



Season XXVIII

24.11.2023 -17.3.2024

25 Seasons

Pao Hui Kao, Solo Show

Vernissage

23.11.2023, 18-21.00

In the presence of the artist

SPAZIO
NOBILE

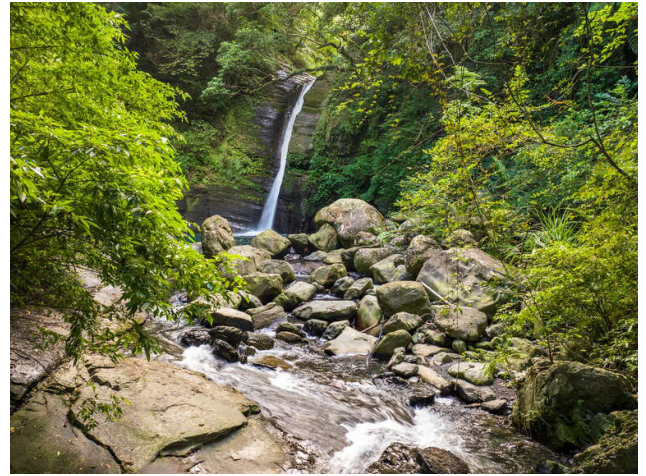
Pao Hui Kao

25 Seasons

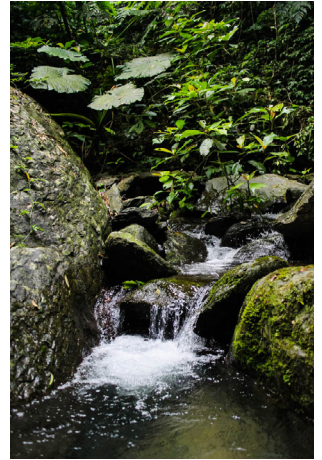
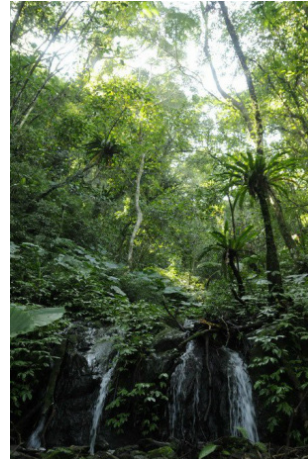
Landscapes of Paper and Lacquer

The highly innovative creative process of Taiwanese artist and designer Pao Hui Kao follows a slow, repetitive, and meditative rhythm, nourished by her confidence in her craftsmanship and the properties of paper as her preferred material. While each of the steps represents a challenge in itself, the magic of paper unfolds gradually under the thoughtful touch of the creator and is showcased through two collections brought together in her first solo exhibition at Spazio Nobile: *Paper Pleats* and *Lacquer Leaf*. 50 pieces of paper furniture and lacquer paintings, vibrant with colors and light, animate the space of the Brussels art gallery throughout Pao Hui Kao's "25 Seasons."

In the *Paper Pleats* series, beauty emerges from a slow and extended phase of experimentation with tracing paper, rice glue, Urushi lacquer, and colored pigments. For the random *Lacquer Leaf* series, the artist composes her canvas with successive layers of crepe paper hardened with rice glue and Urushi lacquer, a technique she intuitively adopted while learning kintsugi (golden joinery) in Japan. The sophistication of each of her pieces follows the thread of her spirit and her research on materials, their intrinsic strength, and their evolution as functional furniture or contemplative paintings. This dichotomy between mobile and utilitarian objects and works of art, both rooted in a tradition that Pao Hui Kao challenges intuitively every day, lends great power to her creations, responding to both daily needs for lightness and mobility and moments of pause and spirituality. *Paper Pleats* consists of successive layers of tracing paper rolled and adhered with rice glue, forming a honeycomb structure that allows them to be used as furniture. *Paper Pleats Original* preserves the translucency of the paper in a mysterious origami reminiscent of a sea sponge, while *Urushi Paper Pleats* elevates the object by giving it an additional pictorial value, emphasizing its contours with vertical and indeterminate lines, akin to "furniture-landscapes." "The experience of color brings back memories of my childhood, the colors of the jungle and mountains in the Wulai region (New Taipei City) south of Taipei, where waterfalls and hot springs emerge. Alongside school, I also studied Chinese ink drawing from the age of 10, mixing it with other materials like oil in a very creative way. Urushi lacquer is similar to Chinese ink; it allows for creating thickness in successive lines like an imaginary calligraphy. I don't use a brush like in Chinese ink drawing but a paper tool that I specially created to trace the color lines or paint my pieces. The gestation time for the work is very long, especially for the *Lacquer Leafs*, which require weeks or even months for the 25 successive layers of Urushi lacquer and natural pigment to solidify before being spontaneously sanded and left to dry. Depending on the climate, the result will always be different and unpredictable."



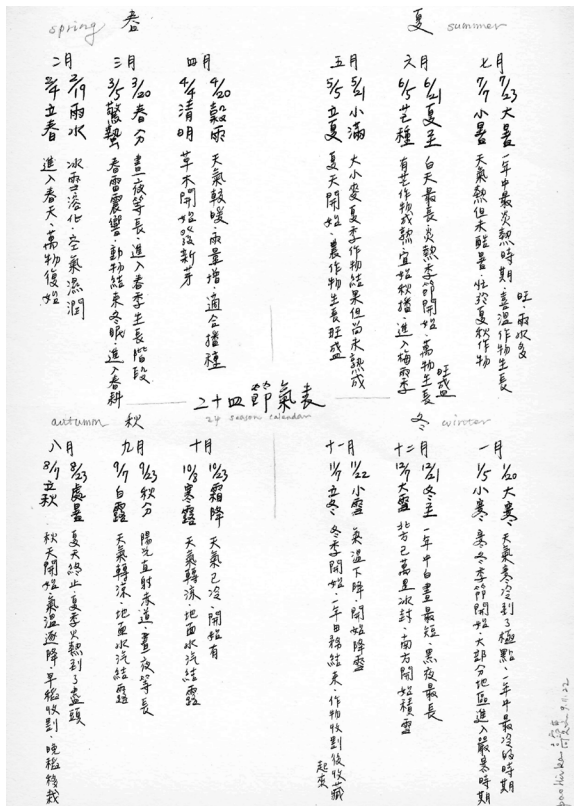
Wulai Region, Taiwan



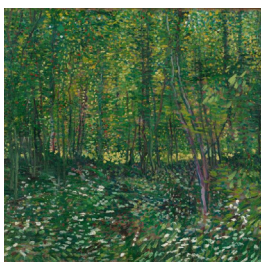
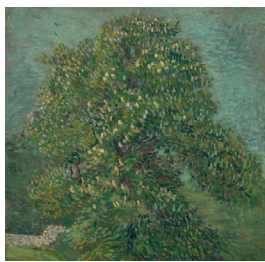
The first version of *Urushi Paper Pleats Black*, which was awarded as a finalist in 2022 by the Loewe Craft Prize of the Loewe Foundation, was followed by new variations in Urushi lacquer and red, green, and blue pigments. Urushi lacquer, extracted from the lacquer tree in Japan, reflects Pao Hui Kao's commitment to using organic and non-polluting materials. Following her residency in Fukushima, Japan in 2019, where Pao learned the techniques of lacquer painting, she became aware of the strong continuity of this craftsmanship passed down through generations. She pondered how to bring this tradition into a more contemporary identity. This gave birth to the random *Lacquer Leaf* series created in different scales, from painted trays to murals, with versatility in both use and display. By projecting her imagination onto these lacquer paintings, she mixes colored pigment powders of black, red, yellow, green, blue, and purple, as well as gold or silver powder.

Pao Hui Kao also adapts the kintsugi technique to create floating lines in her polished and repolished lacquer landscapes, allowing new shades and iridescent sources of shadow and light to emerge. These fine threads of gold or silver, used in Japan for the repair of ceramics, become a visible sign for the artist to connect multiple sections of her tableau, like a line of ennoblement in her grand landscapes, curved paintings into which the gaze plunges and loses itself endlessly in a chromatic and vibrational field that could be likened to auras or the seven chakras (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, gold, and white). This relationship between the material objects of *Paper Pleats* and the immaterial world of *Lacquer Leafs* creates a strong and sensitive dialogue between earth and cosmos, between the real and palpable world and the beyond.

By anchoring this exhibition in the theme of the 24 Seasons or the lunisolar calendar that comes from Asian countries, Pao Hui Kao opens the way to rediscovering this cycle of nature, adding her 25th season: this circular rhythm corresponds to astronomical phenomena such as eclipses and solstices. Pao's palette starts from black and progresses to green, then orange, followed by red, purple, and blue before returning to black. The colors intermingle and follow the changing climate, the variations in dryness and humidity throughout the autumn, winter, spring, and summer. Pao makes perceptible the cadence of the seasons that follow almost imperceptibly every two weeks. The grand tableau of her "25 Seasons" becomes a source of beauty, contemplation, and impermanence. This meticulous observation of nature well expresses the centrality of time in the artist's practice, as she handles Urushi lacquer with full awareness of her environment, the climate, and the ever-changing landscapes. "Using the paintings of Dutch painter Van Gogh as a reference, the chromatic research intensifies as I paint my trays for the "25 Seasons" over the months. I studied Van Gogh by categorizing his works by season, allowing me to observe the evolution of colors in his paintings through his landscapes. The palette of the Dutch painter, the country where I have settled, was also strongly influenced by Japonism. Thus, I complete my cycle of seasons by bridging two cultures to which I feel I belong".



Pao Hui Kao's Lunisolar Calendar



Vincent van Gogh's paintings

Pao Hui Kao's unique and unexpected aesthetics boldly combine paper and lacquer, opening a new chapter in contemporary applied arts. It surprises and reveals all its subtleties and finesse of creation in this first exhibition at Spazio Nobile. After a closer look, it is a unique universe that she unveils, with a multitude of details that come to life and take shape under the amazed gaze: the infinite variations of lacquer and the honeycomb structures of her furniture subtly play with light and transcend the material to become landscapes.



