



Art Gallery
of Western Australia
GOVERNMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

REBIRTH MARIKO MORI

An education resource for
primary and secondary school

Part 1

Mariko Mori – life and work

Born in Tokyo, contemporary Japanese artist Mariko Mori is internationally renowned for her video, photographic and sculptural installation works. In the late 1980s, she travelled to London to study at the Chelsea College of Art and Design from 1989 to 1992, before moving to New York to participate in the Whitney Museum of American Art's Independent Study Program from 1992 to 1993. She currently lives and works in both New York and London. Mori has won prestigious art awards including the *Menzioni D'Onore* (Honorary Mentions) at the 47th Venice Biennale in 1997 for her work *Nirvana 1996-1997*, and the 8th Annual Award as a Promising Artist and Scholar in the Field of Contemporary Japanese Art in 2001 from the Japan Cultural Arts Foundation. Recently, Mori was awarded Honorary Fellow of University of the Arts London.

In the 1990s, Mori became widely recognised for her performance-based photographic works, such as *Subway 1994*, *Play With Me 1994* and *Birth of a Star 1995*. Often featuring the artist dressed in elaborate costumes, these images comment on global pop culture, the emerging virtual realities and the interaction between old-world and contemporary Japan. By the late 1990s, Mori's artistic inquiry expanded to include a poetic exploration of the beliefs and practices of ancient cultures. This evolution of her practice is marked by the production of her first large-scale architectural installations *Dream Temple 1997-1999* and *Wave UFO 1999-2003*, in which she utilised technology and a range of industrial materials to create large scale works that aim to facilitate the viewer's own spiritual experience.

Mariko Mori: Rebirth

In *Mariko Mori: Rebirth* the artist transforms the gallery space into an immersive environment with installations, sound and video works, photographs and works on paper. Each piece forms part of an unfolding narrative which takes the viewer on a visual journey through time and space. In works such as *Flat Stone 2006* and *Transcircle 1.1 2004*, Mori draws influence from the philosophies and physical monuments of Japanese ancestors from the Jōmon period (14,000 – 300 BC). This inspiration centres on the Jōmon belief in the cycle of life, death and rebirth, which forms an alternative perspective on the view of life and death as disconnected states of being. By placing contemporary art in the context of ancient cultures, Mori reintroduces the practices of early humans to the present as a way of reminding us of our past and our possibility for a non-materialistic connection with the natural world.

Materials and techniques In *Mariko Mori: Rebirth*, the artist engages with the idea of reconnecting with our environment through the use of science and technology as part of her works' materials. Mori portrays deep consciousness in works such as *Miracle 2011*, which consists of eight works composed of **cibachrome prints, diachronic glass, salt and crystal**.

The installation *Flat Stone 2006* is composed of **ceramic stones** and **acrylic**. In *Transcircle 1.1 2004* Mori has used the industrial material **Corian** to create stone-like forms. In its function as a symbol for the solar system's planetary movements it uses a **real-time control system** and **LED lighting** to represent the speed and placement of the eight planets and Pluto in orbit around the sun. The resulting installation is a glowing, shrine-like formation, highly synthetic in appearance, whilst alluding to ancient burial cairns and monuments like Stonehenge. By utilising new materials and technology to refer to ancient, natural forms, Mori aims to inspire in people a fresh awareness and respect for the Earth's environment and our place within it.



Mariko Mori
Photo by David Sims

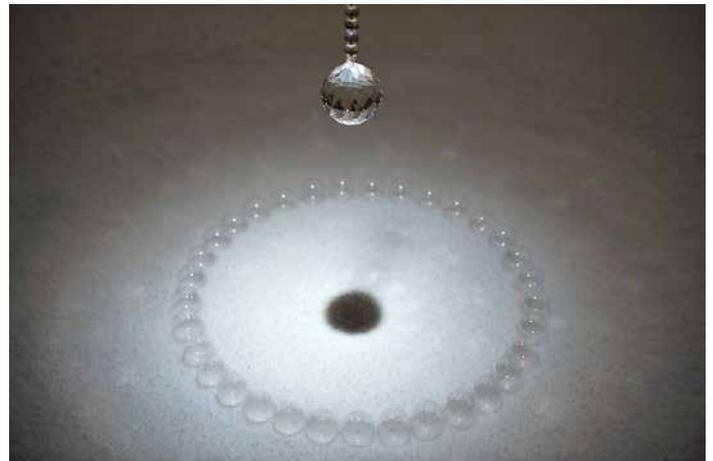
Ring 2012, *Primal Memory* 2004 and *Birds I* 2013, have been made from **Lucite**, which the artist has developed a unique way of colouring. Lucite, an extremely durable and weather-resistant acrylic resin, usually used in the aircraft and automotive industries, has the unique property of keeping a beam of light reflected within its surfaces and only releasing it outward from the edges. This results in glowing forms that seem to emanate their own light. By using technological processes and synthetic, manufactured materials to speak of what is natural, Mori communicates her desire for humanity to be at one with nature.

