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Crossing Bridges:

The Untapped Potential of Wood Carving

Cash for Work: Promoting Livelihoods
Opportunities for Urban
Youth in Yemen.





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Carefully carved wooden doors and windows distinguish the old city of Shibam with its mud-brick towers. Each house has a masterpiece carved by locals with motifs dating back centuries. The craft has been passed down for generations and taught from a young age. Due to the war and lack of demand, many have quit carving wood to obtain other jobs and provide for their families.

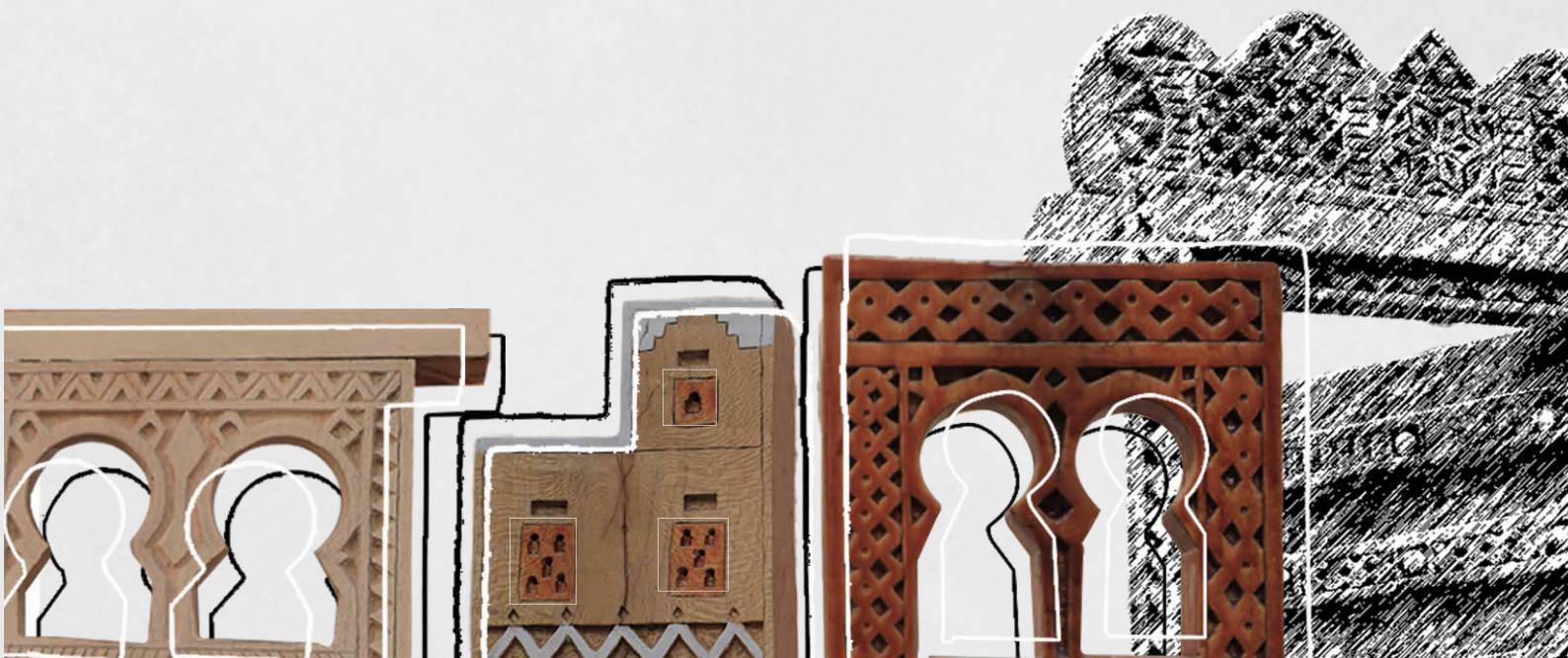


Mohammed Yasleem, a music lover and a violinist, found great passion in woodcarving. He combined his two interests by carving miniature musical instruments, such as the piano and oud. "This workshop represents a turning point in my life," said Yasleem, a Yemeni from the old city of Shibam. The training provided him with an employment opportunity to carve wood in a new and distinguished style.



The Association for Development of Heritage Crafts in Shibam launched Aman training to target 21 young Yemenis with minimal experience in woodcarving, finishing, painting, and packaging of products. Ten Yemenis learned how to carefully carve wood, and 11 females learned how to paint and package wooden sculptures. The course provided opportunities for young Yemenis to tackle the untapped potential of crafts to provide for themselves and their families.

The training is supported as part of the UNESCO-EU project, Cash for Work: Promoting Livelihood Opportunities for Urban Youth in Yemen. UNESCO and the EU, in partnership with SMEPS, have distributed 17 grants to 13 cultural organizations to support cultural and creative industries in Yemen, empower Yemeni artists, reduce unemployment levels, and preserve Yemen's culture. The organizations have implemented and employed Yemeni youth in various cultural projects, such as filmmaking, music, art, animation, cartoon, photography, architecture, woodcarving, and journalism. SMEPS provided the organizations with various workshops in management, finance, administration, and marketing to increase their capacities and implement their projects.





During the training, young Yemenis learned to identify different types of wood, motifs, carving methods, and how to use various equipment in a safe and effective way. The trainees also received a special lecture on preserving Yemeni heritage to instill interest and pride in continuing this legacy.

After the first process, 11 young women received training in painting and wrapping wooden sculptures made by the trainees. They highlighted the beautiful shape and captivating details of the souvenirs by selecting suitable colors.

Sarah Al-Haddad, one of the female trainees, transformed the wooden sculptures into gifts of value to generate an income. "I can work on my own without anyone having to help me," she said. The workshop taught Al-Haddad to be self-reliant.





“I have succeeded, thankfully, the training provided me the opportunity to be one of the productive families. My work has been praised by everyone in the market,” said Samira Ben Ishaq. By the end of the project, the trainees produced 350 wooden souvenirs that has been put for sale in the local market. Many of the trainees aspire to create their own work and promote it through social media to reach a wider audience.

All trainees collaborated to carve a wooden door made of Sidr Wood, one of the most difficult types of wood to carve and finish. The details of the wooden door reflect the ancient legacy of the craft and the passion of youth to preserve it.





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