Pao Hui Kao (TW)

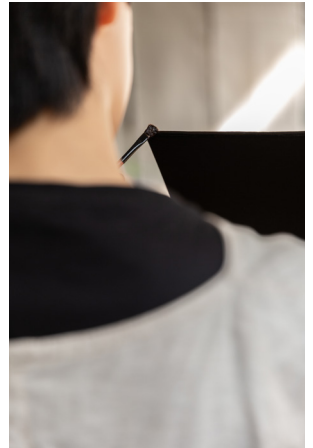
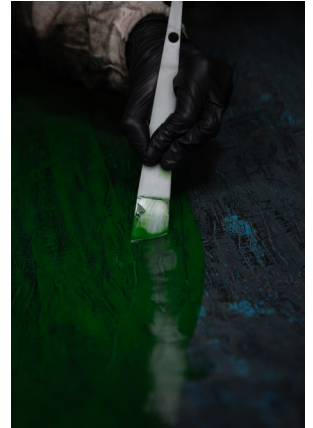
Artist, Designer

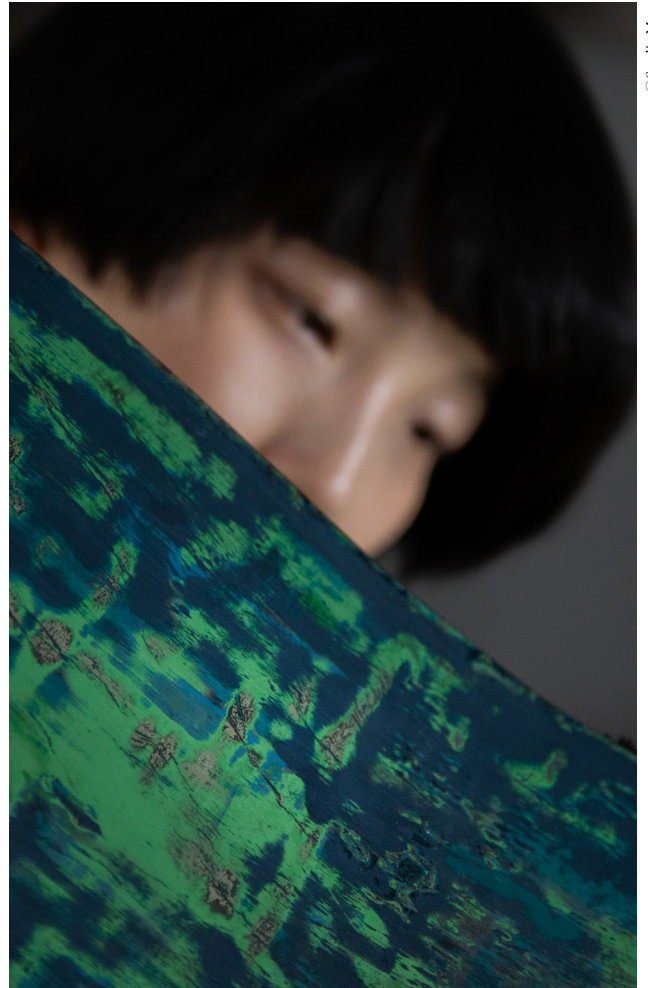
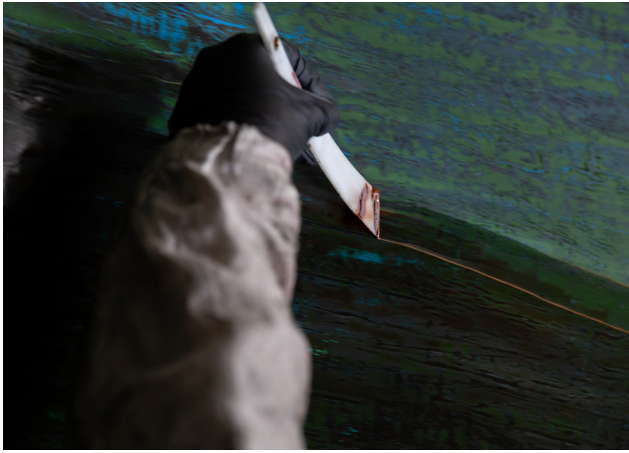
Pao Hui Kao studied Industrial Design at Huaan University in Taipei. After gaining four years of experience as an industrial designer, she pursued a Master's program at the Design Academy Eindhoven, from which she obtained her Master of Arts degree in 2016. Her work reflects significant influences from innovative materials, traditional craftsmanship, social issues, and ecological concerns. Through the creation of objects, sculptures, and installations, her work emphasizes the transformation of ordinary materials and surroundings into extraordinary aesthetics. Pao Hui Kao's projects merge the forces of nature with human artifacts. Her studio serves as a platform for ongoing research in experimental design, imbuing man-made sculptural forms and installations with deeper meaning through their interaction with nature and its elements. This

process of development enables Pao Hui to weave a narrative where the natural and the artificial converge to shape landscapes for the mind to explore the philosophical quandaries that confront the human condition.

In 2020, Pao Hui Kao created two collections for Spazio Nobile: *Paper Pleats* and *Lacquer Leaf*, in which she explores the symbiosis of both organic and mineral elements using tracing paper, crepe paper, rice glue, Urushi lacquer, color pigments, and kintsugi. Pao Hui Kao was also a finalist for the LOEWE Craft Prize in 2022. Her creations have entered private and institutional collections in recent years, including the POC Foundation, Boghossian Foundation, Rothschild Collection, among others. Spazio Nobile has been representing Pao Hui Kao since 2019.

Lacquer Leaf Collection





25 Seasons Lacquer Leafs

Curved wall installation of 25 paintings

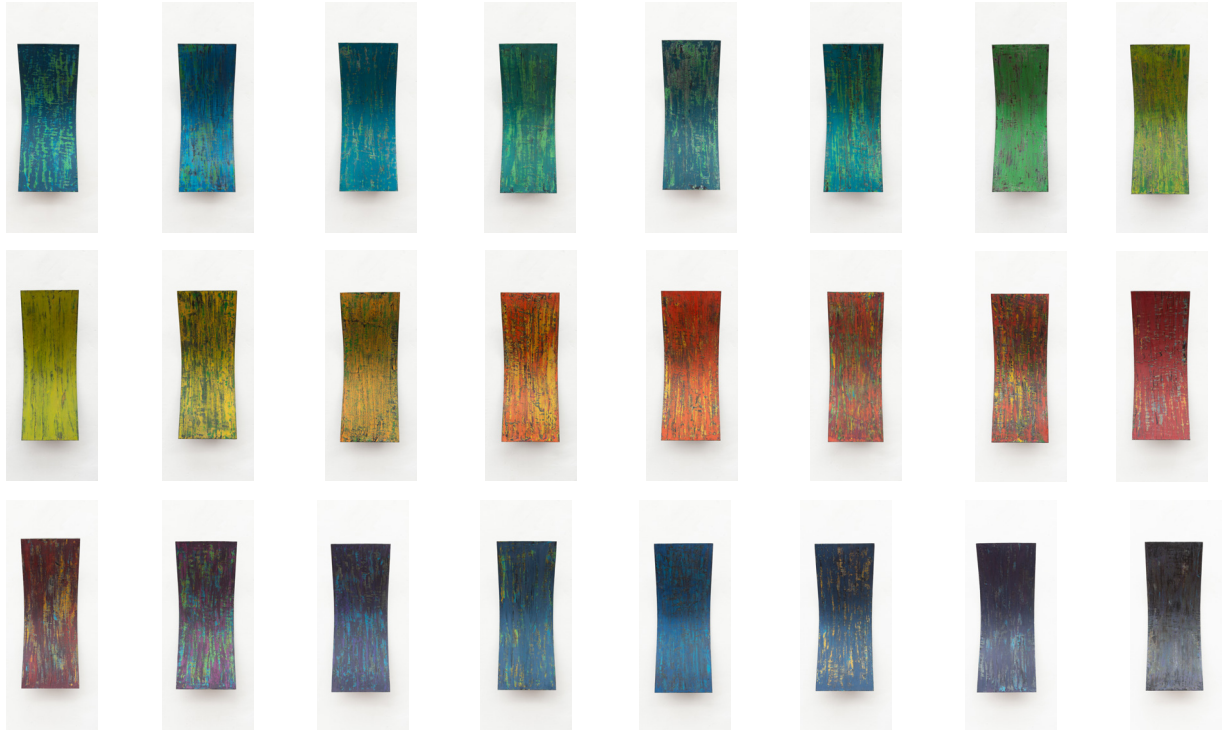
2023

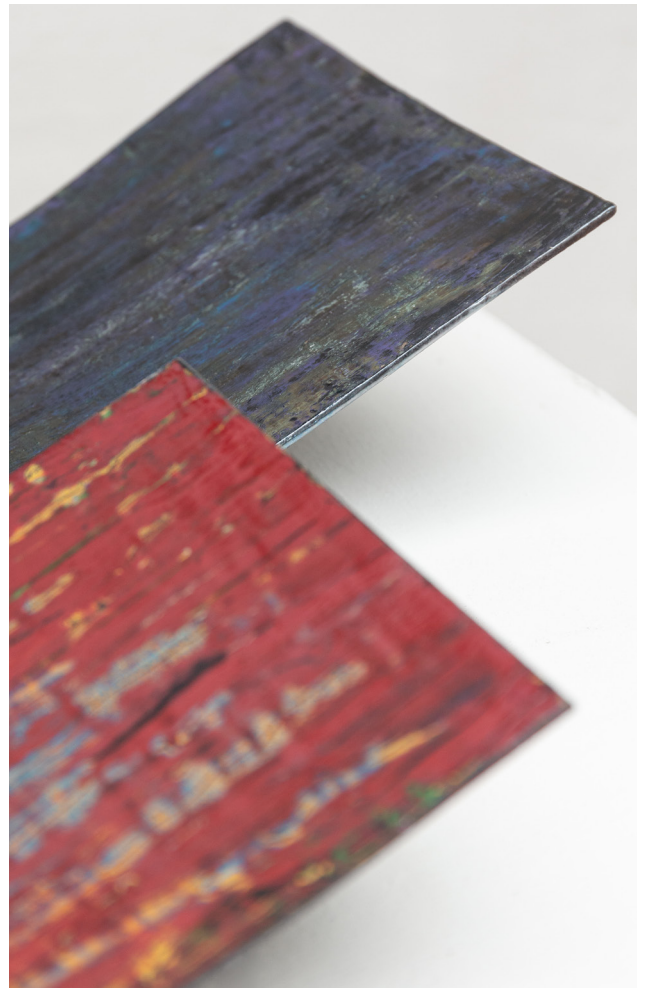
Crepe paper, rice glue, Urushi lacquer, color pigments

45 x 16 x 4 cm each / full installation 550 x 16 x 4 cm or 2 walls of 225 x 16 x 4 cm

