CLOSE-UP

THE SHAPE OF WATER

DAN ADLER ON YUKO MOHRI'S "MORÉ MORÉ (LEAKY)," 2015–

Opposite page: **Yuko Mohri, *Moré Moré (Leaky): Variations*, 2022**, water, hose, PET bottle, bucket, sponge, pump, mirror, bottle, kettle, umbrella, imitation flower, hallstand, tray, table, plastic sheet, corrugated plate, glass bowl, ladle, nylon wire. From the series "Moré Moré (Leaky)," 2015–. Installation view, Pier 2/3, Sydney. From the 23rd Biennale of Sydney. Photo: Document Photography.

Below: **Yuko Mohri, *Yurakucho Station, September 5, 2021***, digital C-print, 42⅜ × 29⅛". From the series "Moré Moré Tokyo (Leaky Tokyo): Fieldwork," 2009–21.

WATER, OR ITS ABSENCE, can be a serious subject. So many existential crises—brought on by drought and deluge, flood and famine, conflict and corruption—flow through the mind and mediasphere. Could my encounters with aquatic-themed art be spared such associations? A memory of Jean Tinguely and Niki de Saint Phalle's *Stravinsky Fountain*, 1983, visits me first as I recall the whimsical variety and vulnerability of the sculpture's liquid outputs, each with its own quality of sound and motion, like the steady stream arching upward from an elephant's trunk or the few dribbles leaking out of the top of a skull. But lately such fond reminiscences are few and far between, partly because of the surging tide of institutional pressure to produce easy-to-consume spectacles. Back in 2016, for example, a bit of dread crept into my encounter with Random International's *Rain Room*, 2012, when the work made an appearance at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. By design, I was able to stroll through the immersive downpour without getting wet. Fully in the service of the experience economy, that installation offered a carefully calculated thrill, one free from any sort of semantic depth about, say, the stakes of water or weather. The buzz evaporated quickly, like a brief spritz in the breeze.

Yuko Mohri has little interest in such packaged and standardized encounters, instead choosing to appreciate water as an unstable and unruly material. Leaks and floods of any sort, after all, are usually not good news—and that is certainly the case in the cities where she has exhibited or soon will, including Venice, where she is participating in next year's Biennale.* "Moré Moré (Leaky)," 2015–, the artist's ongoing series of kinetic works, offers multisensory enjoyments, often striking playful and absurdist notes that nonetheless can create a profound sense of unease and uncertainty. Envisioned by the artist as an individual ecosystem, each version of the project has a hands-on intimacy, always in dialogue with the acoustic and spatial features of its venue. Mohri's process-based practice has lately been focused on framing water as a constantly evolving problem that requires a series of adaptive activities on her part while installing and composing works on-site. The results are experiential events that stubbornly resist documentation and marketing in the conventional sense.

One iteration of the series begun in 2017, *Moré Moré (Leaky): Variations*, appeared last year at Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea, Milan, and at the Twenty-Third Biennale of Sydney. This piece features everyday objects arranged in clusters and connected via networks of simple motors, tubes, and wires. The clusters possess nodal points that serve to generate sounds and/or transmit water. Facing windows offering a garden view, the installation in Milan inhabited a sleek space with sloping ceilings. In one section, fluid flows from a hose in an endless succession of jerky streams down upon an upended umbrella, which in turn sloppily drips onto a broad sheet of translucent plastic. The water is then redirected below through a bouquet of flowers and a chain of cheap metal beads, ending up in the plastic bin whence it came, ready to be cycled up again. The spasmodic motions of the hose generate sound because it is fastened to a steel stick that rubs against the top of a cymbal on a tripod. Nearby, another section of tube shakes to the erratic rhythms of the motorized pulses, causing yet more ringing friction just above the ground, produced by a triangle reacting to the smacks of a small, spherical strainer.

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* While still in development, Mohri's solo show in the Japanese pavilion at the Biennale will combine a new incarnation of "Moré Moré (Leaky)" with another work exploring the dynamics of water and sound: *Decomposition* (part of a series begun in 2021) will feature fruits that are hooked up to wires and software that convert fluctuating electrical currents derived from changes in water levels into sound; the fruits will decompose over the show's duration, and the audio (and olfactory) features of the piece will evolve accordingly over time as well.

Mohri's project is about the intimacy of an in-person event on a human scale.

Mohri's combinations of ready-made materials—including kitchen and percussion instruments; simple, often geometric objects; and rudimentary motors—recall the low-tech, kinetic sculptures of Hans Haacke and Rebecca Horn, which are symbolically diffuse in their referencing of human bodies and other mechanisms. Haacke's *Blue Sail*, 1964–65, for example, consists of a square panel of blue chiffon that's weighed down by its corners and blown from below by a fan, with the result that the fabric billows and ripples, while his *Circulation*, 1969, features a pump shooting water and air around a continuous floor-based circuit of transparent tubing. But Mohri's project is, of course, more expansive and complicated, visually and technically—the result of prolonged experimentation both studio-based and in situ. In Sydney, *Moré Moré (Leaky): Variations* appeared in a large old wooden pier building. Extending from floor to ceiling, the arching and bending tubes cascaded sinuously down through another set of nodal points, including tables, a hat rack, and plastic jugs. Here, the range of dribbling and trickling sounds and sights on offer—along with the associated jerkiness of the tubes—had more pronounced bodily and sexual associations (urinating, ejaculating, spitting).

