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Meet Yuko Mohri: The Artist Challenging Our Perceptions of Light, Sound, and Sculpture

We met the young artist to talk about their inspirations, creative process and the themes found in their work.



The world is busy, noisy and full, but Yuko Mohri's pieces give us all a chance to slow down, take a second and truly see, hear and experience our earth. Far from bowing to pressure which tells us all to hurry up and tune out, Yuko is creating and making art on her own terms. Born in 1980 in Kanagawa Japan, the young artist's installations take on themes and topics which are expansive and ambitious, to say the least.

Fusing the natural with the manmade, her pieces manipulate the architecture and environment of the galleries they're shown in, connecting nature and machine. One of her recent installations, focusing on patterns of light as they move through electromagnetic forcefields and water, utilised a reclaimed reed organ to explore the aftermath of the Great Japan Earthquake in 2011. Another, taking inspiration from the Indian Ocean, used gently cascading rolls of paper to represent an ecosystem within an exhibition centre.

Yuko calls her muted, beautiful works "sound installations, kinetic structures" which continually play on the issues of doubling -- the inside and outside, the deliberate and accidental, the natural and the created. "My themes are always themes of coincidences", she told me. "Or of errors, portents, and silence. All of these themes move and react to the surrounding environment of the exhibition space, so that a whole exhibition environment, including my world, is transformed into an entire ecosystem."

The artist's work allows us, the viewer, to pick up on invisible and intangible forces which are so often overlooked in our busy, metropolitan lives; such as magnetism, gravity, and light. Fittingly, she explains that she often takes inspiration for her work from the natural world. "I always want to find a source of inspiration in scenery, especially scenery that I'm used to", she says.

It sounds simple, but a creative process so straightforward and attuned to the world around the artist has paid off for Mohri. In 2015, she received a grant from the Asian Cultural Council for a residency in New York. She has participated in a number of exhibitions both in Japan and abroad, including the 14th Biennale de Lyon 2017 (France), Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2016 (India) and the Yokohama Triennale 2014. Mohri is the Grand Prix winner of the Nissan Art Award 2015 and is also the recipient of Culture and Future Prize at the 65th Kanagawa Cultural Award in 2016 and the New Artist Award at the 67th Japanese Ministry of Education Award for Fine Arts in 2017.

Yuko Mohri, *Pleated Image* (2016) acrylic on birch

But despite all of the accolades, the artist explains that the art world, in general, can often be less than accepting to new and diverse voices jostling for space in an arena that has traditionally been dominated by older, white men. “As an Asian-relatively young-woman-artist in the art world, I wouldn’t say I have never experienced a piece of discrimination or prejudice.

But this never comes from other artists themselves,” she says. “But I don’t that’s an issue solely confined to the art world. Unfortunately, the entire world suffers from this same blindness and arrogance, and a lack of openness and communication. I’m generally optimistic, but it can be annoying. When I experience this kind of thing I always go back to the root and ask myself why I wanted to be an artist.

Yuko Mohri, *Untitled* (2018)

“My motivation is simple: Through creating, I want to see the dawn of a new world with my own eyes. In doing so, I can cut all the noise and try to concentrate on my own work, enjoying doing what I should do.”

It seems like a fitting way of dealing with external negative influences -- cutting out all the noise. After all, that’s what Yuko’s work is all about, cutting out all the noise of our modern world and creating a safe, natural, peaceful space, even inside our busy galleries and exhibition spaces. To take a second and really listen.