Unique pieces

Signed at the back by the artist







Red in Purple Urushi Large Lacquer Leaf

Curved horizontal or vertical wall painting

2023

Crepe paper, rice glue, Urushi lacquer, purple and red pigments

90 x 54 x 14 cm

Unique piece

Signed at the back by the artist





Blue in Green Urushi Large Lacquer Leaf

Curved horizontal or vertical wall painting

2023

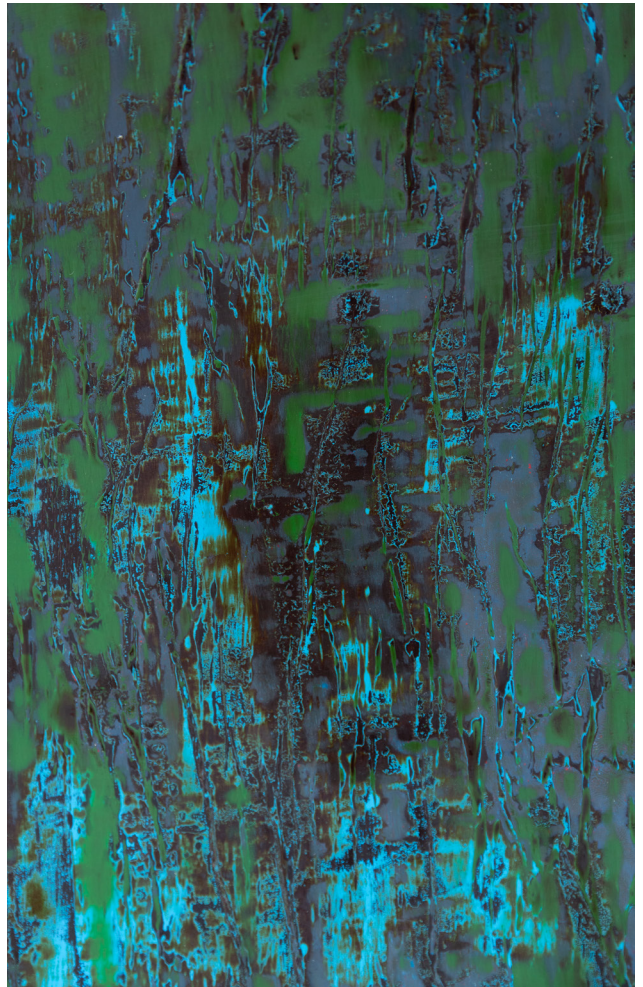
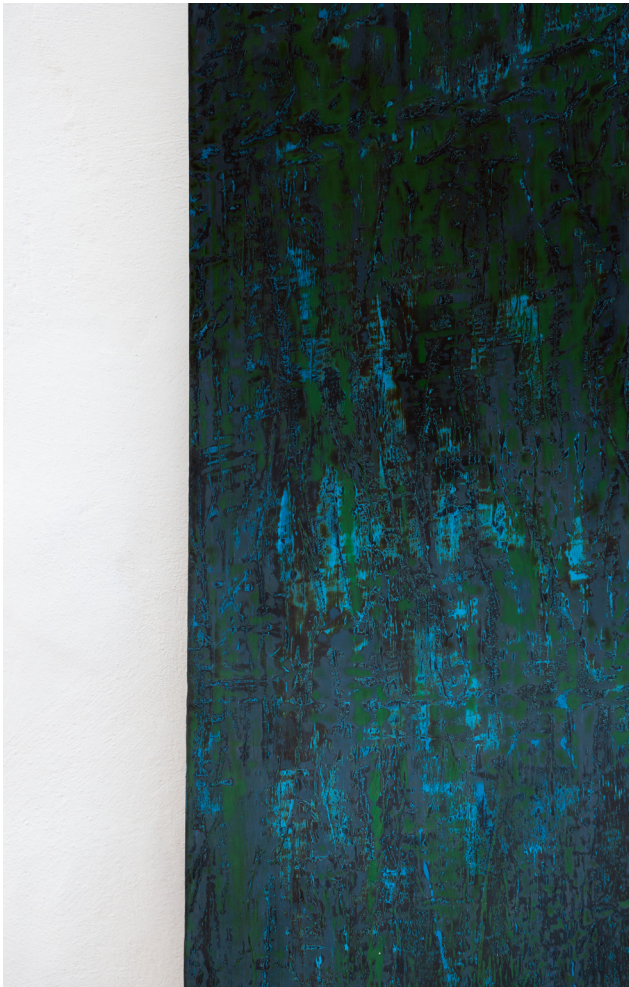
Crepe paper, rice glue, Urushi lacquer, green and blue pigments

