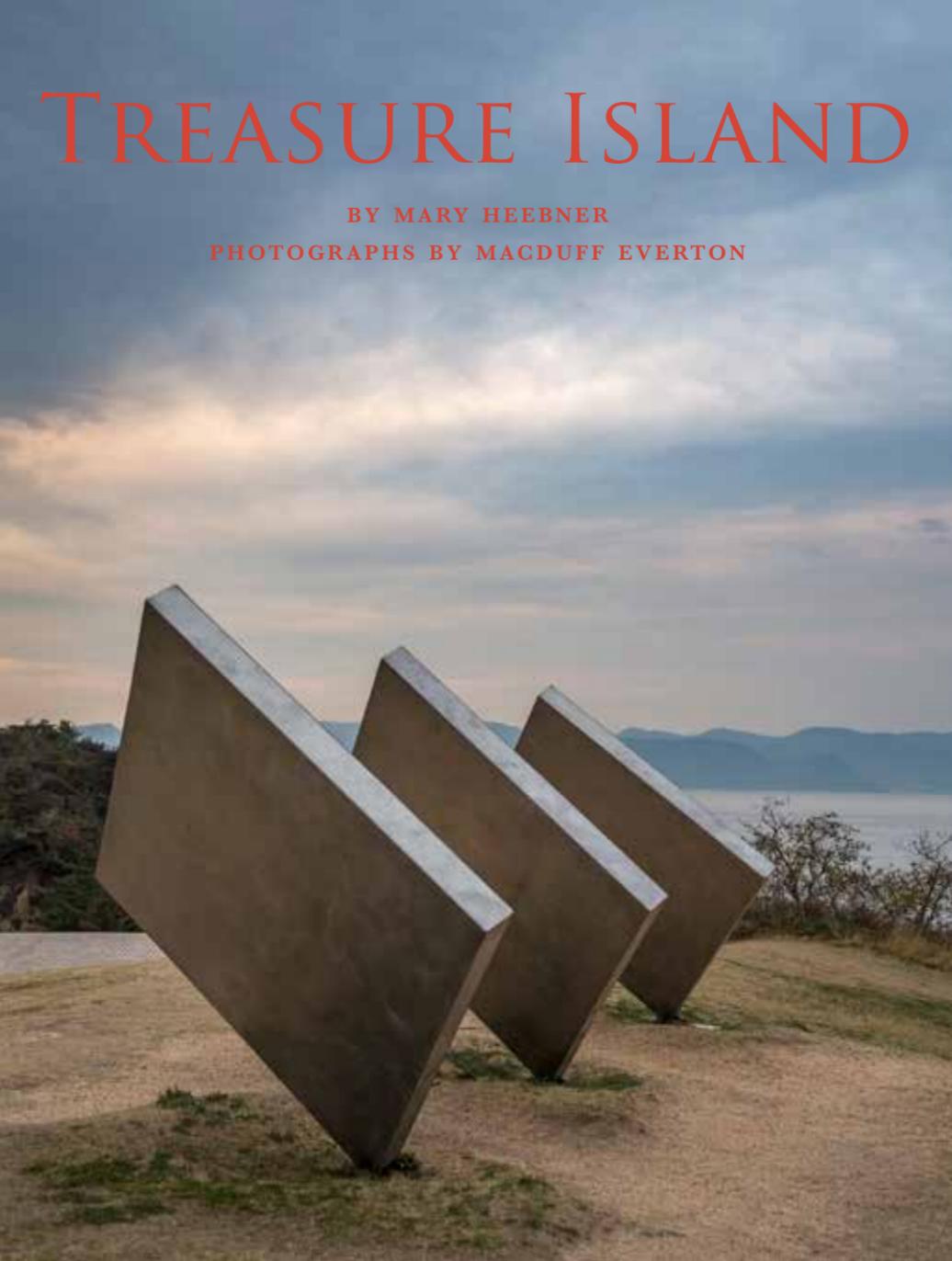


TREASURE ISLAND

BY MARY HEEBNER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MACDUFF EVERTON



