

Introduction

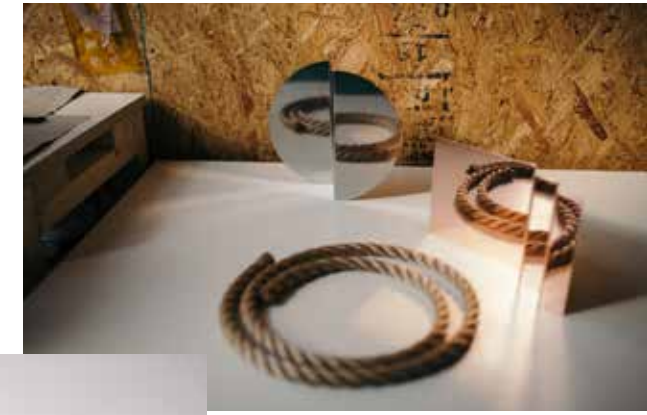
The Work Catalogue highlights outstanding individuals and projects in the city for their accomplishments and industry endeavors. In conjunction with our online features, this section of the magazine is our archive of the growth in Detroit.



NINA CHO *is* A DETROIT-BASED ARTIST *and* DESIGNER, WHOSE WORK *is* INFORMED *by* HER HERITAGE. TO HER, *the* AESTHETIC *of* EMPTINESS IS *a* TRADITIONAL KOREAN AESTHETIC; RESPECTING THE EMPTINESS *is as* IMPORTANT *as* RESPECTING *the* OBJECT ITSELF, *and* REALIZING *the* BEAUTY *of the* VOID *and the* SPIRIT *of the* SPACE COMPLETES *the* PIECE. CHO'S WORK FOCUSES *on* REDUCTIVE FORMS *that* MELD *the* ART OBJECT *with* PRACTICALNESS. TO CHO, *to* SIMPLIFY *the* FORM *is* *to* DISTILL *it to its* BASIC ESSENCE: SHAPES, COLORS, *and* MATERIAL.



left: BENT MIRROR, top right: BUSINESS CARD HOLDERS, bottom right: COULEE SIDE TABLE



Photos provided by artist



NINA CHO— CREATES OBJECTS *for PEOPLE to LIVE CLOSE to and INTERACT with*

Photos by Ali Lapetina
Artwork Photos provided by Artist



**How did you begin?
What did your interest in
furniture come from?**

I was handed a paint brush at a really young age, so from early on I was exploring my creativity. In my high school years, I discovered my interest in three dimensional structure and space. I started to explore the relationship of different scales between human beings, furniture, objects and architecture. I grew especially interested in creating objects for people to live close to and interact with.

**Did you undertake formal
training in college or within
the industry?**

I studied woodworking and furniture design as an undergrad at Hong Ik University in Seoul. The program was very different from an industrial design program. We were encouraged to tell our own story and taught to create unique pieces of furniture using our identity. That freedom in developing my own process led to a more personal approach to design. I create design that motivates people to interact with products in a fresh and inventive way.

I moved to the US shortly after graduating to study 3D Design at Cranbrook Academy of Art. I graduated last year with an MFA but I started building my career while I was at school. There were no credits and assignments at Cranbrook so I operated my studio space just like a professional independent designer. I focused and developed each aspect of my design process from dreaming up my inspiration or initial concept, prototyping small-scale to full-scale models, and producing the final piece. Taking responsibility for the whole design process helped me gain confidence in my creative thinking and helped prepare me as an independent designer.



Photo provided by artist

**What is the difference
between working in
Detroit as an artist
compared to working
in Korea?**

I often work with fabricators to create my final pieces, so communication is really important. I'd say the biggest difference for me working here was getting into the style of communication here. Detroit has a lot of great resources for fabrication and I've definitely enjoyed the strong local culture for craftsmanship.

**Would you want to
stay in Detroit?**

I can't predict where my future working place will be. I can say that I have a great affection and attachment to Detroit. I've been traveling abroad often this year for my work and I found myself missing Detroit. Even after living here for three years I'm still discovering new things that keep me engaged and inspired by being here.





**How would you describe your work?
What draws your style to be minimal?**

I think my personal background naturally led me to a minimal and simplified aesthetic. The aesthetic of emptiness is a Korean traditional aesthetic. In painting, the unpainted portion of a surface is as important as the part that's painted. It's about respecting the emptiness as much as the object. So through practicing the beauty of the void, so to speak, I respect not only the object itself but also the negative space that an object creates. The negative space doesn't signify a deficiency to me. An empty space poetically invites the air, users, surroundings, and the spirit of a space to complete the piece itself.

