artisanal and decorative skill throughout the Islamic world, displaying artful geometry and elaborate perforated designs to become a defining element of Islamic visual culture and ornament. In traditional residences, it also served an essential function of delineating spaces for public and private life, separating male and female members of a household in accordance with purity laws. With its picturesque modularity and wide application of uses, the mashrabiya has become an enduring symbol for many of Islam's most noted artists and writers, including in the present day.

The Mashrabiya Project focuses on the wood-turned latticework found in Cairo, Egypt. It is believed that woodturning as a craft developed in Cairo over 3,000 years ago and it is still practiced in the bustling metropolis to this day. Comprised of thousands of individually lathe-turned components, they are assembled without glue or fasteners to create large scalable elements and furnishings that are complex and ornate. Mashrabiya produced in North Africa are made of wood from a range of tree species, from local to imported, that can expand and contract in response to the region's intense climate. They are found in both everyday and sacred spaces alike.

"*The Mashrabiya Project* centers on the living craft of woodturning and the architectural form of the mashrabiya," said Milliken "The Museum for Art in Wood, whose origin is in international advocacy for woodturning as a contemporary art form, is the ultimate site for this project. Through the language of the mashrabiya, we connect Cairo and Philadelphia – two cities with extraordinary craft histories – and investigate the impact of wood craft on art, space, access, and visibility through this distinctive cultural exchange."

A cornerstone of *The Mashrabiya Project* is the multi-disciplinary exhibition titled *Seeing Through Space*, featuring newly commissioned works from the six artists from across the Islamic world displayed in the Museum for Art in Wood's public space from March 3 to July 23, 2023. The exhibition will interpret the societal and cultural concepts evoked by the mashrabiya and includes original works from sculpture and installation artist [Anila Quayyum Agha](#), photography and installation artist [Nidaa Badwan](#), sculpture, textile and performance artist [Majida Khattari](#), multimedia visual artist [Susan Hefuna](#), sculpture and installation artist [Nadia Kaabi-Linke](#), and mixed-media sculpture and installation artist [Hoda Tawakol](#). The Museum will host a public opening night event for *The Mashrabiya Project* on Friday, March 3, from 5 to 8 p.m., where guests can meet the artists while exploring *Seeing Through Space* exhibition.

Seeing Through Space also feature a salon-style hospitality and gathering space, or *l'iwan*, where the Museum will host a variety of public programming aimed at sharing cultural experiences from across the Islamic world, including poetry, cuisine, live music, and more. A feature of Islamic interior architecture recreated in the exhibition space, the *l'iwan* is a space for coming together—whether to listen, watch, or speak. Its presence is critical, encouraging audiences to participate in the entirety of *The Mashrabiya Project* with hands, heads, and hearts. These elements allow for reflection on the craft and stories framed by the mashrabiya.

"The translation of object into concept, realized in the work of these six international artists, reminds us that craft objects are not created in a vacuum – they evolve within a society as a reflection of the values and laws that define it," said Milliken. "Selected for their intelligent manipulation of material, clarity of voice, and their ability to draw from their complex national and cultural identities from across the Islamic world, the *Seeing Through Space* artists provide nuanced views of the mashrabiya and its cultural functions."

The Mashrabiya Project programming will feature in-person shared making experiences and workshops. Guided by local woodturners, museum visitors of any skill level can turn a mashrabiya component in the workshop, eventually forming a communal, Philadelphia-made mashrabiya piece. In the spring, the Museum will host Cairo-based *Osta* (“master”) woodworker Khaled Abdel Hamid and *Osta* woodturner Mahdouh Abdel Aziz Salem, for a week of learning and exchange. At the close of the *Project*, the resulting work will be loaned to Philadelphia Parks and Recreation for display at Love Park.

The Mashrabiya Project will be documented for the first English-Arabic language publication dedicated to the scholarly and artistic examinations of the wood-turned mashrabiya. This publication, edited by Milliken, will feature writings by Egyptian architects and historians while also profiling the artists in the *Seeing Through Space* exhibition and documenting the components of the project.

In advance of *The Mashrabiya Project’s* launch, the Museum for Art in Wood has published a [blog series](#) examining and illustrating the cultural environment in which the mashrabiya exists to study its form and composition. Hosted on the Museum’s website, the blog documents ongoing process of developing *The Mashrabiya Project* with periodic posts profiling sites, master craftspeople, architects, restoration specialists, and historians in the coming months.

Since fall, the Museum for Art in Wood has presented a series of free virtual lectures with artists featured in the *Seeing Through Space* exhibition. The lectures are meant to connect the public with the artists and engage in thoughtful discussions about mashrabiya in the context of architecture, art, craft, and community.

The Mashrabiya Project continues the Museum for Art in Wood’s core mission of highlighting art, craft, and design in the material of wood and providing a space for its communal practice. *The Mashrabiya Project* reaches across eras and borders to interpret, nurture, and champion creative engagement in wood, while honoring the Museum for Art in Wood’s woodturning origins as it forges dialogues between new audiences and cultures. *The Mashrabiya Project* is supported by a grant from [The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage](#).

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About the Museum for Art in Wood:

The Museum for Art in Wood is the international leader for contemporary art and creativity in the material of wood. The Museum engages, educates, and inspires the public through the exhibition, collection, and interpretation of contemporary art in wood. Founded in 1986 and sited in Philadelphia, the Museum for Art in Wood serves a local and international community. It has built its reputation by providing opportunities for makers and visitors to experience craft directly, through participatory programming; seminal exhibitions and documentation; and the growth, conservation, exhibition, and care of its permanent collection. The Museum’s practice of keeping these resources free and available to the public emphasizes its commitment to building a democratic and inclusive community. Visit museumforartinwood.org to learn more.

About The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage

The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage is a multidisciplinary grantmaker and hub for knowledge-sharing, funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, dedicated to fostering a vibrant cultural community in Greater Philadelphia. The Museum invests in ambitious, imaginative, and catalytic work that showcases the region’s cultural vitality and enhances public life, and engages in an exchange of ideas concerning artistic and interpretive practice with a broad network of cultural practitioners and leaders.