

Eunhee Lee's show featuring the time-consuming Korean lacquerware craft also celebrates the beauty of repetition



# Why Ottchil demands patience

■ PARVATHI NAYAR

Eunhee Lee achieves a perfect marriage between beauty and function with her *ottchil* artefacts. Through the demanding techniques of the traditional Korean lacquerware, the Korean artist transforms utilitarian objects such as wooden bowls, cups and plates into elegant art pieces as seen in 'The Aesthetics of Waiting', an ongoing virtual exhibition. Commissioned by the InKo Centre in Chennai, it celebrates the exquisite simplicity of Lee's lacquerware. And its contemporary sensibilities.

**Art in the drying**  
Creating *ottchil* objects is a complex, time-consuming craft. Every

piece in the exhibition, including the simplest plate, has undergone over 30 creative processes that include applying thin coats of natural sap on to the wooden object, drying and sanding, repeated many times.

The complicated drying procedure, in precisely-controlled humidity and temperature, is

(Clockwise from below)  
Eunhee Lee and her  
art ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

essential. "If I rush... I may have to go back to the previous process, or to the very beginning!" says Lee, about the centuries-old art form.

Tedious? Not at all. It is this deep involvement in the act of creating that draws Lee

to her craft. The artist studied Industrial Design at Hong-Ik University College of Art, did a master's degree in furniture design, and worked as an industrial designer/lecturer for 20 years. But after realising she was "losing that sense of analogue touch" or missing out on the physical process of creating, Lee turned to the art of *ottchil* and *najeonchilgi* (nacre lacquerware). Achievements include the UNESCO Award for Excellence for Handicrafts in 2008 and showings at Maison & Objet in Paris and Museum für Lackkunst in Munster.

## Tilt and bloom

Her online show features works from two series whose titles 'Seum' and 'Pium' originate from Korean words. Seum, which means 'stand up', is expressed through objects that counter-intuitively have tilted silhouettes. Its sophisticated colour palette derives from the artist's "emotional balance, expressed in combination with the colour of wood".

The Pium series – meaning 'to bloom' – is based on capturing nature. The aesthetic here, in Lee's words, is "gorgeous but not extravagant, modest but not shabby".

*Ottchil* objects fashioned out of wood and lacquer are very durable. Lee emphasises, "I hope that my work will not only exist as a décor object, but rather become something precious that people can use and enjoy." This certainly points towards more sustainable ways of living for our use-and-throw plastic culture.

While Lee does take orders (routed through Inko Centre), they take about six months to process.

View it on Prism,  
InKo Centre's virtual  
gallery, at  
[inkocentre.org](http://inkocentre.org) until  
November 28.



MONDAY

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City <sup>Chennai</sup> Express

Exhibit

## Virtual exhibition

Prism InKo Centre's virtual gallery presents The Aesthetics of Waiting - an exhibition by Eunhee Lee Ottchil, a lacquerware craft artist till November 28. **Visit:** [https://www.inkocentre.org/Virtual\\_Connect\\_Infotainment.html](https://www.inkocentre.org/Virtual_Connect_Infotainment.html)