Taking the idea of reconnecting with nature even further, Mori is incorporating **the natural environment** as a material in her current project Faou Foundation. This initiative was established in 2010 to create a series of large-scale, permanent art installations dedicated to six of the earth's different ecological environments. Commencing with *Sun Pillar* 2011, located on Miyako Island, Okinawa, Japan, the purpose of each installation is to observe a growing consciousness of the Earth's environment and stand as a monument to the beauty of its natural setting. Each location is to be selected for its pristine landscape and the cultural history of its surrounding communities, which are intended to be preserved and revitalised as hosts to the installations. Scheduled for installation in 2016, the second monument *Ring* will be located over a waterfall in Brazil.

Installation

An important characteristic of works in *Mariko Mori: Rebirth* is their capacity to form an immersive environment. This is evoked by Mori's inclusion of several **installation** pieces. An installation is defined as a **construction** or **assemblage** of objects, often designed for a specific site or gallery space, which creates for viewers the sense of being surrounded by art. To actively engage with an installation, the viewer experiences an entire environment, often walking through or entering into the work of art, thereby demonstrating its difference from sculpture. In *Mariko Mori: Rebirth*, the works invite the viewer into an immersive space that is separate from the outside world, providing the opportunity to meditate on both our inner and outer realms.

Mori presents the exhibition as a quiet, enveloping experience, connecting ideas about human interaction with nature and technology and encouraging a consideration of spirituality in the contemporary world. Mori links the viewer's experience of contemporary art with that of ancient monuments, creating a distinct crossover between the cultures and people of different times, and reinforcing the relevance of her work to today's world.



Mariko Mori
Miracle 2011 detail
8 photo-paintings, cibachrome prints,
diachronic glass salt crystal
69 cm each element
Courtesy of Mori Art Collection, Tokyo
Photo by Fabio Scrugli

Part 2 Key works

Ring 2012

Ring is a glowing circle symbolising the eternal cycle of life: birth, death and rebirth. It has been made from Lucite, and the use of this material, combined with LED lighting and the smooth edges of *Ring* provides the illusion that it is glowing from within.

The juxtaposition of the suspended ring, manufactured from synthetic materials, with the waterfall, alluding to nature, speaks of the artist's desire for a world where humanity is one with nature and human rhythms coincide with those of the natural environment.



Mariko Mori

Ring 2012

Lucite, LED

127 x 7.5 cm

Courtesy of Faou Foundation, New York

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Discussion questions

Primary

1. Look carefully at this installation and describe what you see. Close your eyes and think about what you hear and smell. Does it remind you of anything?
2. If you were to rename the artwork, what name would you give it?

Secondary

1. This work relies on the audience experiencing it in a multi-sensory way. In what ways does contemporary art such as this go beyond simply viewing?
2. How important is the audience's experience in the success of this work?
3. What do you think is more important in this work – its beauty or the message the artist is communicating?
4. Mariko Mori is in the process of creating a massive interpretation of this work outdoors, suspended permanently over a waterfall in Brazil. Were you to experience it, what effect would this change in scale and location have on the impact of the work?

Middle to Upper Primary activity

Try making your own art work where you combine something manufactured with something natural. Can you tell a story about an issue you feel strongly about through your work? E.g. the environment, sustainability, extinction.

Cross-curricular considerations

Science (materials, processes)

English (poetry)

Asia (eastern philosophy/theology)

Sustainability (humankind v nature)

Transcircle 1.1 2004

Transcircle 1.1 2004, comprises a group of nine smooth, softly glowing stone-like forms arranged in a circle on a bed of small white pebbles. Each 'stone', made from the industrial material Corian, emits light of a specific colour and as time progresses, gently changes tone. These forms are intended to represent the eight planets and Pluto in orbit around the sun. The installation replicates the solar system's planetary movements by using a real-time control system and LED lighting. One minute is in real time mode and nine minutes simulate one year of movement. The installation continually changes according to the planets' position in relation to the central axis of the solar system, the sun. The result is a glowing, shrine-like formation, highly synthetic in appearance, whilst simultaneously alluding to ancient stone circles and monuments like Stonehenge.

