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## ARTFORUM

# THE MORI THE MERRIER

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Tea ceremony for "Mariko Mori: Invisible Dimension" at Sean Kelly Gallery, New York, April 11, 2018. (Photo: Taka Imamura)

I'M NOT JAPANESE, but I am from a country—England—where tea drinking is a daily given ("I'll put the kettle on" follows "Hello" like night follows day). And having grown up in a household where teabags were considered *infra dig* (it was leaf Earl Grey or nothing), I possess a great deal of sympathy for the idea of turning a simple infusion into a ceremony. So while the closest I usually get to a ritualized procedure may be warming the pot, it makes complete sense to me that something possessed of such restorative power should be treated with veneration. It was with some satisfaction then that I took up an invitation from [Sean Kelly](#) to join artist [Mariko Mori](#) for a tea ceremony at his Chelsea gallery on a recent Wednesday morning (what I know as teatime—four in the afternoon—wasn't scheduled, so elevenses would have to do).

Mori's current exhibition at [Sean Kelly](#), "Invisible Dimension," is a collection of seamless swirls and slabs aimed at representing, or at least evoking, the "multiple hidden universes" and "unobservable energy," per the show's press release, associated with string theory. The two grandest works are Möbius strips of white pearlescent steel that encircle the gallery's columns; I was put in mind of those graphic maelstroms used to indicate brawls in old comic books, though that hardly gels with the objects' high-tech construction and space-age vibe. Mori has long been known for conjoining futuristic visions with age-old philosophical conundrums, so her plan to introduce an element of ancient tradition into this thoroughly contemporary setting wasn't as incongruous as it might sound. As I arrived, a few minutes early, I caught a glimpse of a kimono-clad Mori bustling around a corner, and everything felt perfectly in place.

Once the other guests arrived—there were six of us in all, including art historian [Anne Swartz](#) and ARTnews editor [Andrew Russeth](#)—we were ushered into a backroom and each given a paper bag containing a pair of light slippers. Ordinarily I have a rule against art that requires the removal of shoes, but in this case I could hardly refuse (I was, natch, wearing odd socks). We were then treated to a preliminary cuppa—a neat class of some colorless, almost tasteless palette cleanser—before Mori's two assistants came to fetch us. We filed into the gallery behind them, already instinctively lowering our

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voices, and drew chopsticks to determine who would sit where (three would be on chairs, the others on the floor—I scored a chair).

What followed was the distribution and consumption of six weightless pink biscuits (no chocolate digestives for this artist), followed by the sublimely unhurried preparation of six bowls of slightly frothy green liquid. Mori, kneeling on a white sheet in front of us, readied each exquisite component with care, cleaning it with a single wipe after use, and spoke just once to thank us all for coming. A few whispered instructions from her assistants aside, the silence was otherwise broken only by the occasional intrusion of a car horn from outside, or the rustle of silk as our hosts came and left. Back in the office, we found that the whole thing had taken only about half an hour—such was the sense of having been cut loose from time, as this would have been hard to guess at. Swartz, the only one among us with any relevant experience, reported that the “full” ceremony could take four hours. It might sound tortuous, but throw in some Earl Grey and I’d likely sign up. Some Earl Grey, and maybe a tea break.