

INTERVIEW: MARIKO KUSUMOTO

Sphere Necklace by Mariko Kusumoto



Mariko Kusumoto is an artist who was born in Japan and is based in the US. Known for her intricate work with fabric, she creates small, ethereal sculptural forms which are often integrated with jewellery. She has collaborated with fashion designers and aims to create aesthetically beautiful and intriguing work.

Can you introduce your practice, particularly how it relates to wearable items?

I was determined to become an artist while still in my early teens, and I attended a high school in

Japan that offered an art major, with a broad range of studio and liberal arts studies. While at art college, I received a well-rounded education in a variety of art disciplines including drawing, painting, printmaking, and metalworking. Shortly after completing my undergraduate studies, I moved to the USA to continue my education, eventually settling there.

Growing up in Japan and living in the USA for nearly 30 years has exposed me to both western and Japanese aesthetics which, enhanced by my curiosity, has broadened my view. I can appreciate all art forms, and I regard them all as one. To me, there is no boundary between the different categories. This wide, deep perspective has been reinforced by a solid educational background, providing me with knowledge and understanding of many different kinds of materials. My mind is very flexible, and my creativity is not restricted by any rules.

I make both sculpture and wearable pieces. I believe that to express certain things, the scale of the piece has to be appropriate. For example, to suggest subtlety, fragility, intimacy, something you want to embrace, a small scale would be better, but if it's too big it might lose these kinds of qualities. By wearing the piece, it becomes part of you, versus a large installation work, where you feel like you are part of the piece. Different sizes have different roles and purposes.

To me wearable pieces are miniature sculpture. It stands as an object when it's not worn.

Do you perceive your work as relating to women in particular, in practice and/or in theme?

My main inspiration is nature and it's more neutral and universal instead of relating to gender.

What connections do you feel you have to textiles and textile art and what or who are your influences and what inspires your work?

Encountering materials in daily life is important to me. Sometimes I come across a mesmerizing material, which draws me in and stirs my imagination.

Fabric is one of the most familiar of everyday materials. Even if you say the word "fabric," it has various characteristics which draw out numerous sensations or emotions; some possess wet and cold feelings of moisture, a sense of fluffiness and comfort, the mysterious, tranquillity, the ethereal, fragility, subtlety, etc.

I strive to bring out the fabric's inherent characteristics and beauty and, combining a heat-setting technique, give a new identity to my three-dimensional forms. For example, I love the translucency of fabric – using layers and adding moving parts to create playful, mysterious, and ethereal atmospheres.

Besides being inspired by material itself, I am motivated by process. Almost half of my creative time is spent in experimentation. During the experimental process, there is sometimes a breathtaking moment. I pay attention to these accidental discoveries, catch those moments, and develop ideas from that point.

What I can do with fabric is still full of unknowns to me and I'm on a journey of exploring endless, unlimited possibilities with this material. In all my work there is always an insistence on skill and craftsmanship.

Does the work you do have a particular relevance to cultural values and practices?

I've never been trained as a textile artist. I taught myself but I think one of the techniques I use is very similar to the Japanese traditional technique "Shibori." However, with what I create, the theme is very much universal.



Ramune Brooch by Mariko Kusumoto