By utilising new materials and technology to refer to ancient, natural forms, Mori aims to inspire in people a fresh awareness and respect for the Earth's environment and our place within it.



Mariko Mori

Transcircle 1.1 2004 detail

Stone, Corian, LED, real time control system

33.6 cm in diameter: each stone: 110 x 56 x 34 cm

Courtesy of Mori Art Collection, Tokyo

Photo by Richard Learoyd

Discussion questions

Primary

1. Watch this installation for a while and write down what you see happening. Does it remind you of anything?
2. This artwork is made from both natural and manufactured materials. Can you tell what they are?
3. How do you think the artist has made the work?

Secondary

1. Describe the mood or feeling being communicated by *Transcircle 1.1*. How does the artist achieve this? (Consider the application of elements and principles.)
2. What materials and technological processes has Mori employed to create the work?
3. What does the arrangement of this installation remind you of?
4. To what extent do you feel the artist has been successful in communicating ideas about humankind's relationship with the natural environment?

Secondary activity

In your journal, brainstorm some ideas about artworks you could make that incorporate lighting and other digital and electronic components to describe natural phenomena. Try constructing one of your ideas (you may need to secure help with technological processes).

Cross-curricular considerations

Science (astronomy)

Design and Technology (materials, processes)

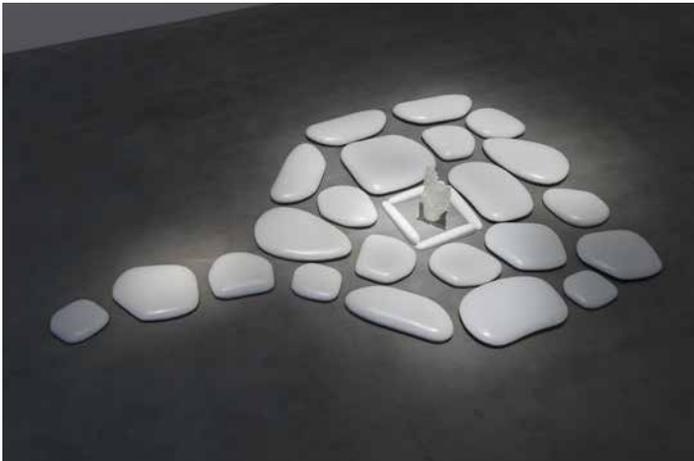
English (poetry)

History (ancient cultures)

Flat stone 2006

Mori's research into the people of the mid-Jōmon era in Japan (3500-2500 BC) inspired her to create this installation which relates to ancient rituals surrounding death and rebirth. Flat stones like those in this work were believed to have been used in the structures that housed ancient Jōmon shrines. The entrances of these early buildings were located specifically to receive sunlight on the winter solstice. Mori has used twenty-two ceramic stones to recreate the narrow shape of the shrine entrance, which widens into a circular ceremonial area.

In the centre of the stone arrangement is an acrylic cast of an actual ancient Jōmon ceremonial vase, embellished with water imagery. This particular vase was selected for its unique representation of water, which for Mori, symbolised a direct connection between nature and the process of spiritual rebirth.



Mariko Mori
Flat Stone 2006
Ceramic stones and acrylic vase
314.6 x 8.8 cm
Courtesy of SCAI THE BATHHOUSE,
Tokyo and Sean Kelly Gallery, New York
Photo by Tom Powel Imaging

Discussion questions

Primary

1. Walk around this installation and look closely at the stones. Are they real stones or has the artist made them?
2. Describe the shape the arrangement of stones makes on the floor. Does it remind you of anything?
3. What do you see in the centre of the stones? Compare it to the rest of the art work. What is similar and what is different?

Secondary

1. Walk around the installation. What materials and processes has the artist used to make the work?
2. This work refers to ancient rituals surrounding death and rebirth. How do the objects and their arrangement contribute to this?
3. Discuss the artist's use of elements and principles. How do these contribute to meaning in the work?

Upper Primary activity

Whole class activity – In *Flat Stone*, Mariko Mori has made the stones so they look life-like and made a replica of a real vase using acrylic. Collect a group of natural objects such as shells, stones, seed pods etc. Encourage each student to make a replica of one natural object using clay. Arrange the finished, uncoloured objects in an installation on the floor, the shape of the arrangement referring to the origins of the objects (e.g. the seed pods in a tree shape). Photograph the finished installation and encourage others to view it.

