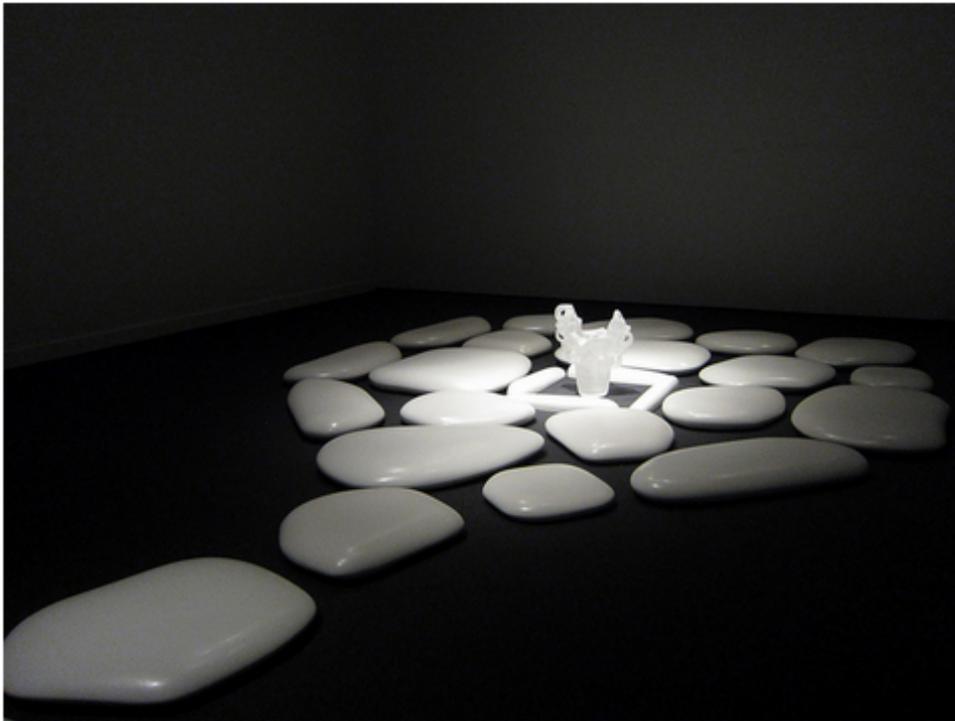


SEAN KELLY

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The Beginning Is the End: Mariko Mori at the Japan Society



Mariko Mori, "Flatstone" (2006), ceramic stones and acrylic vase (all photographs by the author for Hyperallergic)

It's been about a decade since Mariko Mori had a museum show in New York, and much has changed in the Japanese artist's work. No more is there a hyperreal Pop-y take on rampant commercialization where Mori decks herself out in aggressively vibrant costumes to be a sexy cyborg or other caricature of the collision of technology with consumerism. Now there is a focused contemplation that takes as much inspiration from the future as from the past in a sort of looping wormhole of time.

Rebirth: Recent Work by Mariko Mori currently at the Japan Society was planned by Mori with curator and Japan Society Gallery Director Miwako Tezuka specifically for the space, although the exhibition itself had its debut at London's [Royal Academy of Arts](#) last December. The earliest art in the exhibition dates to 2001, and each work is meant to be part of a journey that starts with death, then goes to birth, then a transcendental rebirth. "Her concept of the space for the exhibition is almost a Möbius ring," Tezuka told *Hyperallergic* during a visit to the exhibition. "Her understanding of time is not linear, so it's the past, present, and future all together."



Mariko Mori, "Tama I" (2011), epoxy with pearlescent finish in front of drawings by Mori

This movement of time is most effective at the beginning and the end, where first you enter a dark stage of death heavily inspired by ancient [Jōmon](#) culture (14,000–300 BCE). A beautiful Jōmon earthenware vase that curls up at the edges like the flames that it was fired from stands at one corner of the first gallery, while in the center is Mori's interpretation of a Jōmon stone formation meant to align with the winter solstice. An acrylic cast of a Jōmon mask looms above with one eye scratched out according to the culture's belief that nothing is symmetrical, everything has in it both death and life. Mori's piece, called "Primal Memory" (2004), seems to glow from within, but if you turned off the light the pile of lucite would look like nothing special, it's only with the angle of illumination that it comes to life. In the piece is this connection to the ancient rock formations that meant to capture something of the grand movement of the stars in some lowly stones. "She thinks of all of her work as a device," Tezuka said. "Here she wants to bring in materials that are from our time, in a way combining the past and the present."



Mariko Mori, "Transcircle 1.1" (2004), stone, corian, LED, real-time control system

Nearby, a ring of Celtic-influenced miniature monoliths called “Transcircle 1.1” (2004) has pastel LED hues that shift color based on the path of the planets, sometimes absorbing each other into new shades when their year-long trajectories around the sun align, and a beautiful installation called “Flatstone” mimics the structure of a Jōmon temple. Then the next stage takes the visitor into a rebirth through Buddhism enlightenment. From a window to the interior garden are two sculptures, one two birds entwined in flight and another a glowing ring over a waterfall. The little ring might not be the most visually compelling thing in the show, but it’s a hint at what is perhaps Mori’s most compelling current project.



Mariko Mori, “Ring” (2012), lucite, installed in the indoor garden of the Japan Society

A video in the exhibition shows the “Sun Pillar” which was installed in 2011 in Seven Light Bay on Miyako Island in the Okinawa Prefecture. The small tower will soon be joined by a “moon stone” that it will interact with through the light of the winter solstice. It’s just the first of six installations Mori hopes to place on all six habitable continents, with the next being a more giant version of that waterfall ring over a real waterfall in Brazil.

The final stage of the exhibition is a “White Hole” accessed through a specially installed spiral wall, where in the dark you see a convex glass projecting a complicated installation of LED lights into a subdued spiral of growing light. It’s an interpretation of what the opposite of a black hole would look like, which Mori calculated with Kyoto University astrophysicist Shin Mineshige, again mirroring the exhibition’s idea that even where there is this final annihilating death there is also the potential for a rebirth.

Overall, the exhibition does require a certain engagement from its viewer in order to take the “devices” of her art and use them for the purpose of viewing the past through a futuristic present. It’s all fairly theoretical and could seem a little New Age-y in a certain light, but as with that little jumble of lucite stones that starts the exhibition — and appears at first to be a heap of dull shapes on its own — with the right light the objects become something with a contemplative luminescence.



Mariko Mori, "White Hole" (2008-2010), acrylic and LED lights



Mariko Mori, "Miracle" (2001), eight Cibachrome prints, diachronic glass, salt, and crystals

[Rebirth: Recent Work by Mariko Mori](#) is at the Japan Society (333 East 47th Street, Midtown, Manhattan) through January 12.