118 x 69,5 x 14 cm

Unique piece

Signed at the back by the artist





Black in Red Large Lacquer Leaf

Curved horizontal or vertical wall painting

2023

Crepe paper, rice glue, Urushi lacquer, red and black pigments, kintsugi

114 x 70 x 16 cm

Unique piece

Signed at the back by the artist



Lunisolar Urushi Large Lacquer Leaf

Curved horizontal or vertical wall painting

2023

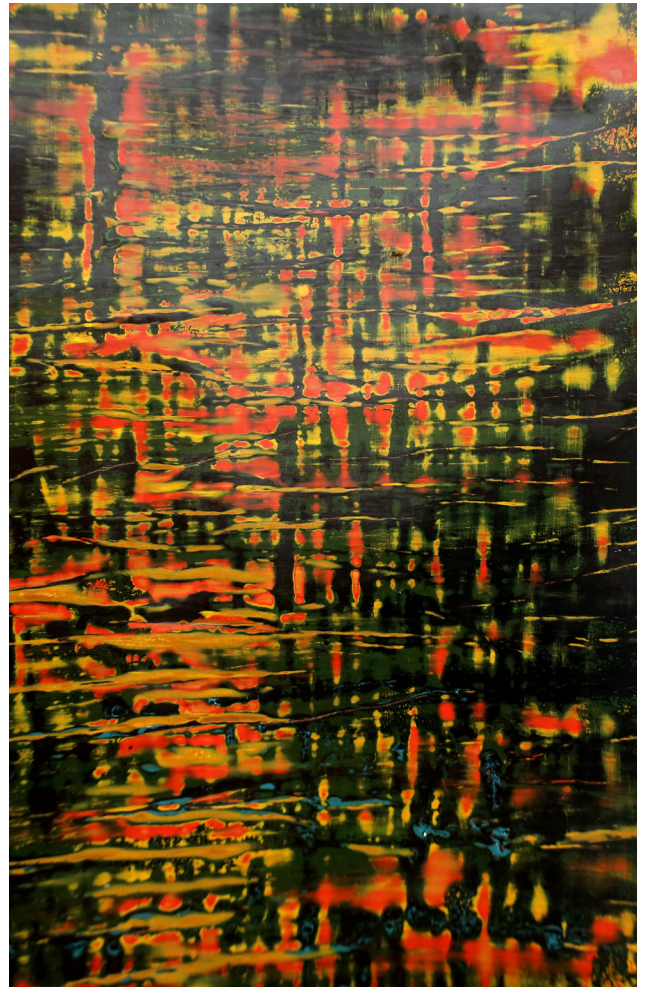
Crepe paper, rice glue, Urushi lacquer,

Yellow, orange, green, black and blue pigments

99 x 66 x 10 cm

Unique piece

Signed at the back by the artist





Night Paper Urushi Large Lacquer Leaf

Curved horizontal or vertical wall painting

2022

Crepe paper, rice glue, Urushi lacquer, blue and black pigments

118 x 69,5 x 14 cm

Unique piece

Signed at the back by the artist



Blue Lacquer Leaf

Sculptural tray

2022

Crepe paper, rice glue, Urushi lacquer, blue and green pigments, kintsugi

45 x 16 x 4 cm

Unique piece

Signed at the back by the artist



Green Lacquer Leaf

Sculptural tray

2022

Crepe paper, rice glue, Urushi lacquer, green pigment, kintsugi

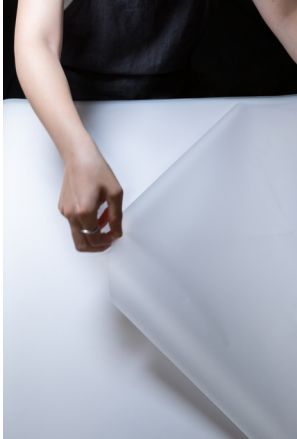
45 x 16 x 4 cm

Unique piece

Signed at the back by the artist



Urushi Paper Pleats Collection



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Black Urushi Paper Pleats

Side board

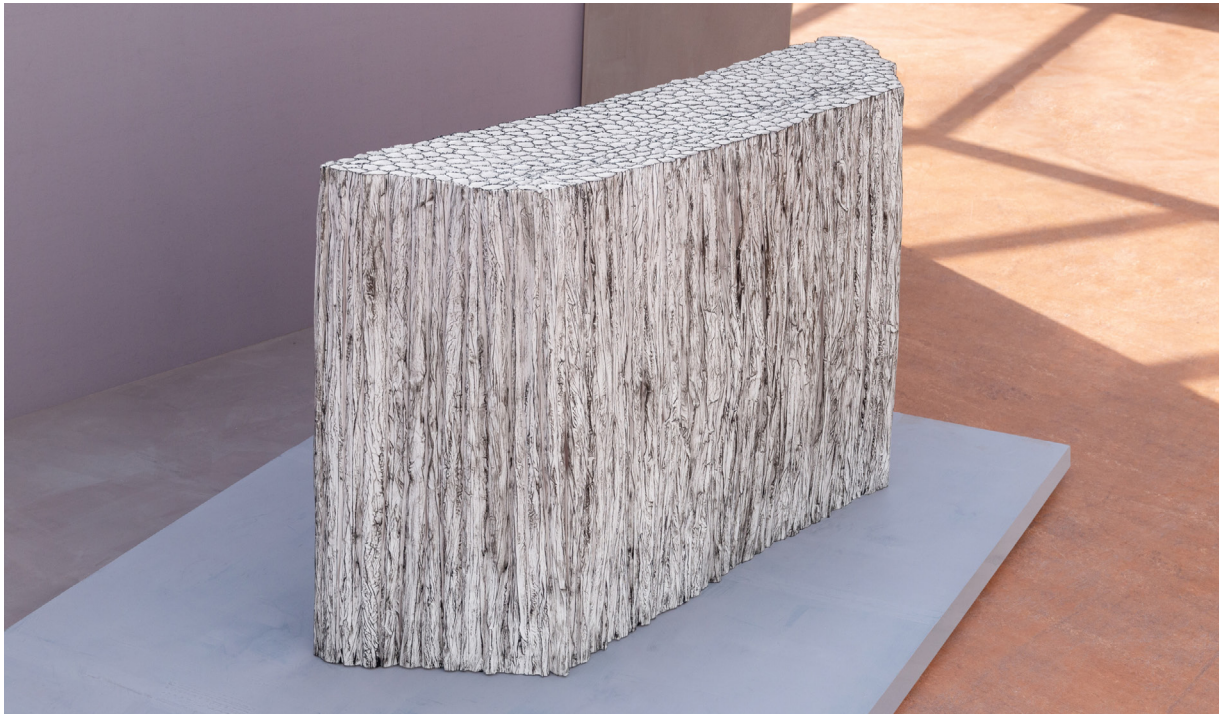
2023

Tracing paper, rice glue, Urushi lacquer, black pigment

70 x 33 x 135 cm

Unique piece in a random collection

Signed and dated by the artist



©Studio Mass

Black Urushi Paper Pleats

Sculptural bench or Low table

2023

Tracing paper, rice glue, Urushi lacquer, black pigment

35 x 130 x 29 cm

Unique piece in a random collection

Signed and dated by the artist

Loewe Craft Prize Finalist Exhibition 2022



©Studio Mass

Black Urushi Paper Pleats

Low stool or Side table

2023

Tracing paper, rice glue, Urushi lacquer, black pigment

45 x 0 32 cm

Unique piece in a random collection

Signed and dated by the artist



Black Urushi Paper Pleats

Low stool or Side table

2023

Tracing paper, rice glue, Urushi lacquer, black pigment

60 x 0 32 cm

Unique piece in a random collection

Signed and dated by the artist



Black Urushi Paper Pleats

Low stool or Side table with cushion

2021

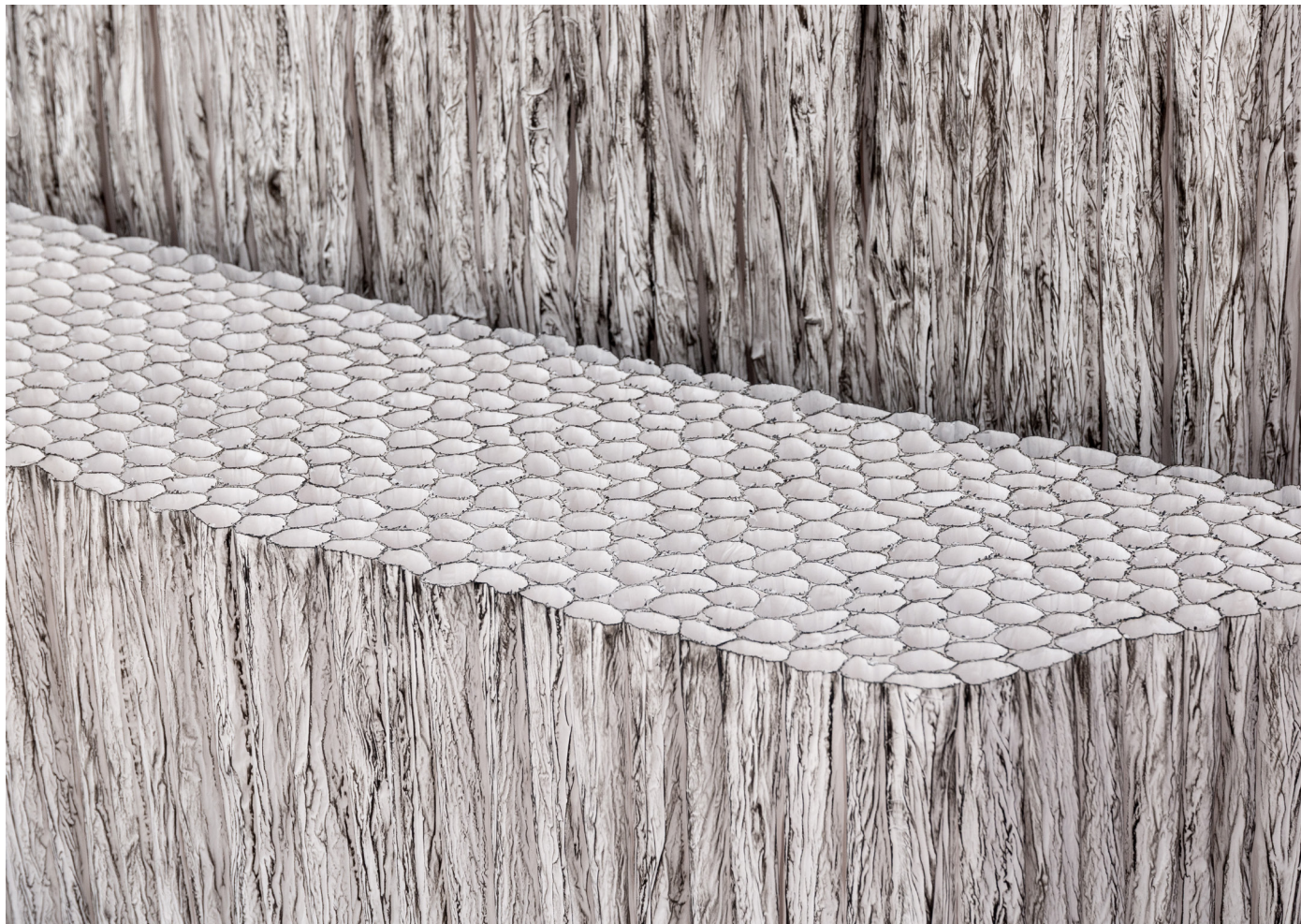
Tracing paper, rice glue, Urushi lacquer, black pigment

51 x 0 31 cm

Unique piece in a random collection

Signed and dated by the artist









Red Urushi Paper Pleats

Side Board

2023

Tracing paper, rice glue, Urushi lacquer, red pigment

70 x 33 x 135 cm

Unique piece in a random collection

Signed and dated by the artist



© Studio Mass

Red Urushi Paper Pleats

Sculptural bench or Low table

2023

Tracing paper, rice glue, Urushi lacquer, red pigment

39 x 135 x 33 cm

Unique piece in a random collection

Signed and dated by the artist

€ 12 000 Ex Works



©StudioMass

Red Urushi Paper Pleats

Low Stool or Side table

2023

Tracing paper, rice glue, Urushi lacquer, red pigment

45 x 0 32 cm

Unique piece in a random collection

Signed and dated by the artist



Red Urushi Paper Pleats

High Stool or Side table

2023

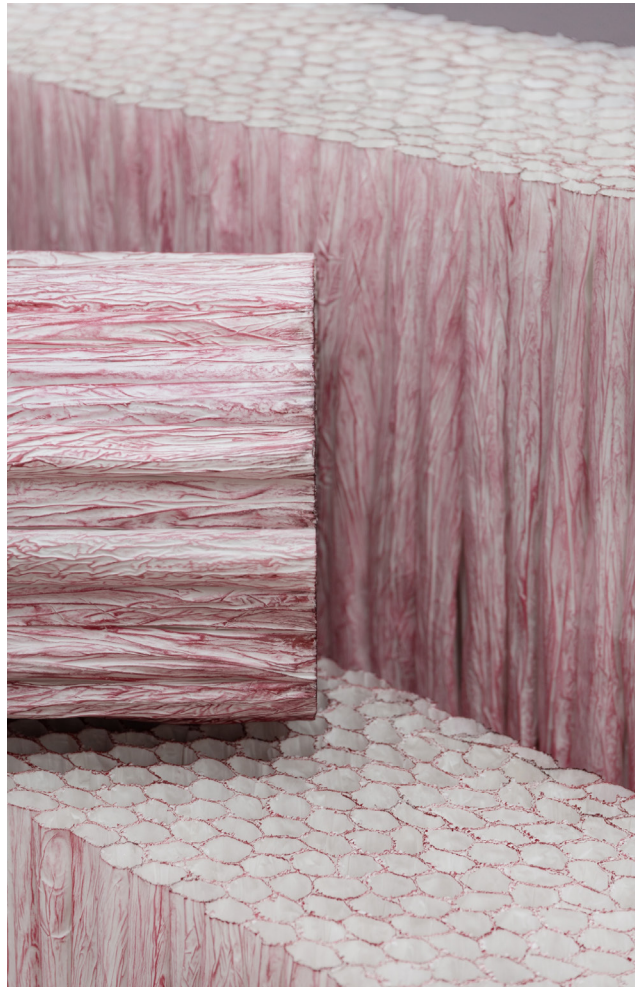
Tracing paper, rice glue, Urushi lacquer, red pigment

