

SEAN KELLY

Jones, Justin. "Mariko Mori Rebirth at the Japan Society," *The Daily Beast*, October 10, 2013.



Mariko Mori Rebirth at the Japan Society

The Japan Society unveils meditative new works by Nineties Japanese Pop Art icon Mariko Mori. Justin Jones reports.



Japan Society

Museums are often a way to reclaim calm moments of meditation; to recharge and emerge renewed. This week, the Japan Society unveils a new exhibition, Mariko Mori's *Rebirth*, which offers exactly that.

The show marks the first time the Japan Society has dedicated its entire space to a single artist. Completely transforming the gallery to reflect Mori's vision, *Rebirth* takes the viewer on a meditative journey through the cycle of life, focusing on humankind's balance and harmony with nature.

The exhibition is divided into three sections: origin, rupture, and rebirth. Upon entering Origin's small, darkened exhibition space, the prehistoric Kaen-doki "flame vase" to the left marks one of the most important sources of inspiration for Mori according to Dr. Miwako Tezuka, curator of the show.

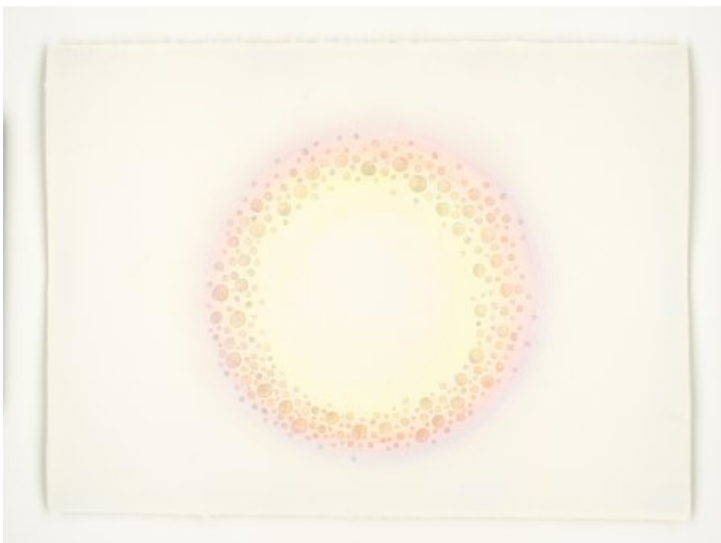
In 2003, Mori began researching ancient sites of the Jōmon culture – a prehistoric Japanese civilization that lived very closely to nature. The Jōmon used stone formations to create shrines, temples, ceremonial stages, and even grave markers, which represented both life and death. In her show, Mori simulates the Jōmon ancient stone formations, as a way connecting to their sense of balance and harmony.



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Three stone works lead visitors through the opening gallery. The most captivating formation, and introduction to Mori's light installations is Transcircle 1.1 – a Stonehenge-like circle formed by nine humanoid rock objects filled with LED lights. As each individual stone lights up, colors change pulsing at various speeds, linking these actions to the position of the eight planets and Pluto and their rotations around the Sun.

The second section, *Rupture*, represents the state between death and rebirth. Eight circular prints mount a wall, which are meant to represent Mori's understanding of ālaya – the first transformation of consciousnesses in Yogacara Buddhism. These discs, titled *Miracle*, transpose the invisible concept of ālaya into a tangible object. Vibrating digital images of particles bursting and floating hang opposite the entrance. Mori's voice echoes from the hallway. "We are nature. We are sustained by nature. We are sharing nature..."

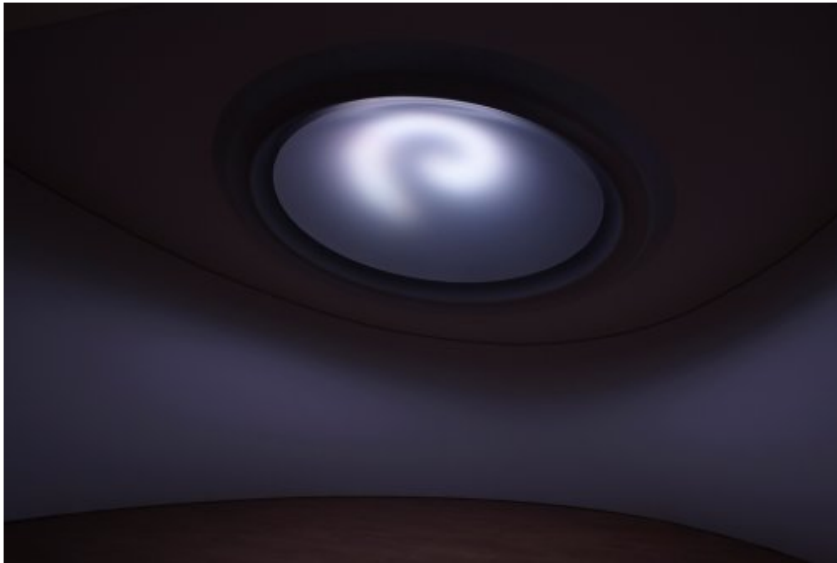


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The final segment, *Rebirth*, begins with a series of drawings – and one painting – depicting small shapes forming celestial swirls and bursts of light. They were selected from the numerous works Mori created

after meditating over the ocean – harnessing, as she says, the energy of various tides. They apparently mark a key moment in Mori’s personal transformation. Her “rebirth” came after she began investing the Jōmon culture. It was the moment she attributes to letting go of body representations present in her early works from the Eighties and Nineties.

White Hole is the pinnacle of the exhibition – constructed as the antithesis of a “black hole.” While everything of matter is sucked into a “black hole” and destroyed, the theory goes that all of this matter is regenerated out of a “white hole” – completing the circle of life that is a constant theme throughout the show.



Japan Society

Walking through the spiral hallway into the almost pitch black, circular room, the senses become immediately disoriented. A convex lens is fixated on a slanted ceiling emanating a faint amount of soft white light. This light becomes instantaneously hypostasizing as it swirls into different patterns. Looking up at the swirling lights, the body immediately relaxes - everything disappears from consciousness allowing a brief time of personal meditation.

Rebirth: Recent Work by Mariko Mori is the first US exhibition for the artist in over a decade. It will be on display at the Japan Society until January 12, 2014.