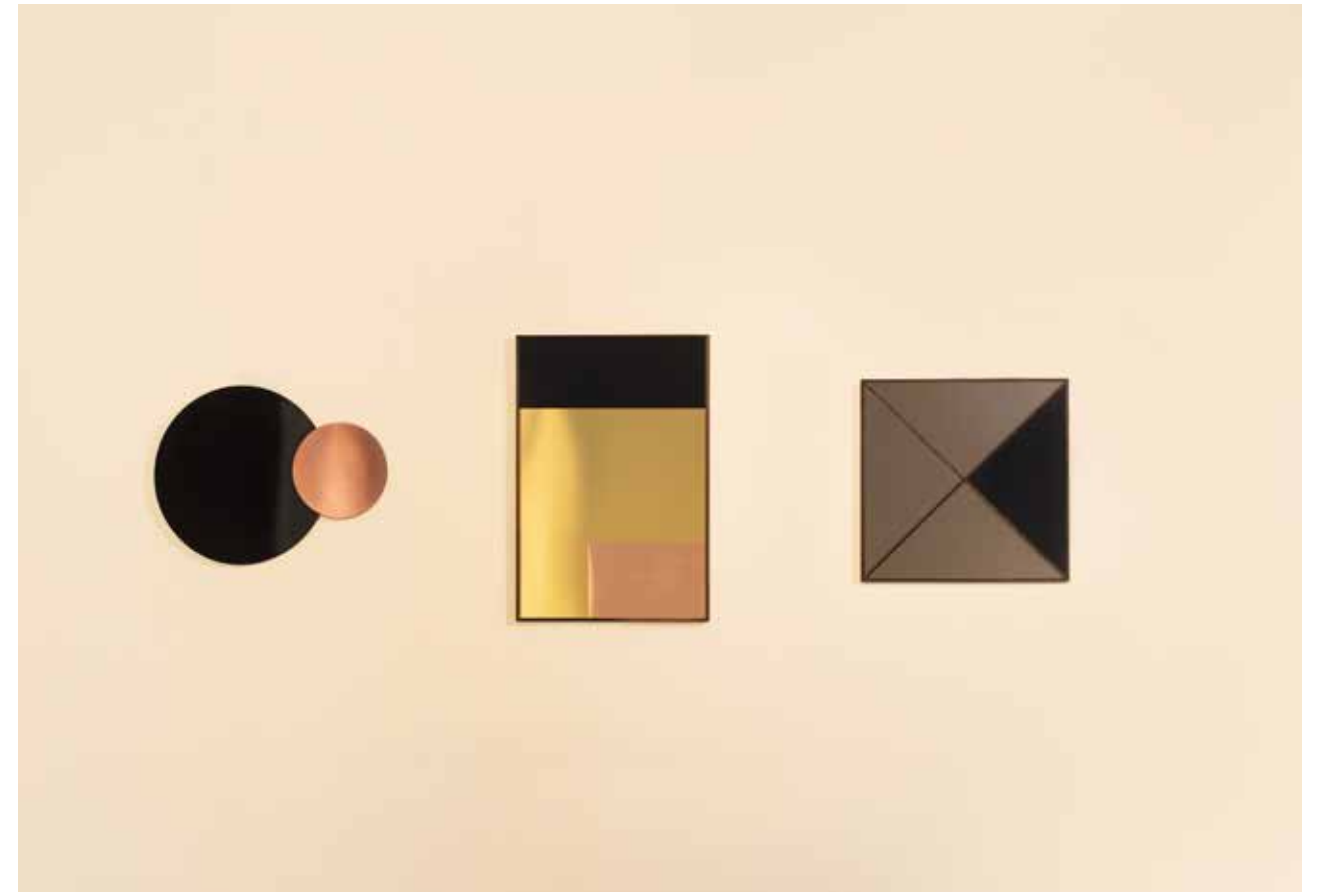
My recent work is focused on reductive forms that blur the line between an art object and a functional product. It's about creating form by distilling it to its most essential structure and to its most ideal function. By eliminating unnecessary factors and highlighting a singular material, I aim to simplify not only a form but the fabrication process as well. I pursue ideas of lightness and reduction. Color, shape, and material must be essential to the piece and complete the work.

What role does material play in your work? Some of the marble and shiny surfaces look fantastic —

I like to use basic materials such as wood, metal, marble and ceramic. My material varies with each project and I try to find the most suitable material for each design.

I worked with metals such as copper, brass and stainless steel. I explored planar materials like sheet metal to develop my ideas about folding and bending because it is such an elemental way to create a three-dimensional form. A thin gauge of metal represents this idea well and supports the aesthetic of emptiness by describing positive space and negative space. I finish the metal objects with a high polish. Their reflective surfaces create a relationship between the objects and their surrounding interior.

My latest project was a collection done in marble for a London design gallery called Matter of Stuff. The fabrication for it was done in Carrara, Italy, which is famous for its marble quarries. It was great to be where the raw marble is sourced and see how it's processed into an available material. I was continually in conversation with skilled experts there and that really enhanced my process on designing for marble. I'm interested in marble because each piece is inherently unique. I like the contrast of between its delicate colors with its solid, heavy weight. Using two heavy-weight pieces in complementing geometry can create a stable structure. Basic marble table-top slabs exist for steel or wood armature, so I wanted to create a new function for marble as not only armature and also the joint. There's an opportunity to talk about shape in a poetic way.



검이불루 화이불치

What inspires you?

Inspiration mostly comes from my daily experience - reading, traveling and a fruitful conversation with friends. I try to look at everything in a fresh way. This always inspires me to have new ideas.

Are there any other Detroiters who inform your style? What is your workspace like?

I'm fortunate to have a studio in a shared space that's run by a great artist and designer, Chris Schanck, who's also a Cranbrook graduate. Witnessing his practice has been a real motivation. I'm currently collaborating with a Detroit based company called Tait Design Co. We're working on a series of spinning tops. It's been truly inspiring and I'm excited to collaborate with more local creatives.

What challenges you?

Critical feedback. It challenges me but also informs how to be a better designer. Good criticism is always needed.

Do you think you have a motto that relates to your work?

검이불루 화이불치 (Korean) 儉而不陋 華而不侈 (Chinese) Gumleebullu Hwaleebulchi (English translation)

I don't really have a motto related to my work but I always like the old saying above. It's a very old Korean saying meaning - "It is simple/humble but not shabby, and impressive/glamorous but not extravagant." I admire this as an attitude and also as an aesthetic. ◆