60 x 0 32 cm

Unique piece in a random collection

Signed and dated by the artist







Blue Urushi Paper Pleats

Side board

2023

Tracing paper, rice glue and Urushi lacquer, blue pigment

70 x 33 x 135 cm

Unique piece in a random collection

Signed and dated by the artist



©Studio Mass

Blue Urushi Paper Pleats

Sculptural bench or Low table

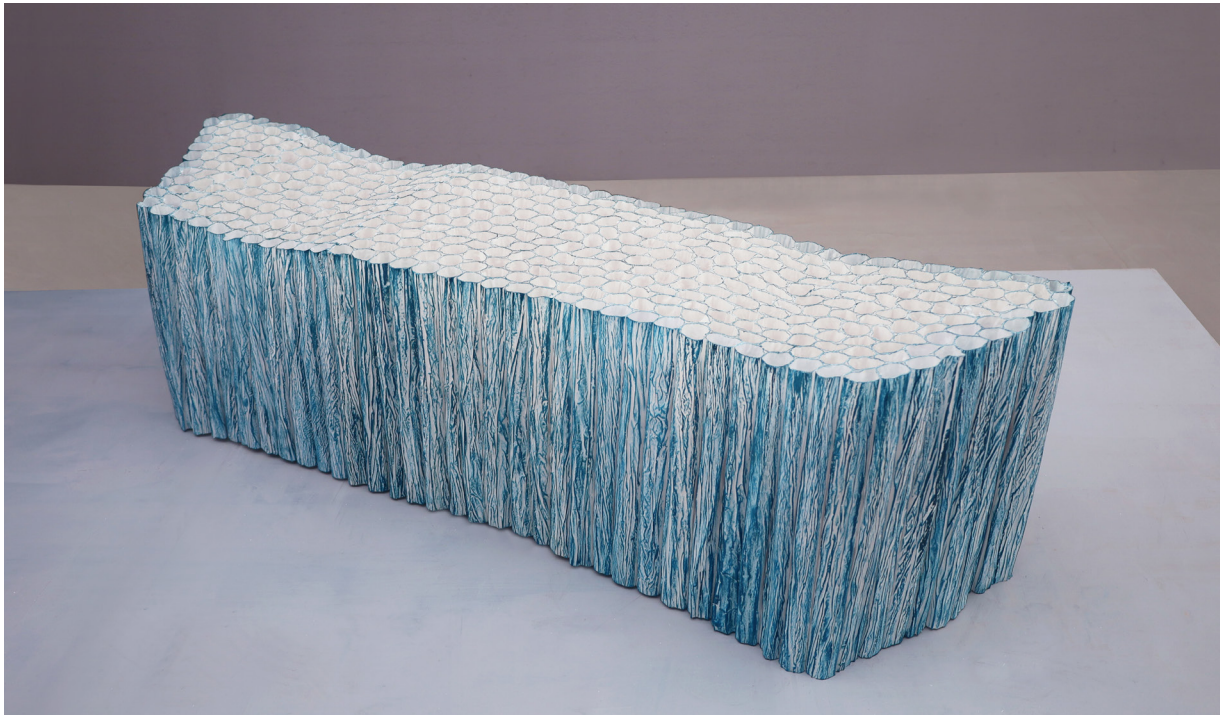
2023

Tracing paper, rice glue and Urushi lacquer, blue pigment

35 x 130 x 29 cm

Unique piece in a random collection

Signed and dated by the artist



©Studio Mass

Blue Urushi Paper Pleats

Low stool or Low side table

2023

Tracing paper, rice glue and Urushi lacquer, blue pigment

45 x 0 31 cm

Unique piece in a random collection

Signed and dated by the artist



Blue Urushi Paper Pleats

High stool or High side table

2023

Tracing paper, rice glue and Urushi lacquer, blue pigment

60 x 0 33 cm

Unique piece in a random collection

Signed and dated by the artist



Green Urushi Paper Pleats

Low Stool or Side table

2023

Tracing paper, rice glue, Urushi lacquer, green pigment

45 x 0 32 cm

Unique piece in a random collection

Signed and dated by the artist



Green Urushi Paper Pleats

High Stool or Side table

2023

Tracing paper, rice glue, Urushi lacquer, green pigment

60 x 0 32 cm

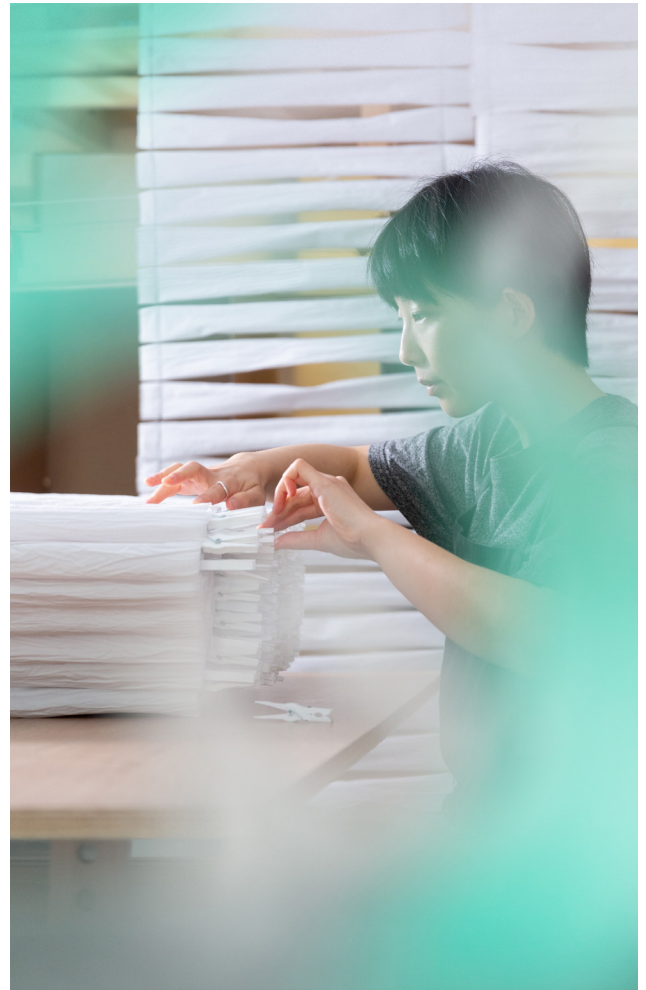
Unique piece in a random collection

Signed and dated by the artist





Paper Pleats Collection



Original Paper Pleats

Lounge Chair

2023

Tracing paper, rice glue

80 x 185 x 40 cm

Unique piece in a random collection

Signed and dated by the artist



Original Paper Pleats

Coffee Table

2023

Tracing paper, rice glue

45 x 75 x 75 cm

Unique piece in a random collection

Signed and dated by the artist



Original Paper Pleats

Wide Low Stool

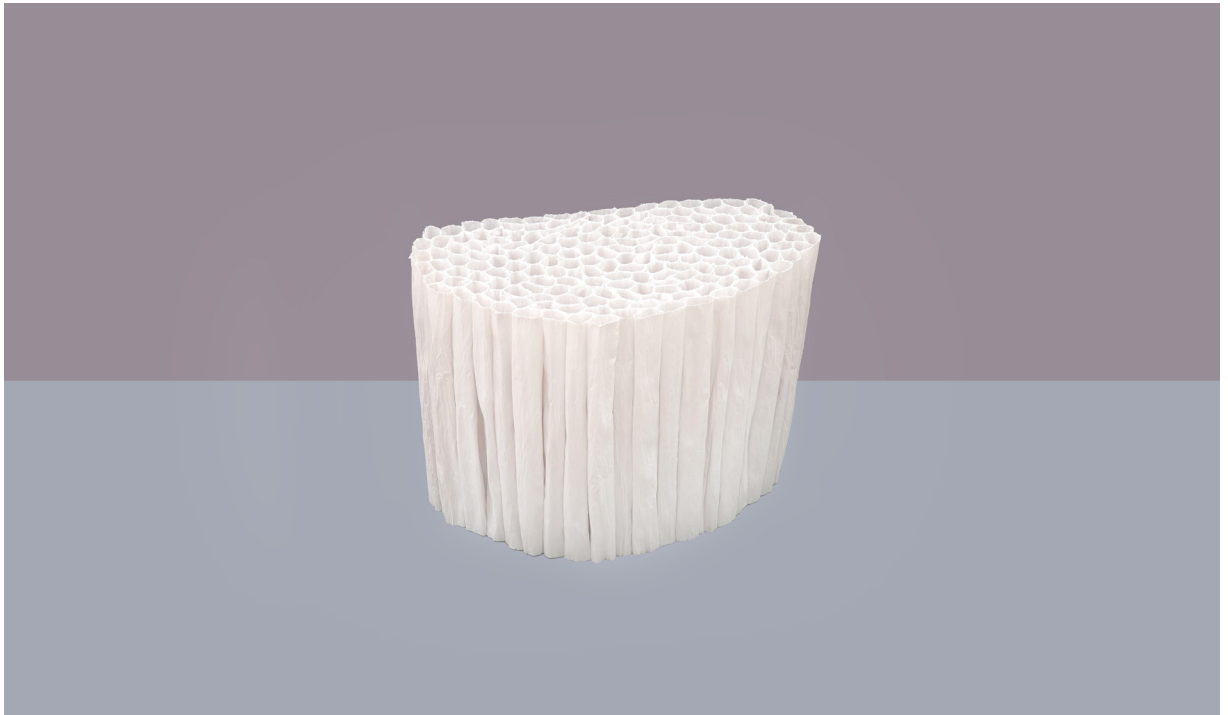
2023

Tracing paper, rice glue

35 x 60 x 45 cm

Unique piece in a random collection

Signed and dated by the artist



Original Paper Pleats

Low side board with cushion

2023

Tracing paper, rice glue

89 x 32 x 60,5 cm

Unique piece in a random collection

Signed and dated by the artist



Original Paper Pleats

Low stool with cushion

2023

Tracing paper, rice glue

45 x 033 cm

Unique piece in a random collection

Signed and dated by the artist



Original Paper Pleats

Sculptural bench or Low table
2022
Tracing paper, rice glue
35 x 130 x 29 cm
Unique piece in a random collection
Signed and dated by the artist





Original Paper Pleats

Console

2022

Tracing paper, rice glue

91 X 140 X 41 cm

Unique piece in a random collection

Signed and dated by the artist



Original Paper Pleats

Small coffee table

2021

Tracing paper, rice glue

ø 65 x 60 cm

Unique piece in a random collection

Signed and dated by the artist



Original Paper Pleats

Low stool with cushion or Low side table
2021
Tracing paper, rice glue
ø32 x 50 cm
Unique piece in a random collection
Signed and dated by the artist



Original Paper Pleats

Low stool or Low side table
2021
Tracing paper, rice glue
ø32 x 45 cm
Unique piece in a random collection
Signed and dated by the artist



Original Paper Pleats

High stool or High side table
2021
Tracing paper, rice glue
ø32 x 60 cm
Unique piece in a random collection
Signed and dated by the artist

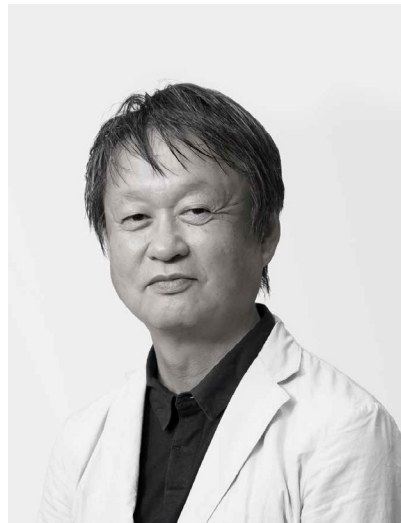




Naoto & Pao

Exploring the Essence of Paper and Urushi

In conversation with Lise Coirier
All Photos by Studio Mass, courtesy of the Artist & Spazio Nobile



1 — Pao Hui Kao
2 — Naoto Fukasawa



Dive into a fascinating conversation between Japanese mentor Naoto Fukasawa and Taiwanese emerging artist designer Pao Hui Kao, where they unearth the profound connection between paper, Urushi, and nature. Guided by Lise Coirier, this exchange paints a vivid picture of the age-old crafts taking on contemporary artistic and design interpretations. Through their words, Naoto and Pao advocate for re-aligning with the lunar calendar – a tradition that the West has lost touch with, yet, promises a stronger bond with our roots and nature.

