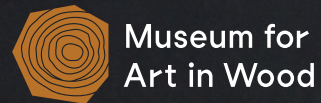


# La Familia

## MARK SFIRRI

Curator: Jennifer-Navva Milliken



### ABOUT THE ARTIST

Mark Sfirri is a renowned figure in the world of woodturning and woodworking. With 50-plus years as an artist, educator, mentor, and champion for collaborative artmaking, Sfirri is a leading figure in the American studio furniture and wood sculpture movements.

Sfirri earned a BFA and MFA in Furniture Design at Rhode Island School of Design, where he began to explore ways to incorporate lathe-turned components into furniture; he also turned some double-rimmed platters, one of which was his first off-center turning. As an MFA student, he made a set of six dining chairs constructed of off-center turned elements, which planted the seeds for his future experimentations in multi-axis spindle turning.

Sfirri's work has been exhibited in galleries and museums worldwide, and is held in numerous public collections including the Museum of Arts & Design (New York, NY), Carnegie Museum of Art (Pittsburgh, PA), the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum (Washington, DC), the Minneapolis Institute of Art (MN), the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (CA), Yale University Art Gallery (New Haven, CT), the James A. Michener Art Museum (Doylestown, PA), and the Museum for Art in Wood (Philadelphia, PA). As a maker, researcher, and writer, he has conducted demonstrations and lectures throughout North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand.

In addition to his role as an artist, Sfirri is professor emeritus at Bucks County Community College (Newtown, PA), where he taught fulltime for nearly 40 years. He has received three national awards: the "Distinguished Educator Award" in 2010 from the James Renwick Alliance, the "Lifetime Achievement Award" from the Collectors of Wood Art in 2012, and the prestigious "2024 AAW POP Merit Award" from the American Association of Woodturners.



*The Ellis Islanders, 2021. Holly*



# La Famiglia invites a way of thinking about the definition of family and its myriad aspects: families that are chosen vs. born into; families of species (such as trees or wood types); and, familial strife, unconditional love, and dysfunction.

It represents a coming to terms with generational passing, through the artist's adoption of a spontaneous, "flow state" approach in his turning, carving, and surfacing processes. The grandchild of four first-generation Americans who came through Ellis Island around 1900 and settled in Chester, the oldest city in Pennsylvania, he presents several installations of sculpture that consider communities comprised of families with their own histories, ethnic backgrounds, biases, and quirks, trying to coexist in a new world.

These threads of life, material, experience, and process are woven throughout the exhibition and this publication. Confronted with the joys and challenges of the natural cycle of life while returning full-time to the demands of ideating and artmaking, Mark embarked on this work—one that takes the generational nature of wood and trees as a muse for contemplating heritage and familial throughlines. This study includes the immigrant experience, where families separate and reunite, disintegrate and rebuild, while learning to exist in new and evolving worlds. At the same time, he ponders creativity and its fickle nature, and the ways he has disciplined himself to catch fleeting ideas as they come. The ability to be mentally, physically, and artistically pliant results from a long commitment to the practice of work—acquiring fluency in one's tools and medium so that space is made for creative spontaneity and improvisation.

Photos are courtesy of the artist, unless otherwise mentioned.  
Right: *Family Tree*, 2020. Western yellow cedar and paint

The groupings of sculpture that populate *La Famiglia* bear the artist's distinctive signature—twisting figures caught mid-expression, saturated pigments from popular culture and the pages of comic books, effortless multi-axis woodturning, geometric columns—buttressed by demonstrations of rigorous technique that steer the forms sharply away from whimsy and caricature. Pushed into being through inquiries into generational exchange and the forming of communities, the works compel the viewer to share in this thinking about what it means to be a part of a society. It is an invitation to everyone to consider where and who we are, and how we arrived "here."

Similarly, the Museum for Art in Wood is a unique kind of "here". It grew out of a community bound by passion for an art form and the material of the trees, which, as we know, do not stand alone but are heavily dependent on the complex networks that support their growth. The material at the center of the Museum's mission is a metaphor for warmth, strength, and resilience; from roots to canopy, the tree—a producer, an autotroph—creates so others can thrive. As such, it is with great honor and reverence that the Museum for Art in Wood presents Mark Sfirri's *La Famiglia*.

Jennifer-Navva Milliken, adapted from the exhibition catalogue



Mark Sfirri was invited to select work from the Museum's permanent collection for a special presentation in companion to *La Famiglia. Inspirations, Influences, and Collaborations*, on view in the Museum's main exhibition space, presents works by artists whose ideas, friendship, and counsel have become ingrained in Sfirri's own artistic development.



## PROGRAMS & EVENTS

Please check our website and social media for upcoming programs and events.

## TOURS

Guided group tours of the exhibition and collection are \$5 per person, with a minimum of 10 guests per group. Tours are 45–60 minutes in duration. Please book your group tour one month in advance at [info@museumforartinwood.org](mailto:info@museumforartinwood.org).

We offer free 15-minute drop-in mini tours. Perfect for a lunch break, a Saturday stroll, or a neighborhood excursion!



The publication *Mark Sfirri: La Famiglia* is available for purchase in the Museum Store, onsite or online.

*Mark Sfirri: La Famiglia* is generously supported by the Cambium Giving Society of the Museum for Art in Wood, The Bresler Foundation, The Klorfine Foundation, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, Philadelphia Cultural Fund, William Penn Foundation, and Windgate Foundation. In-kind support was provided by Boomerang, Inc.

Our deepest thanks go to the generous supporters of the exhibition publication: Patricia Ralph Fowler, John and Robyn Horn, George Nakashima Woodworkers, Ron and Carolyn Picciotti, Rago / Wright auctions, Tom Buchner, Carl Cummins, Leonard Kreppel, and the Zallinger / David Foundation, as well as Deb and Rich Hall-Reppen, Kathy and Louie Hiban, Wendy Joseph, Tib Shaw, Bil Sticker, Al and Nancy Trapuzzano, and Dan Zobel.

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Wednesday – Sunday, 12:00 – 5:00 pm;  
First Fridays 12:00 – 8:00 pm  
Admission is always free!