

SCREEN QUEENS



ANCIENT CRAFT MEETS CONTEMPORARY ART IN A BOLD NEW EXHIBITION BY ISLAMIC WOMEN ARTISTS

A mashrabiya is a carved-wood latticework often seen on windows in traditional Islamic dwellings throughout Western Asia and North Africa.

Mashrabiya screens are not just beautiful, with their intricate geometry and calligraphy, but they also provide shade from the hot sun, and privacy from the street -- you can see out but you can't see in. Additionally, the wood absorbs moisture (and can hold clay jars of water), which cools the air whenever the wind blows: an early form of air-conditioning.

The Mashrabiya Project: Seeing Through Space at the Museum for Art in Wood in Old City brings together six women artists from Islamic societies to reinterpret this functional and ornamental tradition with all its cultural and social significance.

Since the screens were used for centuries to separate and shield women from the public eye, curator Jennifer-Navva Milliken felt strongly that all the artists in this exhibit should identify as women. "I wanted to show how something that hid women for so long could be turned around and used to highlight them, and amplify their voices."

But there's much more going on than gender roles. Each artist brings their unique perspective and interpretation of the mashrabiya, celebrating its rich history and cultural importance.

"I was really captivated by the ability to take something as ancient as the mashrabiya and make it relevant today with the materials and technology we have," said Milliken. By exploring current themes, the artists breathe new life into a practice dating back to the Middle Ages.

Traditionally, the techniques for mashrabiya-making are passed down orally through an apprenticeship system; today, the knowledge is rapidly disappearing as younger generations pursue more modern professions.

See for yourself what it takes to be a woodturner in the exhibition's on-site workspace, where you can try your hand (with the help of an expert). Guests' wood blocks will be incorporated into a special Philadelphia mashrabiya being assembled on-site to document the importance of preserving cultural heritage before these skills are lost forever.

Overstimulated? No worries, the layout features a quiet space with comfortable, floor-seating where visitors are invited to relax, reflect and enjoy the art around them in a new way. "This space is known as an *Iwan* in Islamic residences," Milliken explained, a meeting place for community and hospitality. Take your shoes off, stay awhile.

Finally, one of the best parts of this museum is the shopping! Their gift shop has the most unique offerings: toys, art, jewelry, clothing, furniture -- lots of handmade, one-of-a-kind pieces, at budget-friendly prices.

Sale items and more in the Museum's fantastic online store, which supports artists and makers around the world (includes application form for new vendors).

Open now through July 23rd, the Mashrabiya Project testifies to the power of art and the importance of preserving ancient cultural traditions, while uplifting the voices of modern Islamic women.

Featured Artists:

- **Anila Quayyum Agha** is a Pakistani-American artist based in Indianapolis. She creates immersive installations that explore themes of identity, cultural hybridity, and global politics.
- **Nidaa Badwan** is a Palestinian artist originally based in Gaza, now residing in San Marino. She is known for her photography, theatrical composition, and mixed media works that explore life in Gaza and challenge stereotypes and misconceptions.
- **Susan Hefuna** is an Egyptian-German artist based in Cairo and Berlin. She works in a variety of media including drawing, sculpture, and video to explore themes of identity, language, and cultural memory.
- **Nadia Kaabi-Linke** is a Tunisian-Ukrainian artist based in Berlin. She creates sculptures, installations, and drawings that explore themes of identity, migration, and displacement.
- **Majida Khattari** is a Moroccan artist based in Paris. She is known for her mixed media works that explore themes of identity, gender, and cultural hybridity.
- **Hoda Tawakol** is a Franco-Egyptian artist based in Hamburg. She creates paintings, sculptures, and installations that explore themes of gender, sexuality, and power relations.

Museum for Art in Wood

141 N. 3rd Street

(215) 923-8000

museumforartinwood.org

FREE ADMISSION (suggested donation \$5)

ADA compliant

The Museum for Art in Wood provides a lot of experiential opportunities, from calligraphy and creative writing workshops to free concerts and even yoga. Check their calendar for events and learning opportunities.



Nazariyā: The Dancer's Gaze

A Guided Tour of The Mashrabiya Project

Sat. May 6, 2023

5:30 & 7:30PM

Tickets: \$20

Get swept off your feet as Usiloquy Dance Designs presents an evening of pure magic and wonder! Set within the captivating art of The Mashrabiya Project, classical Indian dancers take creative agency with the space, interacting with various works in the praiseful choreography of Bharatanatyam, a South Asian style of dance that's both spiritual and exuberant.