Lise Coirier (Lise): As a 2022 LOEWE FOUNDATION Craft Prize jury member, what were your initial thoughts on Pao's Black Urushi Paper Pleats Bench?

Naoto Fukasawa (Naoto): The first thing that struck me was its lightness. At a glance, I didn't even realize it was a bench. It felt fragile yet had a surprising sturdiness. Pao, in my view, is brilliantly

exploring paper's potential – not just as a craft but also as an art form.

Pao Hui Kao (Pao): Hearing you describe my work is an absolute honor. Thank you. **Naoto:** Your creations shouldn't be confined to labels like art, design, or craft. They exude beauty and showcase extensive material research, with each piece narrating its own expressive story.

Lise: Naoto, can you share your connection with paper in some of your recent projects?

Naoto: Sure. I've been collaborating with traditional paper companies in Japan, crafting innovative designs, like a paper door, shoji. It's a fusion of thin wood and paper that offers translucency, allowing light to filter through. I've also developed a range of bags using the non-wrinkle tensional paper, under the brand S-I-W-A (Siva means wrinkle). It's a testament to repurposing existing technology to serve contemporary needs.

Lise: Can you discuss some of the projects you've been involved in, especially your collaboration with companies like Muji, which has a notable emphasis on paper products?

Naoto: Paper is inherently flat, and historically, it's a natural material. Muji is revisiting that original, eco-friendly essence. Kraft paper, which is both commonplace and synonymous with Muji's brand identity, connects people to nature because of its organic feel, setting it apart from man-made materials. Its distinct colour has also become emblematic of Muji's brand.

Lise: Does Muji use washi paper?

Naoto: Not exactly. While washi is handcrafted, Muji, being a large-scale producer, finds it challenging to source handcrafted washi in the quantities they require. We hold a deep appreciation for artisanal methods and always strive to imbue our industrial products with that natural touch.



3-5 — *Black and Red Urushi Paper Plates* Sculptural Furniture Collections and details, Tracing paper, rice glue, Urushi lacquer, red pigment, 2021, unique pieces in a random collection, signed and dated by the artist designer

LiSe: Would you say that paper is a core element in your design philosophy?

Naoto: Undoubtedly, I gravitates towards paper, wood, and other natural materials – avoiding plastic. I favor designs that exude a rustic and organic charm.

Pao: Some view paper as fragile and transient – it can warp in humidity and age over time. Given these characteristics, why do you think paper remains an integral part of our daily existence?

Naoto: Beyond mere functionality, paper brings a sense of tranquility and closeness to nature. Though seemingly counterintuitive, even in high-tech domains, there's room for paper. Consider airplanes that once had paper components or traditional Japanese umbrellas (*Wagasa*) crafted from bamboo and paper. In Kyoto, these umbrellas are still in use. Made from materials like wash,

bamboo, wood, linseed oil, and lacquer, they undergo an "oiling" process for waterproofing (*Abura-Hiko*), and depending on the weather, their drying time varies. From daily essentials to fashion statements, *Wagasa* highlight the unique and enduring tradition of Japan.

Pao: My respect for Urushi workmanship has deepened, especially after my residency in Aizu Wakamatsu. There, I spent three months under the guidance of an Urushi craft master and came to realize the complexity of its application. After returning to the Netherlands, my journey with Urushi took a different turn. Instead of strictly adhering to traditional methods, I introduced an element of "playfulness". When something didn't turn out as expected, rather than sanding it away, I sought to communicate with the imperfections, sometimes even adjusting my

original plan for that piece. I understand that some purists in the traditional Urushi community might find my approach irreverent. However, my aim is to explore new possibilities for this incredible material. I'm curious about your perspective, Naoto. How do you strike a balance between creative reinvention and preserving a traditional craft?

Naoto: I've always seen Urushi as more than just a decorative layer for objects. It's extensively used in architectural and furniture contexts as well. However, when applied over wood, it doesn't ensure permanence, given the nature of the wood. Urushi serves as a protective layer, akin to lacquer. What sets it apart is its natural origin, making it an intriguing invention from nature. As we move forward, there's a need to prioritize such natural alternatives over synthetic coatings.



LiSe: And let's not forget the scarcity of Urushi. It's only becoming more expensive as time progresses.

Naoto: True. Its scarcity is intrinsically tied to its traditional harvesting methods. But there's potential. If we could innovate in terms of manufacturing or expand its cultivation, not only could we have more of it, but possibly even enhance its quality.

LiSe: Given the need, should we consider planting more Urushi trees, perhaps even an entire forest in the Netherlands? Is this viable, or is the Urushi tree unique to Japan? Could we potentially introduce it to Europe?

Pao: It's an interesting idea. First, we would need to review importation regulations. As I understand it, the Urushi tree thrives best in its native environment. However, I'm open to experimenting with growing the tree here in Holland.

Naoto: Your approach to using Urushi differs from traditional methods. I'm curious, why did you choose to work with Urushi?

Pao: Many collectors often posed this question. Initially, I worked solely with paper. Some would ask, "If I spill water or coffee on the paper, is there a protective layer?" I've always been against using chemical coatings. My fascination with Urushi began when I spent three months in Aizu Wakamatsu, apprenticing under an Urushi master. I learned everything from tree cultivation to its application. It became clear that Urushi should be the protective layer for my paper works.

Despite its challenges, like potential allergies, the material intrigued me. The symbiotic relationship between paper and Urushi became evident as I delved deeper; both are derived from trees. My paper pieces emphasize the wrinkles and textures created by the fibers, showcasing the transformation of paper into a robust material. Applying Urushi not only added protection but also accentuated these wrinkles. The two materials complement each other beautifully. My *Lacquer Leaf Tray* I have created for my "25 Seasons" Solo Show at Spazio Nobile, are a testament to this union. The design on the tray reveals the original paper wrinkles, enhanced by multiple layers of Urushi. While traditional craftsmen might manipulate the surface to create patterns, the patterns in my work are innate to the paper.

While designers often micromanage every detail, I prefer letting the materials breathe and express themselves. It's why I'm in love with Urushi and paper; they offer endless possibilities. With Urushi,





6



10

6-14 — Into the process of the Paper Pleats Series



7



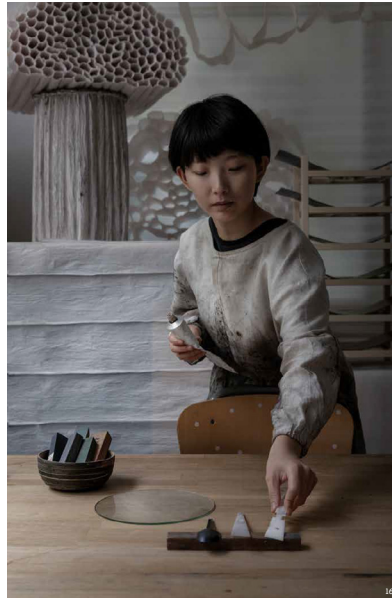
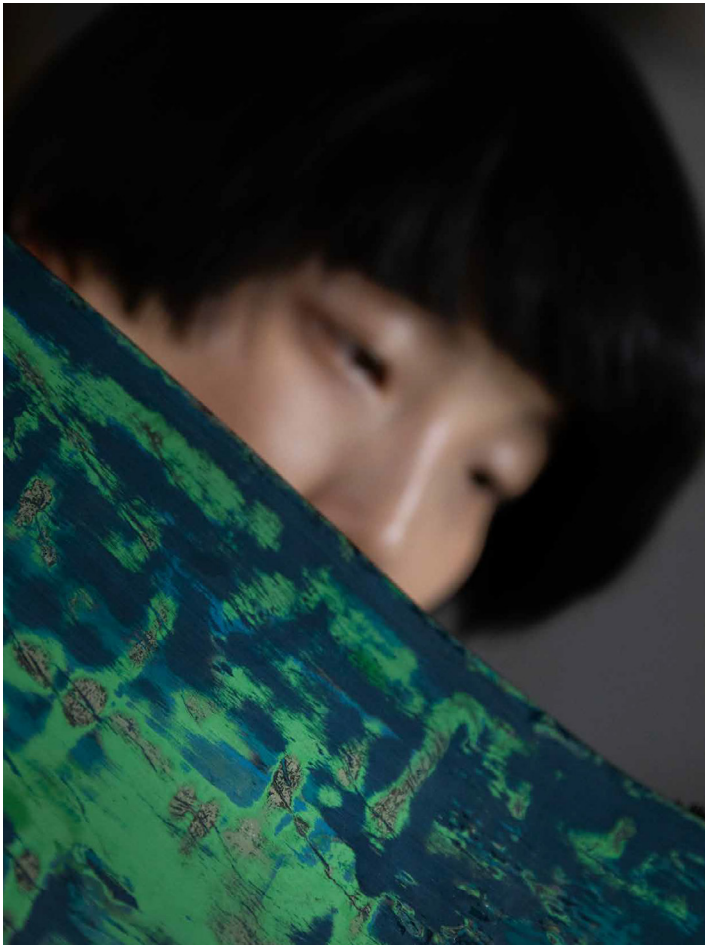
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11



12



15-26 — Into the process of the Blue in Green Urushi Lacquer Leaf at Pao's Studio in Eindhoven, 2013

factors like the weather play a significant role, influencing the wrinkles on the paper. It's unpredictable, and many might find it daunting since you can't control these elements. But I embrace this unpredictability. I don't dominate the materials; I feel I mentor them, guiding their synergy. Traditionally, Urushi was used on wood or glass. Applying it on paper is unorthodox, perhaps influenced by past perceptions about paper's longevity. What's your take on merging Urushi and

paper in contemporary times? Do you feel I am challenging Japanese traditions in this way?
Naoto: Your approach feels like a fresh take on Urushi technology. Traditional Urushi painting has specific techniques to coat surfaces evenly, like in Kiashu Lacquerware where one craftsman prepares the wood base while another applies the Urushi. Your method of letting Urushi absorb into paper, making it intrinsic to the piece, is groundbreaking.

