

# The Craft Spirit

Hong Kong artist-designer and Loewe Foundation Craft Prize 2025 finalist Didi Ng Wing Yin's woodwork is a labour of love and intuition *By Madeleine Mak*



**H**ong Kong artist-designer Didi Ng Wing Yin doesn't just work with wood—he strives to bring the natural properties of the material back to life. Based in Helsinki, the industrial designer turned craftsman creates sculptural objects that blur the lines between the organic and the manmade. Take his Wood Feathers collection as an example: the range

of wall art and sculptures features intricate, feather-like carvings to remind us that the wood was once a living thing. In another display of experimental surface treatments, his Wood Pleats series uses planks of processed firewood to recreate the original grooved textures of a tree trunk.

Ng explains that he tries not to control or alter the natural material

too much. "The ideal situation is that the finished piece is 50 per cent done by me and 50 per cent done by the wood."

In February, Ng was named a finalist of the Loewe Foundation Craft Prize 2025. Established in 2016, the initiative celebrates artisans from around the globe who are championing contemporary craft practices. This year, 30 finalists were selected from a pool of over 4,600 submissions from 133 countries and regions. Alongside Ng were 12 other artists from Asia, including Vietnamese silk and lacquer painting artist Le Thuy; Japanese glass artist Rei Chikaoka; embroidery artisan Sumakshi Singh from India; and lacquerware artist Fang Liang from mainland China. "I never thought that I would be recognised because there are so many great artists and craftsmen in the world," Ng tells *Tatler*. "This is encouragement for me to continue." Further encouragement will no doubt come from his participation in a group show, *The Nature of Wood*, that will open at Spazio Nobile Gallery in Brussels this November.

From May 30 to June 29, Ng's Pleats Vase No 7 (2023) will be exhibited at Madrid's Thyssen-Bornemisza National Museum alongside the works of other finalists. A panel of 13 leaders across design, architecture, journalism and museum curatorship will then select a winner who will take home €50,000. The recognition is powerful: textile artist Lin Fanglu, the 2021 winner, has been able to



**Clockwise, from top left:** *Pleats Vase No 7* (2023); *Details of Pleats Vase No 11* (2025); *Feather Branch III* (2024). **Opposite page:** Artist-designer Didi Ng Wing Yin



continue to advocate for craft on a global stage through solo exhibitions and at renowned art fairs like the Venice Design Biennial.

On top of this, Ng sees the competition as an important way to guarantee the future of the sort of work he does. “The world is moving so fast, but craft takes a lot of time,” Ng admits. “When more time is needed, it’s more expensive. This goes against the economic system and there are many traditions dying. The Loewe Foundation Craft Prize is not just protecting traditional craft, but they’re also looking [out] for the future of craft.”

Before he turned to woodworking, Ng was a furniture and interior designer in Hong Kong, though he did not particularly consider himself to be a creative person. But he felt dissatisfied with the rigidities of his

industry. “With industrial design, you want to achieve a very objective goal,” Ng says. “It’s not about self-improvement, it’s about designing something to be as perfect as it can be. I feel like it goes against what I currently believe.”

Ng’s perspective shifted while pursuing a master of arts in interior architecture from Finland’s Aalto University. A course in sculpture gave him a first taste of woodworking. A friend’s advice also helped flip the switch. “I was struggling to create a sculpture and he told me: don’t try so hard to think about what it’s going to be—let your subconscious drive your work and then interpret it,” he says. “This reverse process continues to help me with craft, design and life.”

Enthralled by the freedom that art offered him, Ng soon found himself pursuing more sculptural woodworked pieces. He then began to combine his former expertise in furniture design with his new-found passion. Today, his creations also include vases, benches, side tables, lighting and chairs.

According to Ng, the term “naturalness” best defines his growing body of woodwork. He’s quick to clarify, however, that this does not only speak to his respect for the material’s unique properties but also reflects the intuitive approach he uses to create each piece. Consider the *Pleats Vase*

*No 7* (2023). The piece started after Ng became fascinated with firewood—a common material specially cut and prepared for burning. He noticed that the wood’s grain patterns run straight, allowing him to recreate the natural texture of a tree’s surface when small, chopped-up pieces are put side-by-side and realigned by the grain. After further refinement, he discovered that he could also use this technique to form tubular shapes.

As for the piece’s red gradient hue, “It was quite intuitive,” Ng says. “I used Chinese ink, which is made out of carbon, and carbon comes from wood. Flower petals also have this gradient and I think that’s why I did this—it adds to the vase’s natural feeling.” This desire for natural-looking pieces is also why Ng keeps the shapes of his works simple. “At some point, [the piece] will lose its connection with the original material,” he says. “This is not what I want. Even if the form looks quite simple, the story [behind each piece] really isn’t.”

And in the spirit of encouraging other craftspeople to believe in their work, he has this advice. “Try to work as hard as you can and do the best that you can,” Ng says. “After you develop muscle memory, you’ll start to discover your own way of seeing things and create something that really touches your heart. For me, this is the spirit of craft.”