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## ARTINFO

### Exploring Ritual Through Science, Mariko Mori Shows That Everything is Connected



(c) Geraint Lewis 2012

Installation view of "Mariko Mori: Rebirth" at Royal Academy of Arts Burlington Gardens, until 17 February 2013

by Coline Milliard

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LONDON — A large, glowing monolith shrouded in darkness stands in the first room of **Mariko Mori**'s solo exhibition at the **Royal Academy**, its subtle radiance moving slowly up and down, as if the light inside has a life of its own — which, in a sense, it does. The work is connected to a computer at the **University of Tokyo**'s **Kamioka Observatory** recording the flux of neutrinos — particles created by the sun, our atmosphere, and dying stars — which constantly bombard earth. The different kinds of neutrinos are illustrated in real time by the variously colored LEDs in Mori's piece, which is titled *Tom Na H-iu II* (2006). Created as a window onto outer space, it opens up a room for contemplation.

With its combination of an ancient form and cutting-edge technology, this first piece sums up most of the sources behind the show. Japanese-born Mori freely draws on Buddhist, Shintoist, and Celtic traditions that she reinterprets in a retro-futuristic lexicon, all muted hues and curved shapes. Human ritual meets scientific investigation into natural phenomena: Her floor piece "Flat Stone" (2006) echoes pebble shrines from the mid-

Jomon Era (3500-2500 B.C.), aligned with the winter solstice's light. A replica of a Jomon mask hangs on the wall above it, almost hovering like a deity over its realm. "I'm not religious, but Buddhism and Shintoism are part of my cultural background, and Buddhists believe in transfiguration — reaching a deeper level of consciousness, transcending the self," the artist has said.

Mori advertises a form of spirituality, of which her pieces are the ritualistic tools. In one work, a crystal pendulum is suspended over a circle of 108 crystal balls — one for each of the 108 earthly desires, according to the Buddhist scriptures, as director of exhibitions **Kathleen Soriano** explained to **ARTINFO UK**. Immobile, the pendulum could point any direction, potentially encompassing the whole of the human experience.

Round pictures of cell-like shapes, *Connected World* (2002) and *Miracle* (2001), were conceived while the artist was pregnant. Inside a round chamber, drawings of pearls, bubbles, and pseudo-biological imagery unravel over 12 sheets of paper. These are remarkable in their exploration of white's infinite variations, from chalky to iridescent; Mori's blues, yellows, and reds are so pale as to almost disappear. Yet although the artist's calm, meditation-inducing aesthetic is seductive, the obviousness of the symbols she uses in the Royal Academy show quickly tires.

"The whole exhibition is about how everything is connected," said Soriano. "It underlies some of her Shinto/Buddhist principles, ideas about reincarnation, the fact that we are all part of a single cosmos." Mori tackles big ideas — the life and death of stellar bodies, the origin of life and its perpetual renewal, the need to respect one's environment — with disarming earnestness. One can only respect the strength of her beliefs, and the elegance with which she uses scientific data in her work. There's no doubt that many will enjoy the immersive experience Mori offers at the RA, but ultimately her vocabulary, too often bordering on twee, fails to truly convince.