
MATRIX, TESHIMA ART MUSEUM

The art installation 'Matrix' was created by Rei Naito, and built as part of Teshima Art Museum, which was designed by Ryue Nishizawa. This encounter was first published on gensojapan.org (now offline).



Teshima Art Museum, (2010) Ryue Nishizawa. Photo: Noboro Morikawa

The coastal path that takes you to Teshima Art Museum loops around a clump of trees at the edge of the island first. The clatter of cicadas resonate as you follow the winding track through woodland, seeing the neighbouring islands and the hazy horizon, before the trail bends back to a clearing that reveals a gently domed concrete shelter. Pale and unobtrusive, it lays low in its surroundings, but the coastal path that has taken you there is just as important in attuning you to what awaits.

Upon entering, a festival volunteer asks you to remove your shoes and to refrain from touching the artwork. Barefoot, the first sensation is the feel of the floor against the soles of your feet. It's smooth but uneven and cold to the touch. Nearly everything inside has a quality contrary to its exterior counterpart. Bright becomes shady, sweltering becomes cool; the slender path becomes a broad interior, and despite there being many other visitors inside, it feels almost empty. Even the song of the insects becomes serene.

The museum itself roughly resembles a huge, hollow pebble. Without distinguishing between wall and ceiling it slopes gradually upwards to form a continuous concrete canopy. It's spacious and there are two elliptical apertures in the roof that bare the building to the elements and frame the sky. A few treetops are visible through these, but instead your eye follows its general contours, taking in the pale grey tones of building material and searching for Rei Naito's elusive installation. Initially, there doesn't appear to be an artwork to resist touching.



Matrix, Teshima Art Museum, (2010) Ryue Nishizawa. Photo: Noboro Morikawa

From one of the openings in the roof, a single thread hangs in a deep arc like a hammock. A trickle of moisture runs down the string and pools onto the floor below. And then another. Then you notice that there are dozens of other puddles strewn throughout the space. Some are motionless whilst others stream into shallow ponds nearby.

Looking closer, you begin to notice the sum and speed of these minuscule streams. The floor is a finely veined network of pale waterways. Reflecting the silvery environment, they dart like mercury tadpoles across the floor. The entire base of the building is alive with liquid wriggling over the irregular ground at sporadic intervals.

Looking closer still, you see that the surface of the floor is speckled with pinholes that push the tiny droplets up to the surface. Concealing an intricate network, a matrix, the floor acts as a membrane to produce a spectacularly subtle installation in a museum on an island in the Seto Inland Sea.



Matrix, Teshima Art Museum, (2010) Ryue Nishizawa. Photo: Noboro Morikawa