

Collecting

## How Yuko Mohri found inspiration in 'leaky situations'

The Japanese artist's work draws on the interaction of the natural and the synthetic



*Yuko Mohri*

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In 2009, Yuko Mohri noticed a strange phenomenon spreading across the Tokyo metro system. Wherever a leak sprung, station staff were making elaborate improvisations to try to channel water away from passengers. Cobbled together from plastic sheeting, hoses, buckets and

umbrellas, they started to appear everywhere, Mohri says, “like an angel or a ghost in the station”. Intrigued by their inventiveness, she began to photograph each one she saw.

By 2015, Mohri had encountered around 10,000 “leaky situations”, as she calls them, and found inspiration for the installation that kick-started her international career. “Moré Moré (Leaky): The Waterfall Given #1-3” (2015) won the Nissan Art Award 2015 for emerging Japanese artists, leading to London residencies at Camden Art Centre and the V&A, as well as solo exhibitions in Taipei, New York and London. She is currently in a group show at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo (MOT), and is showing in the Kabinett sector at Art Basel Hong Kong next week and at Sapporo Art Festival later in the year.

This February, Mohri made another version of “Moré Moré (Leaky)” for London’s White Rainbow gallery, where we meet. Hissing and spluttering, the ceiling-height sculpture is like something a Roald Dahl character might have concocted to brew potions. Water flows through a meandering loop of incongruous objects; it travels along narrow tubes into wellington boots and watering cans, drips into plastic bags and umbrellas, trickles over a small metal wheel, slides down a piece of corrugated plastic and falls into buckets, before being pumped around again. There is not a leak in sight.

“The most important phase in my work is collecting objects,” says Mohri, who once worked as a carpenter. “That’s the beginning, it’s like my sketching.” Smiley and quick to laugh, she is unable to describe why she chooses certain objects over others, except to say that “everything has a possibility for the future”. To make “Moré Moré (Leaky)”, she laid out her finds on the gallery floor, and with a team devised a system that would circulate water. “Most of my role is working out how to develop the art from the details,” she says.

The only element of the work that is premeditated is the three wooden frames, suspended vertically from the ceiling, that support the circuit. These are built to the exact dimensions of Marcel Duchamp’s “The Large Glass” (1915-1923), a work she has admired since her teenage years. Because there was little contemporary art in the museums in Japan’s Kanagawa district, where she was born in 1980, she made her first discoveries from books. “It’s impossible to understand a Matisse without seeing the real thing,” she says. “It’s a different experience. But even in a book I could feel the shock of Duchamp.”



*Mohri's sculpture 'Moré Moré (Leaky)' (2014-15)*

Mohri focused on new media at art school in Tokyo, where she became involved in the improvised music scene. “I had so many friends who were doing experimental performances. I wanted to do that”, she confesses. “But I’m actually very shy.” She made sound pieces instead, before realising that she could

experiment with objects as musicians do notes. “I changed my mind,” she says simply. “One day I started making sculpture randomly with the tools and items I happened to have in my house. It was like making different sounds, like an improvisation.”

The sculptures have since grown less random, involving objects that carry symbolic, even spiritual, meaning. She describes “I/O: Chamber of a Musical Composer” (2014), a kinetic installation using instruments given to her by the late musician Victor Clarke Searle, as a “collaboration with a dead person”. Most often, however, her art riffs off the spaces and places it inhabits; the show at White Ribbon used objects she gathered while on residency in London, and she is excited about an upcoming visit to Sapporo, Japan, where she wants to test the possibilities of a “huge beautiful corridor” that she hopes to exhibit in.

Underpinning Mohri’s work is her sensitivity to how invisible forces, such as gravity, interact with man-made situations; an idea perfectly encapsulated by the unpredictable appearances of underground waterways in a metro system. “Behind the materials there is a force — you can sense the physics of this piece,” she says, gesturing to “Moré Moré (Leaky)”, “I often create artificial ecosystems, which I hope make these energies more visible, allowing people to see how they are connected to ordinary life.” Mohri finds inspiration everywhere; she wants us to discover it, too.

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