Cross-curricular considerations

Design and Technology (materials, processes)

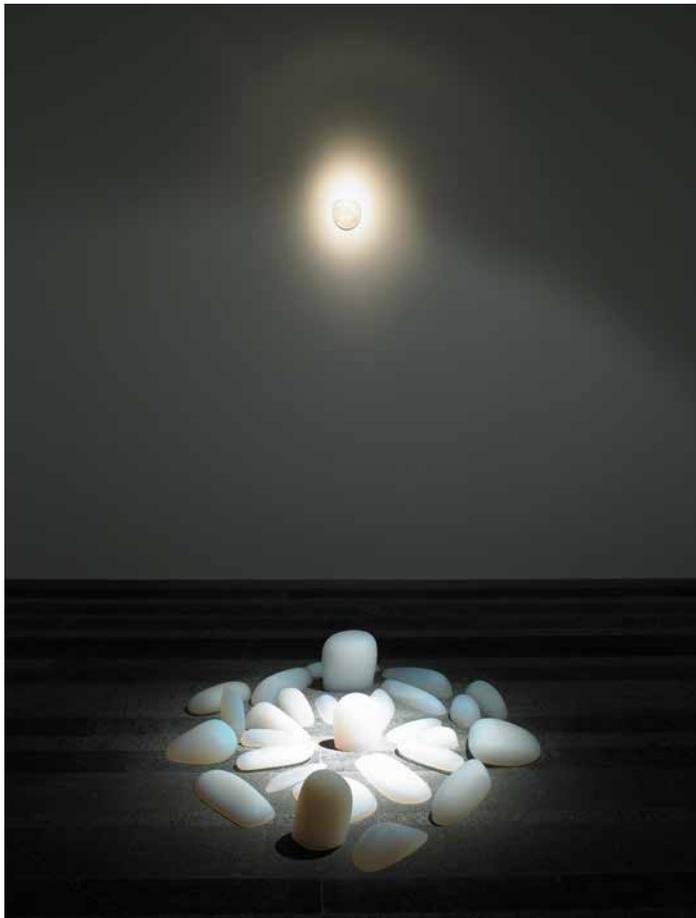
English (poetry)

History (ancient cultures)

Primal Memory 2004

Primal Memory is an arrangement of stone-like forms made from Lucite, an acrylic resin that has the unique quality of absorbing and holding light, and reflecting it out from its edges, causing forms to appear to glow. The pure white 'stones' in the installation are arranged like an ancient archeological site. Above the circle of Lucite forms, hangs a clear acrylic mask, made from a cast of an ancient Jōmon mask. The mask appears to have one eye scratched out, a reference to *dogu* which are often purposefully sacrificed during a ritual to cure an ill person. Overall, the installation conveys the impression of a contemplative and mystical shrine.

Ancient civilizations like the Jōmon culture, made large-scale stone formations such as this on sacred sites in order to align with the winter solstice, reflecting the way their lifestyle was dictated entirely by nature. Through small-scale works such as *Primal Memory*, as well as her permanent large-scale recreations on sites such as *Primal Rhythm* at Seven Light Bay in Japan, Mori is creating contemporary versions of these celestial sites.



Discussion questions

Primary

1. Walk around this installation and look closely at the stones. What do you think is causing them to glow?
2. What do you see hanging on the wall above the stones? Compare it to the rest of the art work. What is similar and what is different?
3. How does this work make you feel?

Secondary

1. What materials and processes has Mori used to make this installation?
2. Describe the way the artist combines the past and present in this work. What messages and ideas is she communicating through doing this?
3. What strategies has the artist used to manipulate the way you feel in experiencing *Primal Memory*?

Secondary activity

Research celestial formations and other astronomical phenomena and develop a body of work that responds to what you discover. Develop ideas in your journal through drawing, photography and collage. Consider creating an installation using contemporary materials and processes to express ancient, scientific or spiritual concepts.

Cross-curricular considerations

Design and Technology (materials, processes)

Science (astronomy)

English (poetry)

History (ancient cultures)

Mariko Mori

Primal Memory 2004

Lucite

25 x 126.8 x 129.6 cm

Courtesy of SCAI THE BATHHOUSE,

Tokyo and Sean Kelly Gallery, New York

Photo by Richard Learoyd

Mask (part of *Primal Memory* installation), 2004

Acrylic plastic

12.5 x 13.5 x 6 cm

Collection of Tokyo University Museum

White Hole 2008-10

Accessed through a specially installed spiral wall within a domed enclosure, *White Hole* is a circular shaped convex piece of acrylic through which the viewer experiences a complex installation of LED lights. The lights morph and grow appearing as an illuminated spiral, subdued at first, then gradually becoming brighter. This installation is based on the artist's interpretation of a white hole. In astrophysical theory, a white hole is connected to a black hole via a worm hole. The formula of a black hole was provided by Professor Shin Mineshige at Yukawa Institute of Theoretical Physics, Kyoto University, Japan. This theory is about rebirth and regeneration and expresses the idea that everything that dies in a black hole has the potential to reform as renewed energy and emerge from a white hole.

