

Stead, Chloe. "The prophetic magic of Mariko Mori's cyborgian vision." SLEEK Magazine. May 15, 2020.

# SLEEK

## The prophetic magic of Mariko Mori's cyborgian vision

The Japanese artist's work, inspired by ancient Eastern philosophy and tradition, explores human connection, life and death, through the prism of technoutopianism—By Chloe Stead



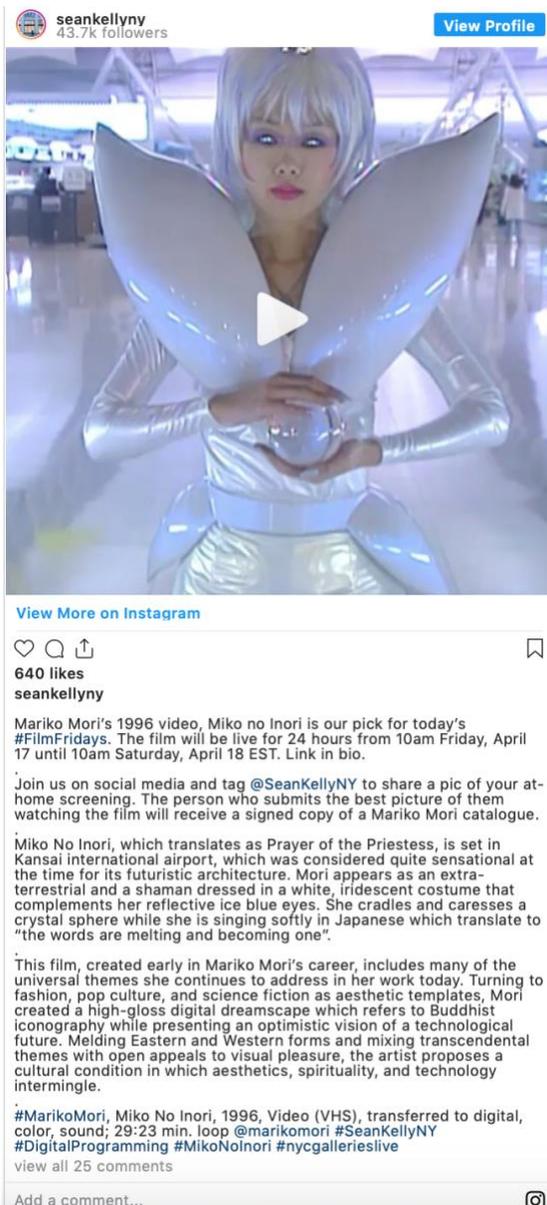
In a new series, 'Artist on my mind', writers discuss an artist whose work feels particularly visionary and relevant right now. In our first instalment, Chloe Stead discusses Japanese artist, Mariko Mori (1967-).

Eyes closed, legs slightly apart and arms by her sides, a woman lies in what a yogi would call 'Shavasana', or 'Corpse Pose'. Encased in an oblong-shaped, clear acrylic pod, she is both visible to and set apart from passers-by, an otherworldly figure in an otherwise urban landscape. This photograph, taken in New York's Times Square in 1997, documents one part of *Beginning of the end*, a performance series by Japanese artist Mariko Mori. Seen through today's lens, it's impossible not to

think about social distancing. Indeed, when the image was posted on the popular Instagram account, [@another\\_\\_kind](#), recently, many commenters jokingly wished that they, too, had a pod to keep them safe. But rather than craving separation, Mori envisioned the multi-part performance as a radical form of togetherness. "I went to 13 cities around the world with my Body Capsule," [she has said](#) of the series. "In the final work... all the cities are connected—east and west, as well as past, present, and future."

# SEANKELLY

Born in Tokyo in 1967, Mori studied fashion and worked as a fashion model before relocating to England in the late 1980s, where she attended London's prestigious Chelsea College of Arts. Initially focusing on painting, it wasn't until Mori moved again, this time to New York, that she began staging the performances for which she's best known. Steeped in the language of Japanese pop culture, these early works saw Mori take to the streets in an array of futuristic, anime and video game-inspired garb. For the 1994 performance *Subway*—documented with a wide-angle lens to catch the commuters who tried to edge out of frame—Mori rode the underground dressed in a silver two-piece, complete with blue jewel-like inlays and a headset. In other pieces from the same year, Mori's costumes were even more elaborate. For *Play with Me*, for instance, she donned a blue wig and armour plating, while *Love Hotel* saw her slip a cute sailor's outfit over her customary bodysuit.



Working as her own model, Mori's early output drew comparisons to the theatrical self-portraits of Cindy Sherman. But while Sherman continued to focus on photography throughout her career, Mori quickly moved away from depicting herself, and towards the end of the decade she turned her attention to techno-utopic inspired sculpture. Speaking in an interview with *The Brooklyn Rail*, Mori identified the travelling she did in connection to *Beginning of the End* as well as her growing interest in Buddhism, Shintoism, and Eastern philosophy as the reason behind this shift. While [one critic](#) described her early works as an "amalgamation of fashion, ego and future shock" these new pieces were distinctly ego-less—combing tech with studies on prehistoric civilisations to build on the idea of "oneness" that she had started to articulate with her body capsule. "Based on my research into prehistoric cultures," [she told The Brooklyn Rail](#), "I take the view that we were one world before, and that we can become one again."



In 2010, Mori founded the [Faou Foundation](#), a not-for-profit dedicated to creating six site-specific artworks in unique ecological settings on each habitable continent on Earth. The foundation's inaugural project, *Primal Rhythm* will be completed in two phases on Japan's Miyako Island. For the first phase, Mori installed a 'Sun Pillar' from layered acrylic on a rock just off the coast of the island, while the second will see her anchor a 10-foot in diameter 'Moonstone' with LED lights that change in concert with the tide. Meanwhile, in Brazil, she hung a luminous ring at the foot of a waterfall in the state of Rio De Janeiro as part of the cultural program of the Olympic Games. As with Moonstone, Mori utilised natural resources together with state of the art technology to alter the sculpture's colour, which transitions from blue to gold depending on the height of the sun.

As a technical feat, these earth works are astonishing. If there is one thing we can take away from Mori's decades-long practice, though, it's that technology can actually bring us closer to nature—and to each other—than we have been led to believe. In this way, her thinking is strangely prescient of our current moment. Once asked in an interview for her "latest, personal" fantasy, Mori [answered](#), "I think the internet, Skype... how we connected with each other. We don't have the limitations." Despite her sci-fi beginnings, then, Mori's fantasy is not to use technology as an escape, but as a way to emphasise our "oneness" to "really have a feeling of sharing this world together with everybody on earth."