Pao: It's fascinating. During my time in Aizu Wakamatsu, I observed the traditional wood base and Urushi application. But it's only now, after this discussion, that I see how I've melded both roles. Is it maybe too ambitious?
Naoto: The Loewe Craft Prize champions the marriage of tradition with innovation, and you've captured its essence. It's not about pigeonholing craftsmen into categories. It's about leveraging traditional materials to enhance contemporary life. Your position as a finalist is testament to your singular vision and skill.

Lise: Given the varying weather conditions in Europe, is it challenging to use these materials?

Pao: Absolutely, working with Urushi in Europe presents unique challenges. The climate here, especially considering the ongoing shifts due to climate change, is vastly different from Asia, places like Japan or Taiwan. The conditions can sometimes be less than ideal, causing unexpected results. Yet, I continually experiment and adapt because I genuinely love the process. While the weather might occasionally be unfavorable, leading to results I didn't initially envision, I use these surprises as opportunities to innovate and push boundaries.

Naoto: When working with Urushi, how do you envision its multifaceted nature - the colours, layers, and thickness? It seems like there is a depth of beauty in this one material.

Pao: You're right. My unique approach involves applying Urushi solely to paper. Paper feels alive, always evolving. I could use chemicals to stabilize it, but I prefer to preserve its organic quality. Each time I layer Urushi onto paper, it undergoes a transformation. This process is a dialogue between the paper and Urushi. Probably, the interaction between these two materials would likely be less dramatic in Taiwan or Japan. The European climate environment intensifies the challenge, which I find enthralling. Here, I'm exploring the possibilities of a traditional Asian material in a totally new European context.

Naoto: Urushi isn't just for artistic pieces; it has practical applications in construction and furniture. However, when applied to wood, it doesn't last indefinitely. It acts as a protective layer, similar to lacquer, but it's entirely natural. As we move forward, there seems to be a trend towards using more natural coatings instead of synthetic ones.

Naoto: How do you procure Urushi in The Netherlands?



12-25 — Into the process of the *Blue in Green Urushi Lacquer Leaf* at Pao's Studio in Eindhoven, 2023

Following pages:

26-27 — Pao Hui Kao, *Urushi Lacquer Leaf Blue in Green*, Paper, rice glue, Urushi lacquer, red pigment, unique piece in a random collection, signed at the back by the artist, 2023

28 — Pao Hui Kao, *Urushi Lacquer Leaf Purple Red*, Paper, rice glue, Urushi lacquer, red and purple pigment, unique piece in a random collection, signed at the back by the artist, 2023

Pao: [Laughs] That's a challenge in itself. Fortunately, I have connections in Taiwan, who liaise with contacts in Japan. They ship the Urushi to Taiwan, from where it then makes its way to The Netherlands. I'm lucky to have such supportive friends.

Lise: Pao, considering your solo show at Spazio Nobile, there's been interest in incorporating themes from the Lunar Calendar, particularly the concept of the 24 Seasons. Naoto, do you ever intertwine this with your work or life?

Naoto: The notion that humans are a part of nature is encapsulated in calendars, whether lunar or modern. They significantly influence our psyche and daily rhythms. Although it might seem tangential to today's topic, I feel that modern humans often forget their intrinsic connection to nature, focusing more on individualism and detachment. By embracing nature,

we can use its resources more sustainably without waste. It's crucial to discern what truly matters and create beauty from that foundation in our lives.

Lise: Pao has now established herself in Eindhoven, in the Western world. Given her research-based work that's deeply rooted in Asian culture, what advice would you offer her about reintroducing this work to Asia? How can she convey its beauty and essence back to its origins?

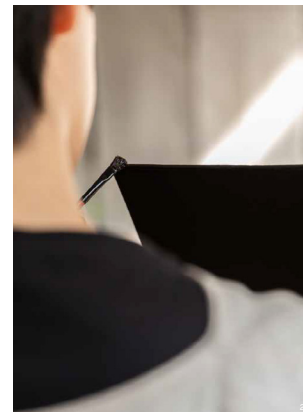
Naoto: This trend of blending cultures is already evident globally. I've designed a considerable amount of wooden furniture, notably chairs, which we export to Europe, primarily through The Netherlands. Sometimes, distributors inquire whether we utilize local materials or import them. When we mention that our wood is sourced internationally, certain distributors express a preference for

local materials. This sentiment is quite prominent, and it's not exclusive to furniture – it's seen in traditional crafts like Urushi as well.

For Pao, being in the Netherlands and drawing upon her Asian heritage provides a unique opportunity. It allows her to reimagine – and "imagine" something new. In ancient cultures, the sum of experiences and influences doesn't simply add up; it multiplies. Pao's potential lies in her ability to expand her imagination beyond traditional boundaries. ♦

Pao Hui Kao, *25 Seasons*, Solo Show, Spazio Nobile, Brussels, Belgium, 23.11.2024-17.2.2024

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Pao Hui Kao

Au plus profond de la matière */Deep in the Material*

Par /by Oscar Duboř
All photographs, courtesy of the Artist & Spazio Nobile



Pao Hui Kao

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© Roberto Nigamini, courtesy of the Artist & Spazio Nobile

1 - Page suivante / following page — Pao Hui Kao, Red Urushi Paper Pleats High & Low, papier calque, colle de riz, peinture de laque Urushi et détail / tracing paper, rice glue, Urushi lacquer paint and close up. Photos Studio Maguelon, courtesy of the Artist & Spazio Nobile
2 — Pao Hui Kao, Red Urushi Paper Pleats Side Board, papier calque, colle de riz, peinture de laque Urushi et détail / tracing paper, rice glue, Urushi lacquer paint

Pao Hui Kao raconte que, lorsqu'elle était étudiante à Taiwan, la Design Academy Eindhoven pointait en tête de liste des écoles les plus désirées par les jeunes designers asiatiques en herbe. Plus ouverte, plus expérimentale, plus cool, la célèbre université, qui a vu passer sur ses bancs Lex Pott, Sabine Marcelis, Wiekil Somers et tant d'autres, avait tout pour séduire la jeune Pao, déjà un peu frustrée par l'apprentissage très scolaire proposé dans son Bachelor en Industrial Design. «À l'université, chaque projet devait se faire selon un ordre d'étapes établi et tout était très compartimenté: semaine après semaine, on dessinait une télévision, puis une automobile, etc. En revanche, à Eindhoven il fallait s'organiser de manière autonome et surtout on nous poussait à sentir la matière avec nos mains pour mieux l'explorer. L'individualité est vraiment encouragée à Eindhoven, en partant du principe qu'il vaut toujours mieux de produire quelque chose par nos propres moyens. Lorsque je crée, je veux utiliser mes mains et même si je dois m'appuyer sur des machines, je veux pouvoir les maîtriser moi-même»: explique-t-elle.

■ Pao Hui Kao tells that when she was a student in Taiwan, the Design Academy Eindhoven topped the list of most desirable schools for budding young Asian designers. More open, more experimental, cooler: the famous university, through whose doors have passed Lex Pott, Sabine Marcelis, Wiekil Somers and so many others, had everything to seduce the young Pao, who was already a bit frustrated by the very academic experience her Bachelor's in Industrial Design had offered. "At university, every project had to be done according to an established order of steps, and everything was very compartmentalised. Week after week, we drew a television, then a car, etc. On the other hand, in Eindhoven we had to organise ourselves independently, and above all we were pushed to feel the material with our hands to better explore it. Individuality is really encouraged in Eindhoven, based on the principle that it is always better to produce something on our own. When I create, I want to use my hands and even when I must rely on machines, I want to be able to master them myself," she explains.

ire la sensibilité des projets révélés par Spazio leplus deux ans maintenant, Pao Hui Kao a su sur du Master en Contextual Design empo- à la ville néerlandaise, sans pour autant renier aspects de son éducation asiatique. Bien plus fect de mode politiquement correct, la ques- 'impact environnemental demeure centrale et fans sa méthode de travail qui ne tolère aucun recyclable. Pas de colle chimique, pas de e, ni de résine, le défi peut paraître audacieux, eune designer a choisi de tourner la contrainte , allant jusqu'à l'ériger au rang de manifeste: *e projet est une question de limitation: comment venir du procédé le plus simple possible?». Un e qui ressemble presque à une forme d'accès- r aux sources qui a notamment amené Pao Hui avaller le papier, ce matériau tellement omni- dans notre quotidien que l'on s'en aperçoit à Ce même matériau qui ne devait surtout pas rès de l'eau sous peine de s'abîmer, comme on atume de le rappeler à la petite Pao lorsqu'elle fant. Raison de plus pour le designer de ques- croyances, en mouillant plusieurs types de ne fois, puis deux, puis trois et ainsi de suite différents liquides jusqu'à trouver les bons élé- *« Dès que je suis en mesure de contrôler quelque ta devient un outil... comme dans un labora- us explique Pao Hui Kao. Ainsi c'est toujours la de la matière qui détermine la forme et je ne sais quoi ça va ressembler. Chaque jour je découvre chose de nouveau et je parviens à voir la beauté la es ne verraient qu'une vilaine erreur».* L'urgence, la beauté ce sont les deux séries, *Yeats Original Q Urushi* et *Urushi Lacquer* sues de cette longue phase d'expérimenta- quelle se sont ajoutées aussi la colle de riz et Urushi. Autant de composantes à la fois rudi- es et sophistiquées, dont les racines remontent rs siècles: *« C'est vrai que je me sers de maté- l'usage est très ancien, mais je veux aussi créer chose de contemporaine. Lors de ma résidence à ma en 2019 pour apprendre la technique Urushi, sé que certains artisans la pratiquaient depuis six ons et que personne ne faisait plus appel à eux- nement donner à cette laque un nouvel usage pour tuer la tradition? En lui trouvant une applica- érente ».* Et à chaque application correspond a différent, tantôt vaporeux comme le sont ses *leats*, tantôt plus consistant, à l'image de ses *Paper Leafs* rigidifiés par les couches successives- laque. Deux facettes complémentaires d'une scherche qui va s'étendre sur le chemin de la , puisque Pao Hui Kao a choisi d'intégrer les s dans son processus, donnant lieu à un solo évu en mars chez Spazio Nobile. D'abord le uis le noir et ainsi de suite, jusqu'à suivre des 24 saisons qui complètent le calendrier *Taijō reki*, connu depuis trois millénaires à en Chine, au Japon ou encore en Corée. *« Je suis sûr que ce n'est pas qu'une affaire de colorama, l'explique le designer: « Chaque saison corres- idement à une étape dans le déroulement de**

Considering the sensitivity of the projects exhibited with Spazio Nobile for two years now, Pao Hui Kao was indeed well able to make the most of her Master's in Contextual Design while tucked away in the Dutch city, without disavowing certain aspects of her Asian education. Much more than a politically correct fad, the issue of environmental impact remains central and sincere in her way of working, which does not tolerate any non-recyclable waste. No chemical glues, no plastics, no resins... the challenge may seem audacious, but the young designer has chosen to turn the constraints into an asset, going so far as to raise it to the rank of a manifesto: "Each project is a question of limitations: how to create from the simplest process possible?" It's a method that resembles almost a form of asceticism, a return to basics that in particular has led Pao Hui Kao to work with paper: a material so ubiquitous in our daily lives that we hardly notice it. A material that above all must be kept away from water or risk damage, as little Pao was repeatedly reminded when she was a child. All the more reason for the designer to question that belief, by wetting several types of paper once, then twice, then three times and so on depending on the different liquids, until she finds the right elements: "As soon as I can control something, it becomes a tool... like in a laboratory," explains Pao Hui Kao. "Thus, it is always the reaction of the material that determines the shape, and I never know what it's going to look like. Every day I discover something new, and I come to see beauty where others would only see a nasty mistake."

