



## Elias Saffarzade

Elias Saffarzade's artistic journey has been unique in ways both wonderful and arduous. Originally from Herat, Afghanistan, Elias' creative work began in his father's shop where he learned to weld and lathe, moving on to work in a factory at the age of ten.

In 2016, however, Elias was forced to flee his home country following anonymous death threats promising to "kill [him] if [he] continued to live there". Elias fled to Athens, Greece, becoming a refugee in Camp Inofita and applying for asylum.

It was in this camp that Elias first encountered the art of quilling, also known as paper filigree, a long-standing art form in which spiralling paper strips are laid out to create intricate designs. Without even knowing the name of the art form, Elias began to quill and sell his artwork as a way to make an income. "I only once saw that there was a paper flower on the wall, and after one year I knew what...I'm doing...is called quilling".

Elias' application for asylum was finally granted in 2019 and he returned to work as a lathe operator, using his evenings to pursue his own artistic projects. Since moving to Greece, he has displayed his work in three exhibitions and worked briefly as a bilingual art instructor through ELIX, teaching quilling to various age groups.

In speaking about his artistic process, Elias has expressed his love of playing with color and creating beautiful things with his own hands. “I always do art every time my mind calms down, and...I work two or three hours every night when I come home from work. My art is an inspiration to me in my life. My hope in my artwork is that I can be...an entrepreneur for the community”.

Elias is currently applying for the necessary documentation to allow him to travel outside of Greece.

Jessie Christensen with Elias Saffarzade  
June, 2021

The phICA Virtual Exhibitions Initiative is made possible through the generous support of Arizona Commission on the Arts / National Endowment for the Arts, Laurie and Tom Carmody / The Carmody Foundation, Brendan Mahoney and Gordon Street, Bobby Walker and Michael L. Zirulnik, and Ted Decker Catalyst Fund.