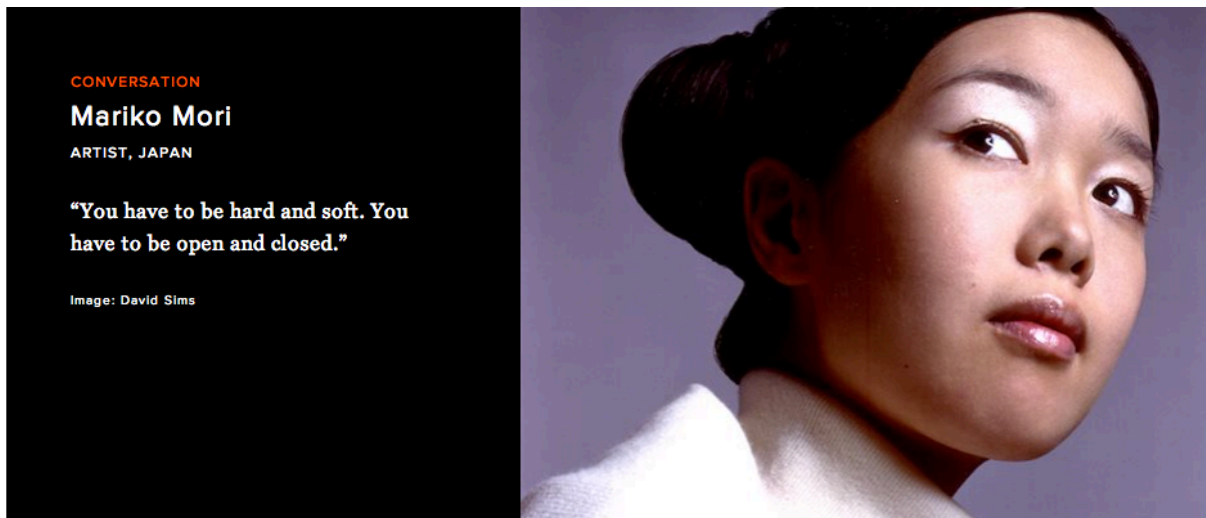


SEANKELLY

McDermott, Emily. "Conversation: Mariko Mori," *Ocula*, February 2014.

OCULA



She may be remembered as an '80s fashion model or more known for her Cindy Sherman-esque photographs in which she inserted herself into everyday scenes while dressed in futuristic costumes—think cyborg in a convenience store, metallic astronaut in the subway and blue plastic mermaid in a public swimming pool. But what is less recognized, however, is Japanese artist Mariko Mori's latest work that is now on display at the Japan Society in New York City.

The exhibition *Mariko Mori: Rebirth* focuses on Mori's most recent installations, which are rooted in natural wonders and prehistoric rituals. Compared to her bold photographs of the '90s, the sculptures, paintings and photos currently on view are placid and meditative. But despite these qualities and primeval inspirations, the pieces continue to reflect her futuristic qualities—ancient Celtic rock formations are reimaged by perfectly smooth, color changing stones made of translucent corian. Mori's work has been showcased globally beginning in the 1980s and she is regarded as one of the most prominent contemporary Japanese artists. In this conversation she speaks about her inspirations, research processes and upcoming projects.

I went to your exhibit in New York and it was so different from your older work. I thought we could talk a little bit about how you came across working with prehistoric cultures and this meditative sense rather than your previous work, which was very futuristic and a bit louder.

Between my very early photographic works and the exhibit at Japan Society there were several works, which are installation works. Between those works there is a work called *Dream Temple*, which is more like an architecture installation, and you go inside and look at computer graphic animation. So maybe if you only knew the early works, you see a big jump, but if you knew those works, then it's not such a big jump. It's not photographic work [anymore]. It's more abstract animation and more interactive work.

What led you to *Dream Temple*, to move toward this abstraction in your work?

Even through the earlier works, like the *Esoteric Cosmos* series and *Nirvana* video, I already started to talk about this philosophy in my work, and the *Cosmos* photographs and *Nirvana* video are more related to Shinto tradition. In a way, the exhibition in the Japan Society is trying to reach a more prehistoric culture, which is a much earlier period than Buddhism and Shintoism. I wanted to discover an idea, which is more universal, not only in Japan or Asia. Asia's prehistoric cultures are very universal when you compare them with one from Western Europe, [like] ancient Celtic, which has a more common idea. It's

before religion. It's before difference. I wanted to do more research on culture that our ancestors really shared in the world.

I thought the use of ancient Celtic traditions was really interesting considering you're from Japan and then moved to New York. Was there a specific reason you chose ancient Celtic traditions and culture?

First I started to do some fieldwork in Japan for Jomon culture, which was 1200 BC to 300 AD. At the same time I was doing the fieldwork I noticed there were very similar ideas to ancient Celts. I realized that the Northern Hemisphere shares the same time and concept of the winter solstice and how prehistoric people, their way of life, was deeply rooted in nature. It doesn't matter what place in the world, people were seeing this cycle of nature related to the star movement in the sky. It's very fundamental and primal to how humans were living at the time. I discovered the sense that modern society or contemporary society may not have inherited it enough from our remote ancestors. But these days I think we see that we cannot ignore the power of nature and how humans and our society are sustained by its richness. We cannot exist without natural resources that we have from the earth. Also, even though different things are happening, we are reliant on the earth. When something bad happens it looks like somewhere that it isn't related to our everyday life, but in fact we are sustained by nature and remote places. So I think this idea really came to my mind when I did the fieldwork on Jomon culture in Japan and some ancient Celtic sites in Scotland and England.