Such moving and multisensory sculptural works were inspired by a series of photographs, "Moré Moré Tokyo (Leaky Tokyo): Field Work," 2009–21. Mohri started this series by documenting the improvised devices employed by maintenance staff in Tokyo subways to patch leaks caused by earthquakes, weather, and groundwater seepage. The artist became fascinated by the idea of "repair" as a form of adaptive creativity that anyone can channel. Station agents employed buckets, tarps, duct tape, soda bottles, and umbrellas to cobble together "highly customized bricolages"

Opposite page, left: **Yuko Mohri, *Asakusa Station, October 24, 2015***, digital C-print, 42⅜ × 29⅛". From the series "Moré Moré Tokyo (Leaky Tokyo): Fieldwork," 2009–21.

Opposite page, right: **Yuko Mohri, *Shinjuku JR Station, November 2, 2015***, digital C-print, 42⅜ × 29⅛". From the series "Moré Moré Tokyo (Leaky Tokyo): Fieldwork," 2009–21.

Above: **View of "Yuko Mohri: Moré Moré (Leaky)," 2017**, White Rainbow, London.

Below: **Yuko Mohri, *Moré Moré (Leaky): Variations*, 2022**, water, hose, PET bottles, bucket, sponge, pump, bottle, umbrella, imitation flower, plastic sheet, flower base, plastic bowl, plastic chain, LED light, cymbal, pot, iron screen, pinch, sewing box, candle stand, bell, funnel, nylon wire. From the series "Moré Moré (Leaky)," 2015–. Installation views, Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea, Milan. Photos: Lorenzo Palmer.

(as the artist characterizes them) reflecting the "beauty of use," a notion derived from Japanese philosopher Soetsu Yanagi that Mohri admires. *Shinjuku JR Station, November 2, 2015*, for instance, depicts an expanse of tarp, fastened to a ceiling and to a wall, that diverts a leak away from a busy corridor; one strolling silhouetted commuter glances toward the improvised installation, marked by bright-yellow caution tape, perhaps appreciating its ingenuity. *Yurakucho Station, September 5, 2021*, captures a network of thin clear plastic tubes—forming elaborate lattice- and web-like shapes—suspended above a bench of waiting passengers, descending and converging as the conduits extend from right to left. *Asakusa Station, October 24, 2015*, presents an array of translucent umbrellas rigged with tiger-stripe-patterned tape, tubes, and tarps; the umbrellas glow ominously above some blue buckets and mundane signage. I wonder with some unease about the forces of corrosion, seismic shifts, and changing proximities of moisture and electrical systems in these spaces. Mohri's ongoing commitment to such "fieldwork" lends this series a Conceptualist rigor as an accumulation of empirical evidence that may yield insight into methods (and typologies) of water containment and redirection within a certain cultural context. In this regard, Thomas Struth's series "Museum Photographs," 1989–92—or perhaps the more explicit typological concerns of his teachers Bernd and Hilla Becher—reflects similar interests in comparative study. And yet Mohri's project seems distinct, given her emphasis on utterly unpredictable and ungovernable phenomena.

The artist prioritizes the process of testing the physical properties of her sculptural components. Over the years, she has become highly attuned to the sounds and vibrations that water makes within her particular parameters: the drips and dribbles, the seeps and pours, all occurring at different rates and speeds in relation to the pulses of the motors. The work is always the product of careful calibration, with a diligent understanding of fluid dynamics, friction, gravity, and other forces. While that level of expertise and insight is impressive—and the scale of her work is sometimes sprawling—it never becomes grandiose, as does Peter Fischli and David Weiss's famous 1987 film *The Way Things Go*, an intricately conceived meditation on entropy and order (à la Rube Goldberg) dressed up as a dry Teutonic joke and an influence on Mohri.† While Fischli & Weiss prioritized similarly everyday materials and oddball effects within a nondescript warehouse setting, Mohri's project is more about the intimacy of an in-person event on a human scale. When I am in close proximity to her art, my body senses the effort it took, with such humble means, to harness water and create sound. Yet as I spend time with her work, it makes me consider many subjects, both serious and benign: for instance, when I observe how a piece reacts to the mild breeze of an AC kicking in and take notice of the ambient sounds generated by vents and lighting systems. My appreciation of Mohri's work is rooted, each time, in an event of beholding and navigating a slippery progression of sculptural (and sonic) twists and turns—which triggers memories and associations that alternate between the idyllic and the troubling, like the gurgling eruptions from a bucket when one is bathing a dog; the sobering sight of water rising, slowly and ominously, on a Venetian street; or the gushing contents of the frozen pipe that exploded in my former home. With great care and inventiveness, Mohri manages to contain the chaos, always tenuously, while clinging to a sense of hope and humor. □

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† It is worth noting that Mohri's work was shown alongside Fischli & Weiss's film in a show at Minatomachi Art Table, Nagoya, Japan, in 2015.