FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Ruth Davis Design Gallery at the School of Human Ecology presents the exhibition:

Woven Gardens of Hope: Afghan Women’s Carpets
January 23 – March 1, 2015
Opening Celebration: January 25, 3:30 – 6:00pm

Through stunning traditional Afghan carpets and textiles, the exhibition presents the reinterpretation of the artisanal tradition in an innovative model of social entrepreneurship, embracing a sustainable approach to poverty alleviation through empowering Afghan women in rural villages. Based on traditional designs and techniques, women weave carpets competitive in the American market. Through the women’s artistic work, traditions of the past are repurposed to address contemporary needs and aspirations. The exhibition will include handmade carpets by ARZU Studio Hope craftswomen, carpets from the private Minasian Collection, Evanston IL, carpets from Sergenians Floor Coverings of Madison, textiles from the Helen Louise Allen Collection, School of Human Ecology, University of Wisconsin and more, approximately 60 objects.

January 23 - March 1, 2015
January 25  3:30-4:30 Talk by Connie Duckworth, Founder and CEO, ARZU Studio Hope
4:30-6:00 Public exhibition opening celebration

The world’s view of Afghanistan is dominated with images of trauma, strife, and social breakdown. Often times forgetting that it is a country with complex, rich cultural traditions that have contributed to world culture for thousands of years. The traditions of rug making and textiles are among the oldest artisanal traditions and skills in this area. Without the tending and renewal of these traditions it is possible they may be lost.

In many rural areas in Afghanistan, without the basics required for economic sustainability, cultural and social sustainability unravels. The mission of ARZU Studio Hope, an innovative model of social entrepreneurship, is to break this cycle, embracing a holistic approach to sustainable poverty alleviation achieved through artisan-based employment that empowers women in rural villages with opportunities for creating a better future.

Women, earning fair labor wages, weave exquisite hand-knotted rugs, which are retailed in the United States. Concurrent programs and facilities provide healthcare and wellness resources, clean water, required preschool, literacy and education programs for weavers and children, community gardens, parks and innovative housing alternatives. The exhibition presents this program and its profound effects in the lives of the women and families achieved through their artistic work.
The exhibition aptly demonstrates that the foundation of the ARZU project is the centuries old legacy of Afghanistan’s valuing of handmade rugs and textiles as integral functional and aesthetic objects of daily life. Through juxtaposing ARZU carpets with historic Afghanistan carpets and textiles the cultural continuity is evident.

The exhibition also promotes the mission of the School of Human Ecology to support a sustainable quality of life for individuals, families and communities. And it exemplifies the commitment of the Department of Design Studies to sustainable, human–centered design within a sustainable environment.

**Recent awards and recognition by participating organizations**

*Connie Duckworth, Corporate Social Innovation Award, YWCA, 2014*

*Nancy Vincent McClelland Merit Award*  
*American Society of Interior Designers, 2011*

*Gold Award Winner, Best New Product-Lifestyle and Social Impact*  
*Edison Awards, @011*

*Best of 2009*  
*Interior Design Magazine, 2009*

*Sergenian’s Floor Coverings of Madison, Rug Retailer of the Year 2003*

*Carnig Minasian, Member of the Advisory Council for The Textile Museum, Washington DC*

**Related Events:**

*Talk by Connie Duckworth January 25, 3:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.* - Founder and CEO, ARZU Studio Hope & winner of the Corporate Social innovation Award, YWCA, 2014. “Many women don’t realize that they can achieve their dreams and execute on their passions in business. It really is a wonderful form of self-expression.”  
*Talk by Sharon Fenlon February 19, noon.* Please contact Design Gallery for expanded info on events.

*Sponsored by the University of WI School of Human Ecology, Department of Design Studies and Arts Institute. Funding provided by the University of Wisconsin Anonymous Fund, Minasian Rug Company, Evanston IL, Sergenian’s Floor Coverings of Madison WI.*

**For parking info:** www.designgallery.wisc.edu, click Visit Us for interactive map. Wheel chair accessibility is in Lot 27- Nancy Nicholas Parking Garage.

**About Us**
Exhibitions in the Ruth Davis Design Gallery explore themes that relate to the creative processes and products of design. We are a hub for research, education and outreach by bringing together the Helen Louise Allen Textile Collection, Ruth Davis Design Gallery and Ruth Ketterer Harris Library. It enhances undergraduate and graduate programs in Design Studies. **The Gallery is free and open to the public.**