Here, the beauty is in her two series *Paper Pleats Original Q Urushi* and *Urushi Lacquer Leaf*, both resulting from this long phase of experimentation to which rice glue and Urushi lacquer have also been added. So many components that are both rudimentary and sophisticated, going back centuries: "It's true that I work with materials that have been used for a very long time, but I also want to create something contemporary. During my residency in Fukushima in 2019 to learn the Urushi technique, I realised that some artisans have been practicing it for six generations, yet no one turns to them anymore. So how to give this lacquer a new use in order to perpetuate the tradition? By finding a different application for it." And each application results in a different outcome, sometimes misty like the *Paper Pleats*, sometimes more solid like the *Paper Leafs* trays stiffened by successive layers of lacquer. Two complementary facets of a same research that will extend to colour, as Pao Hui Kao has chosen to integrate pigments into her process, giving rise to a solo show scheduled for March 2023 at Spazio Nobile. First red, then black, and so on, following the course of the 24 seasons that complete the *Taijō reki* solar calendar, known for three millennia in Taiwan, China, Japan and Korea.

But of course, it's not just a matter of colour ranges, as the designer explains: "Each season corresponds to a stage in the course of the year, linked to the environment, the climate and the changing landscapes. In the same way, temporality is central to my practice of Urushi, as I observe how the sunlight and



4 — Pao Hui Kao dans son atelier à Eindhoven, Pays-Bas / in her workshop in Eindhoven, The Netherlands
En arrière-plan / In the background: Green Urushi Lacquer Leaf / Golden Leaf Kintsugi Coll. Fondation Eugéssian, Brussels, BE
5 — Pao Hui Kao, Black Urushi Paper Pleats Bench, finaliste /finalist, Loewe Craft Prize 2022, Collection Galila Barzilai Hollander / Fondatie Brussels, BE





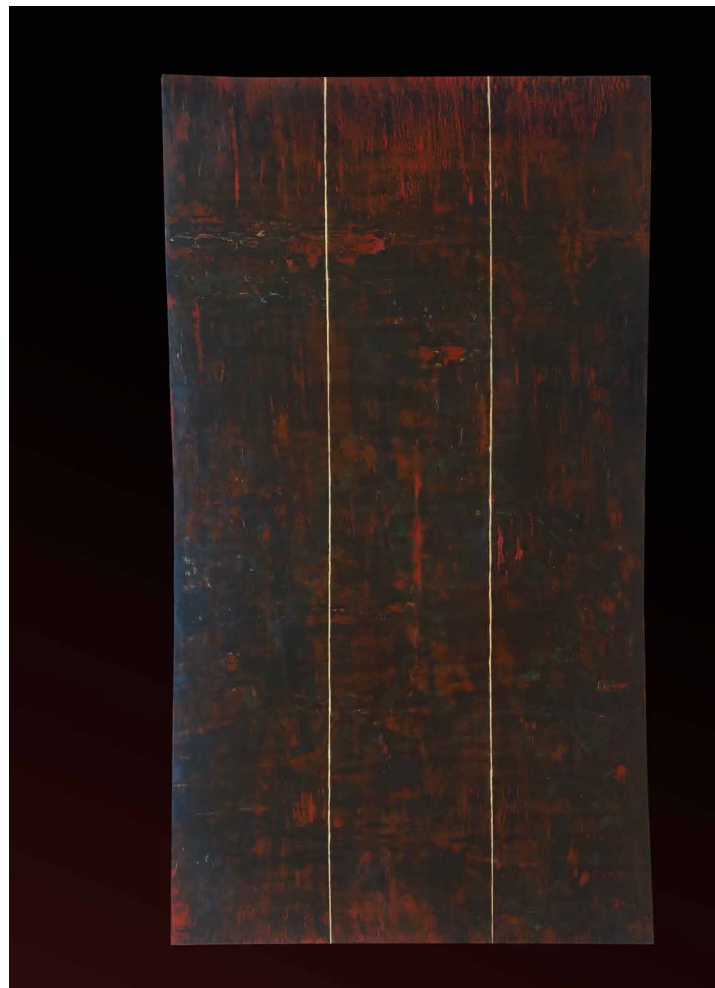
6. *Urushi Lacquer Leaf*, installation murale contemplative à base de papier, peinture de laque Urushi non polie, kintsugi à la feuille d'or, collection privée, GB
7. *Urushi lacquer painting*, unpolished, golden leaf kintsugi and detail, private collection, UK

née à l'environnement, au climat et aux paysages gent. De la même manière, la question de la température centrale dans ma pratique de l'Urushi puise comment la lumière du soleil et sa température sur chaque couche de laque et notamment sur la laque. D'où l'idée de cette subtile recherche chromatique. Pao Hui Kao a voulu mettre en relation les œuvres de Van Gogh : lui était Néerlandais et Eindhoven, il était inspiré par la peinture des Pays-Bas, elle a appris la laque auprès d'eux, les corrélations enchevêtrées et font sens. Si les 24 couleurs de Van Gogh : jour sous l'égide du maître, la 25^e sera donc celle de Pao, créée expressément par et pour elle afin de créer ce paysage d'objets en papier comme une œuvre de Van Gogh. Ou comment transcender les origines ancestrales et l'héritage des maîtres du passé pour créer une esthétique totalement inattendue et contemporaine, capable d'écrire une page des arts de demain qui était restée nichée dans les origines d'une matière si élémentaire. D'ailleurs, elle s'en étonnerait presque : « Je crois qu'en fait, elle ne s'en étonnerait pas car il est très subtil : il y a beaucoup de détails qui surgissent au fur et à mesure que l'œil se rapproche ». Oui, de toute évidence à Eindhoven Pao Hui Kao a été à bonne école. ✦

temperature effect each layer of lacquer, particularly the colour.⁹ Hence the idea of the subtle chromatic research, which Pao Hui Kao wanted to connect to the world of Van Gogh: he was Dutch and she lives in Eindhoven; he was inspired by Japanese painting, she learned lacquer work from them... the correlations become entangled and make sense. While the 24 colours emerge under the aegis of the master, the 25th will therefore be that of Pao, created expressly by and for her in order to complete this landscape of paper objects like an ode to Van Gogh. Or how to transcend the most ancestral origins and the heritage of past masters in order to draw from it a totally unexpected and resolutely modern aesthetic, capable of writing a page in the decorative arts of tomorrow, which had remained nested in the very essence of a matter so elementary. Indeed, she would be almost surprised: "I think my work actually surprises because it is very subtle: there are a lot of details that emerge as the eye gets closer." Yes, it seems clear that Eindhoven was the right school for Pao Hui Kao. ✦

Season XXV. Pao Hui Kao. Solo Show. 25 Seasons.
Spazio Mobile Gallery, Bruxelles / Brussels,
BE. 2-3-14.5.2023

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Info

Season XXVIII

25 Seasons

Pao Hui Kao, Solo Show

24.11.2023 - 17.3.2024

Vernissage

23.11.2023 - 18-21.00

In the presence of the artist

Sunday Brunches

26.11.2023

17.3.2024



Save the date

Ceramic Art Brussels
Tour & Taxis
Group Show
25-28.1.2024

NOMAD St Moritz
Hotel Eden
Group Show
22 - 25.2.2024

Spazio Nobile Gallery
Åsa Jungnelius, Solo Show
22.3 - 16.6.2024
Vernissage 21.3.2024

PAD Paris
Les Tuileries
Group Show
3-7.4.2024

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When art historians Lise Coirier and Gian Giuseppe Simeone opened Spazio Nobile in 2016 in the lively and cosmopolitan Brugmann Square area of Brussels, they combined their passions for design and art history, establishing a scholarly dialogue between contemporary applied arts, design and photography. With no boundaries between disciplines, visual arts dialogue with fine arts. Having assembled a collection of unique pieces, limited editions and installations that are both experimental and artistic, with a particular sensitivity for all things related to nature and minerality, the gallery organises five exhibitions and events each year in art and heritage venues (Maison Louis Carré, Yvelines, France, arch. Alvar Aalto; Ancienne Nonciature, Grand Sablon; Lempertz (former Leroy Frères gallery), Brussels, etc). Spazio Nobile also participates in Belgian and international fairs such as Art Brussels, Luxembourg Art Week, Art on Paper, Collectible Design Fair, PAD Paris and PAD London, Design Miami/Basel, NÔMAD Capri / Saint Moritz, Unique Design Shanghai, etc. The gallery celebrates its 7th anniversary in 2023 and represents some twenty emerging and internationally renowned artists and designers, while promoting excellent craftsmanship and the cultures of East and West. Spazio Nobile also publishes TLMag True Living of Art & Design, created by Lise Coirier in 2008; through this bi-annual art and design magazine, available in print and online, the gallery shares its selection and its artistic and cultural commitment to collectible art and design. Spazio Nobile has been awarded the Homo Faber label of excellence and continues to explore its international project *Glass is Tomorrow*. In 2020, Spazio Nobile opened Spazio Nobile Studiolo, a permanent exhibition space, opposite the main gallery which is located on the beautiful floor of a 1920s house and the founders have extended the gallery experience to their villa in Tervuren, Spazio Nobile At Home.

SPAZIO NOBILE

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Contemporary Applied Arts, Design & Photography