Is there one specific moment during your research and fieldwork that really stands out to you as a formative moment of this work?

I think that the aesthetic of prehistoric people is very different from our time, especially how they lay down the stones on the ground. It looks very Celtic but it looks very natural. There are no rules or order. Our society is always trying to make some order, but there's no order and no rules. It looks quite scattered, but it's quite balanced at the same time. I feel that our early remote ancestors understood nature. That's why their aesthetic is very close to nature. This is so different from our culture and really inspires me. Our remote ancestors are no longer here to tell me the meaning of this and that. Even though I read many papers by archeologists, this is all research and imagination. No one really could explain what it means and why it is. I visited an island in Okinawa where the people still do a primal ceremony. It's those rituals that hailed from the 13th Century—not so formalized, but still honoring nature. It gave me a hint of what our remote ancestors would do. That was very inspiring for me—how they honor nature and how they do rituals, which have no beauty and nothing formalistic. It's pure nature. This experience was really a mind-opening experience of how a human being could be so connected to nature.

How do you feel toward nature, being that you live between New York and Tokyo in incredibly urban environments?

I was able to stay in Okinawa Island for one month during the summer and just sit in front of the ocean and do some drawings. Even though I work in New York, I had opportunities to spend time surrounded by nature. That way I was able to experience and feel myself also as nature. But at the same time, I feel like I'm a bridge to bring those elements back to the city. The people in the city are very much reliant on natural resources, which are outside of the city in nature. The people in the remote places are actually caretakers of nature, but the people in the city don't have this consciousness. We could easily spoil remote nature, so it's important to bring the essence into the city. I find it quite important to bring my work into the city, to produce the work and plant a seed about how much we are sustained by nature in order to support nature in remote places.

There are photographs and drawings, but the main components of the exhibit were installations. How did you decide that was the way you wanted to show nature to the city?

For example, the permanent installation in the natural environment that I produced for my non-profit organization called Faou is really honoring nature. That work has to be in the landscape, but some works that are in Japan Society, in an exhibition space, still bring some essence linking ancient times to contemporary society—to use contemporary technology, but bring in concepts from prehistoric. The work, again, is trying to be a bridge from the prehistoric to the contemporary.

If you had to describe the bridge or the message that you're trying to create in one or two sentences, what would they be?

I think that "the one" is a theme I carry in my work. I do a performance called *Oneness*. The idea of *Oneness* is that even though yourself is in the body, when you look at the bigger scale, I believe every living thing, including the galaxy, the planet and tiny particles, are all connected. We are all together and we all sustain each other. That theme is very important to me. I try to embrace how we are nature, especially with the works in Japan Society.

Are you working on other projects now?

For the second project of the non-profit organization Faou we are working on a new permanent installation in Visconde de Maua in Rio de Janeiro, which is near Brazil. Also I'm developing a new body of work, which is inspired by a new idea of the astrophysicist circle, the ekpyrotic universe. Before the Big Bang there was another plane or universe that's called the cyclic model of the universe, so I'm trying to produce a sculpture that was very much inspired by the ekpyrotic and cyclic models of the universe.

How would you describe your philosophy toward art?

Every time I produce work the process is very important to lead to the concrete, so experiences are very relevant. Sometimes it's a confirmation of some idea that develops through producing work. It's a representation of some belief of our existence, of meaning, of life, and particularly for this exhibition of "Rebirth." It's a representation of discovery through research, through my life. I don't know if you can call it philosophy, but the act is very important. It's not linguistic and it's not only the image, but it's communication through deeper consciousness. There are no cultural borders. There are no political borders. There are no physical borders. You can really go beyond. There's no limitation of communication. I think art is one of the most reachable communication medias that can go beyond any limitation.

You said for you it's more about the process. How did your process change with this newer body of work? When you did the *Temple* piece, how did your process change?

As you see, I had to collaborate with many specialists in order to produce the work, but in a way the process is always the same. The inspiration came, I conceived an idea, and through the process the idea grew. For myself it's a learning process to use new technology, develop new technology, and share an idea with my collaborator to produce work. So the processes are each time different, but in a way the same. I think it's important to carry the essential idea but at the same time it's important to be open to accept. Then things can become a gift to yourself. It's a balance that you need to keep. You have to be hard and soft. You have to be open and closed.

SELECTED ARTWORKS BY MARIKO MORI



MARIKO MORI
Tea Ceremony I

SELECTED IMAGES



Flatstone, 2006
Installation view, Japan Society, New York
Ceramic stones and acrylic vase; 192 x 124 x 3 1/2 inches.
Courtesy of SCAI THE BATHHOUSE, Tokyo and Sean Kelly, New York.
Photo by Richard Goodbody



Transcircle 1.1, 2004
Installation view, Japan Society, New York
Stone, Corian, LED, real-time control system, 132 3/8 inches diameter, each stone 43 3/8 x 22 1/4 x 13 1/2 inches.
Courtesy of the Mori Art Museum, Tokyo.
Photo by Richard Goodbody



Miracle, 2001
Installation view, Japan Society, New York
Eight Cibachrome prints, diachronic glass, salt and crystals; each element 27 1/4 inches.
Collection of Mr. Chen Rong-Chuan
Photo by Richard Goodbody



White Hole, 2008-2010
Installation view, Japan Society, New York
Acrylic and LED lights; 136 1/8 x 103 1/2 inches. Courtesy of SCAI THE BATHHOUSE, Tokyo and Sean Kelly, New York. Supported by Comunidad de Madrid.
Photo by Richard Goodbody