

Mariko Mori  
*Dream Temple*

Fondazione Prada  
Milan  
22 May - 15 June 1999

From Saturday the 22<sup>nd</sup> May through to Tuesday the 15<sup>th</sup> June, the *Fondazione Prada* will present a new monumental multimedia project, centered on the *Dream Temple* by Japanese artist Mariko Mori (Tokyo, 1967), a complex, ambitious architectural initiative, projected towards the twenty-first century, that represents a utopian place, the ideal destination at the end of a path towards spiritual discovery. A journey that culminates in the hi-tech entrance to the flow of consciousness of each living being.

The exhibition, conceived by Mariko Mori herself for the Fondazione Prada display areas, describes an ideal voyage that consists of two spectacular and impressive visions - the Garden of Purification and the Space of Meditation - accessed through two initiation antechambers. Each step of the voyage features a single work and is characterized a particular quality of light, one of the essential elements used by Mariko Mori to convey purity and universality. Light also means internal enlightenment, attained along the individual's path towards self-awareness, a state in which the relation between exterior and interior light is defined.

The journey through the exhibition opens with the *Enlightenment Capsule* (1998), a sculpture representing the fusion of advanced technology and mystic thought. The work comprises a capsule containing a transparent lotus flower that is illuminated by means of a special system for the transmission of sunlight, called *Himawari* (sunflower), and an optic fiber system that together create the illusion of the flower floating inside the capsule. The light transmitted from the atmospheric exterior ambient to the interior of the work of art has a dual material and metaphysical function: visible and invisible forces converge to achieve the combination of spirit and science.

The hi-tech *Himawari* system, invented by the artist's father, Prof. Kei Mori of the Keio University, uses optic fibers to purify natural light of UV radiation, and conveys it inside an artificial ambient.

The *Garden of Purification* is an impressive space with an almost sacred impact, created by a white stretch of marine salt, chosen for the purifying qualities acknowledged by religions throughout the centuries. The scene embracing the view of the visitor evokes ages past, its brilliant purity evenly highlighted by diffused spotlighting.

Purification is necessary to accomplish the silent path of initiation towards earthly detachment: the Garden is a gathered space, without openings, to nullify the conventional relationship between interior and exterior.

This candid landscape is perfectly intact, crossed by a path of transparent resin rocks of changing hue: a total of fifty-one elements, in accordance with the symbolic number of the sutra indicating the different moods of the individual in relation to the celestial phenomena.

The only trace of human contact in the Garden of Purification are the light, perfectly round impressions, six concentric circles drawn by the artist with a traditional Japanese rake. At the center of each circle, six hard stone planets, multicolored spheres invite the visitor to meditate through their purifying qualities. The colors of these stone planets mark out the progressive purification of the human body, from the feet up to the head: the red stone for the legs and pelvis, the pink for the stomach, the orange for the heart, the green for the throat, the blue for the head through to the purple revealing the “third eye” of the mind.

Half-way through the Garden of Purification the visitor encounters the *Kumano* (1997-98), a color photograph made up of five giant-size panels. “In the *Kumano*”, explains the artist, “I wished to cancel the boundaries between present, past and future, to transcend time and space”\*.

The photographic works of the *Kumano* in the Garden of Purification and the video installation *Kumano (Alaya)* (1997-98, length approx. 13’, sound) arranged in the antechamber of the Space of Meditation are dedicated to the fusion of Buddhism and Shintoism. Both works depict a scenery of mountain woodlands, represented as a place of magic, where Mariko Mori appears in the guise of priestess while in prayer and performing a ritual dance. The spectator can glimpse between the trees the famous *Nachi* waterfalls, the largest in Japan and traditional destination for pilgrims, and a turquoise temple that anticipates the ambitious multimedia structure of the *Dream Temple*. The turquoise temple is inspired by the *Yumedono*, the Temple of Dreams in the Horuji Buddhist monastery built in 739 AD near Nara, in Japan. The original model is the ancient octagonal pavilion, the “hidden temple”, which houses the gilded life-size wood statue of prince Shotoku (574-622 AD), known as Kuse Kannon (“the Savior”) representing the body and soul of the founder. Between the XII and XIX centuries, this image, the object of fervent worship, was no longer visible to the faithful.

Part of the surface area of the *Kumano* photographic display features ancient Japanese ideograms dedicated to the overcoming of human sufferings. The *Kumano (Alaya)* video installation celebrates a personal interpretation of the tea ceremony, becoming a performance in which artistic creation and mystic symbolism converge in a form of meditation.

The Space of Meditation leads to the heart of this monumental representation. At the center of the room stands the remarkable multimedia architecture of the *Dream Temple*. The aim of this spectacular project, which required two years for the artist together with an *equipe* of American, Japanese and Italian specialists to complete, is to suggest a different perception of reality through an original fusion of scientific and mystic knowledge in a work of global art that seeks a higher spiritual awareness. “My aspiration to create a utopian or ideal space”, states the artist, “belongs to the history of civilization, and can be traced back to four thousand years ago. The *Yumedono* is Japan’s most ancient temple, a place for meditation and a center of Sutra studies. The temple is actually a *virtual* center, where all tensions can be released, in which the individual is freed of conflicts and residual stress to reach a highest degree of happiness. All civilizations, whether in the West or the East, have always dreamed of an ideal place for Beauty and Purity, an imaginary space that is actually a non-place (ou-tópos) and a happy place (eu-tópos). In Western as in Eastern civilization, the

desire for perfection has always been associated with the utopian aspiration and the dreamed vision”\*.