The light patterns in the installation are reminiscent of those emitted during the birth of a star, reminding the viewer of the universe's vast capacity for renewal.



Mariko Mori

White Hole 2008-2010

Acrylic, LED lights

239 x 272 x 65 cm

Courtesy of SCAI THE BATHHOUSE, Tokyo and Sean Kelly Gallery, New York

Photo: © Royal Academy of Arts, London/M. Leith

Discussion questions

Primary

1. Enter the domed space through the spiral wall and watch the display of lights. Write down what you see happening. Does it remind you of anything?
2. How does it feel to be inside this space? What do you think the artist might be telling us about the universe?
3. How do you think Mori has made the work?

Secondary

1. Describe the mood or feeling being communicated by *White Hole*. How does the arrangement of the space contribute to this?
2. Mori designed this work to represent the opposite to a black hole. How does this contribute to the overriding theme of the exhibition – the cycle of rebirth?
3. To what extent do you feel the artist has been optimistic in commenting on life, death and the universe through this installation?

Primary activity

Spend some time viewing *White Hole*, watching the way the display changes over a period of time. Back at school create large, mixed media works on the floor that respond to the light display. Begin by painting a dark background using thick brushes and sponges and black and dark grey acrylic paint. When dry, add layers with light colours such as white, silver and pale grey, using different tools and techniques such as dripping and flicking, stencils and stamps. Add other materials such as collage and glitter paint to create cosmic compositions.

Cross-curricular considerations

Design and Technology (materials, processes)

Science (astronomy, astrophysics)

English (poetry, prose)

Music (composition)

Journey to Seven Light Bay, *Primal Rhythm* 2011

Journey to Seven Light Bay, Primal Rhythm is a video documenting the development of *Primal Rhythm*, the first permanent monument conceived by Mariko Mori, to be installed in a natural location by the Faou Foundation. The video documents the way the two-part work will eventually be installed in Seven Light Bay of Miyako Island, Okinawa, Japan. To date, one part of the work has been installed, *Sun Pillar* 2011. Standing at a height of four metres and weighing approximately three tonnes, *Sun Pillar* was installed using only human power in order to protect the site's natural formations. The structure is made from a specialised layered acrylic resulting in a smooth, glistening surface. Designed as an enduring reflection on the natural beauty of its setting, *Sun Pillar* was revealed on the day of Winter Solstice in 2011; a time chosen for its symbolic reference to the end and beginning of nature's cycle.

Narrated by Mariko Mori, the video also shows a digital render envisaging the second part of the installation, *Moon Stone*, which is yet to be completed. The artist shows viewers the way the sun will hit the sun pillar during the Winter solstice, casting a shadow onto the large, floating moonstone which is anchored in the bay, the whole installation acting as a giant sun dial. The work shows the way *Moon Stone's* colour will be in a constant state of flux in response to tidal movement.



Mariko Mori

Journey to Seven Light Bay, Primal Rhythm 2011

Video

5.14 min

Sound by Ken Ikeda

Courtesy of Faou Foundation, New York

Discussion questions

Primary

1. Watch this video. Describe what the video is about.
2. The artist had the *Sun Pillar* installed on the rocks in the bay without using any machinery. Why do you think it was important for her to have it built this way?
3. How does the *Primal Rhythm* project connect with the main theme of the exhibition – the cycle of rebirth?

Secondary

1. Watch the video. What do you think the artist's intentions were in making it?
2. Mori describes *Primal Rhythm* as "A lasting testimony that pays respect to the natural beauty of our surroundings on earth". To what extent do you believe she has been successful in conceiving this work?
3. The video shows the way the bay will look once both parts of the work have been installed. Do you think people will come to see the installation? Is it important that they do, or will this video that documents its construction and communicates the artist's ideas be enough? (Consider technology and the reach of the Internet in communicating globally.)

Secondary activity

Research other artists who use the natural environment as integral parts of their work. Consider the ways they use the spaces in which their works are installed and the messages and ideas they are communicating. Select a natural area that resonates with you and devise a plan for a large piece of public art to be installed in the space. Begin by writing an artist statement to explain your ideas and intention. Use design software to create a digital design for the work or make a video that expresses the design concept.

Cross-curricular considerations

Design and Technology (materials, processes)

Science (astronomy, astrophysics)

English (poetry, prose)

Music (composition)

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