The temple architecture and the three-dimensional hemispherical projection in its interior were designed by Mariko Mori, who began developing the project in 1997. The artist’s design was transformed into a technical project by the Japanese architect Yukiharu Takematsu, and implemented in Italy by a team of architects and artisans, in co-operation with the Studio Cerri & Associati.

The octagonal temple is 5 meters high with a perimeter of approximately 10 meters. The overall architectural structure is transparent, bright and transient, like the hues of the aurora. Beneath the temple, a vast bed of transparent glass fragments enhances the surreal light of the raised structure, according to the criteria of purification envisaged by Japanese architectural tradition in the construction of “ideal” buildings, that appears magical and shining.

“The references for the Hoyuji *Yumedono*,” states Mariko Mori, “are formal but also symbolic, like the octagonal structure and the ornaments that bring into contact the terrestrial and celestial dimensions, sky and earth, interior and exterior. These elements can date back to the past and belong to ancient cultures, or be of the present and flow into the future. Since they can only look upon the present, I considered it important to recover traditional motives and make them present, if not to project them into the future, as I did by using certain materials, such as dichroic surfaces. I like the idea of an *eternal present*; that’s why I’m interested in using technologies such as virtual reality, because it allows me to take an ancient element and make it *eternally present*”\*.

The materials used include painted metal, fiberglass, plastic, optical fibers, as well as four types of precious glass: dichroic for its prismatic refraction; special iridescent Japanese glass, changing from opaque to transparent according to view angle; liquid crystal, opaque or transparent depending on human presence; and Venetian decorative glass. Mariko Mori explains: “I insisted on using dichroic glass with a changing surface, because it’s closer to the image of awareness that changes with every second, every instant. It’s also a material that cannot be defined by its chromatic properties; its color cannot be defined, just as you can’t define consciousness. The colors change incessantly when you observe them from different angles. Sometimes you perceive them, sometimes you don’t. Dichroic glass is also transparent; in fact I think that the interior and the exterior come into contact, just as I believe that each conscience can connect to another or to all consciences throughout the world”\*.

Eight magenta-colored dichroic glass steps lead up to the temple into the spherical area, the place for individual meditation and viewing of the projection (1999, length 4’ 44”, sound). The number eight is an allusion to the seven levels of awareness of the Buddhist tradition by which the eighth and final level, revelation, is reached.

The *Visiondome* viewing system represents the most advanced technology of its kind today. The system was designed in the US laboratories of the *Alternate Realities Corporation*, in close collaboration with the Japanese specialists of the *Shiseido Co. Ltd.* to create in Tokyo a series of computer graphic images \*\*.

The virtual projection inside the *Dream Temple* is the synthesis of the artist’s personal meditation: “The idea was of a being or a person who can only believe in their own conscience, who visualizes it and expresses it. This complex universe of figures and signs, of movements and colors has taken on the shape of the vision shown

in 4' 44". During the first minute I tried to recapture the images of an immersion that leads to the fundamental ideas of life, even deeper. It's like looking at 50 million different strings of DNA to try and understand what makes up a human being, without grasping its definition. (...) In the case of the computer graphic images, I focused on the relationship between light and darkness. A relationship that dates back to past experience, when at 9 years of age I visited cathedrals in Europe; dark inside, in which light filters through the windows. In my work I've always emphasized the importance of light and illumination, in both the physical and metaphysical senses"\*

On the occasion of the exhibition, the Fondazione Prada is publishing the book *Dream Temple* (in Italian and English) designed by the artist herself. The book features drawings and writings by Mariko Mori and complete documentation of the architectural project, from the initial sketches through to the technical drawings and pictures of the temple construction, the plan and story board of the 3D projection. It also contains an interview with the artist by Germano Celant, as well as a conversation with Shin'ichi Nakazawa and Takayo Iida, not to mention biographical and bibliographic information.

\* Taken from the interview by Germano Celant, published in the volume edited by the Fondazione Prada for the exhibition.

\*\*The project was organised with the patronage of the *Corporate Culture Department, Shiseido Co. Ltd.*; CG production supported by *Advertising Department, Shiseido Co. Ltd.*; *Sony Corporation*; *Sony PCL Inc.*; *Nihon Silicon Graphics K.K.*; *The Japan Foundation*.

*Exhibition info*

*Title:* Mariko Mori  
*Dream Temple*

*Date:* 22 May - 15 June 1999

*Venue:* Fondazione Prada

*Address:* Via Spartaco 8, Milan

*Opening times:* Seven days, 10 a.m. - 10 p.m.

*Entry:* free entry to view exhibition  
telephone bookings for projection viewings inside temple  
(tel. 02/546 70 224, between 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.)

*Catalogue:* Fondazione Prada

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