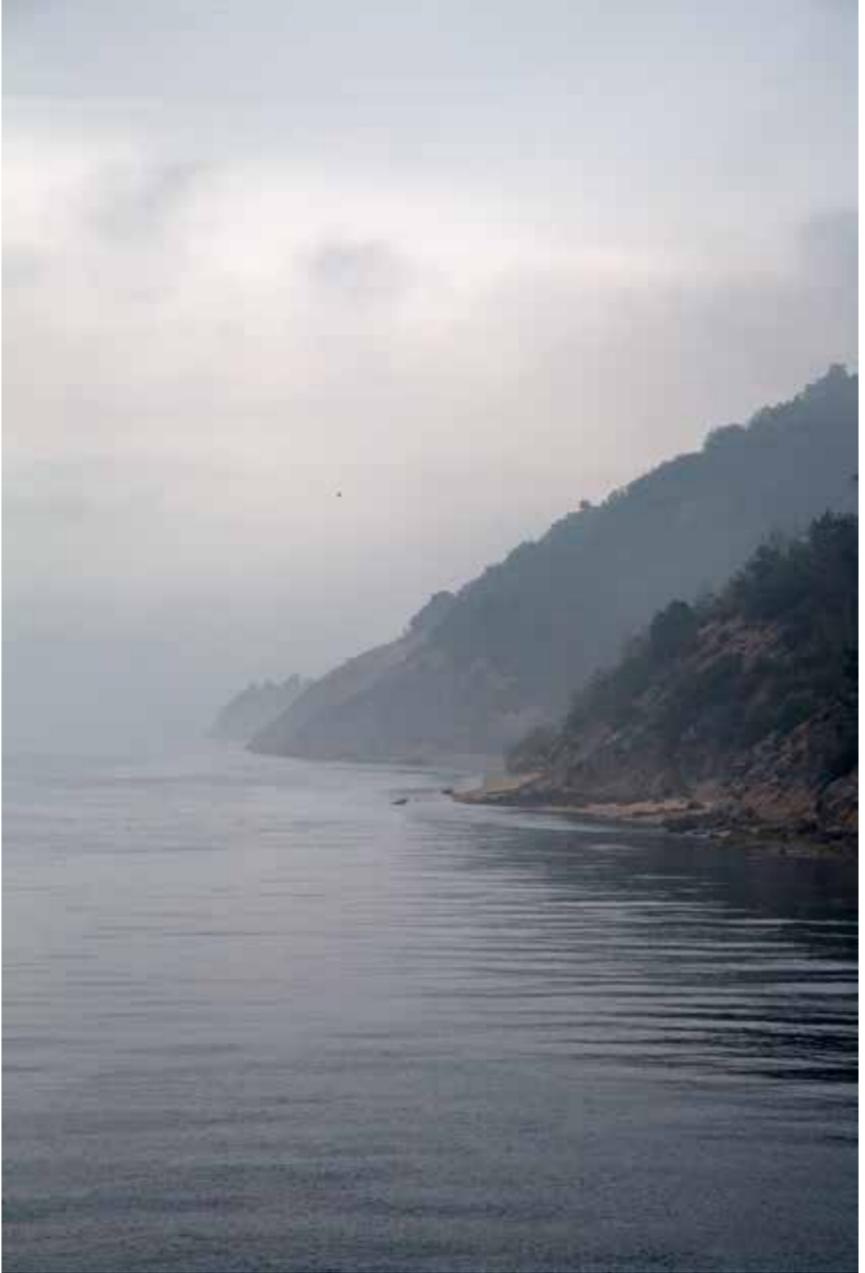
AMID THE SHELTERED WATERS OF JAPAN'S
SETO INLAND SEA, ART AND NATURE MEET
IN WAYS BOTH CUTTING-EDGE AND
DEEPLY TRADITIONAL

Removing my shoes, I enter an all-white anteroom paved with tiny cubes of pale Carrara marble, and catch the powdery scent of marble dust. This leads into the gallery with softened plastered corners where the grand Monet Water-Lily Pond trumpets a riot of purple, rose, blue, and green, and although it was painted a century ago, it is as vivid as if the paint were still wet. This and four smaller Water-lily oils seem to hover, afloat in the edge-less space. Monet's brave swirls of paint summon pure movement, a jazz of color.

No stranger to the works of the great French plein-air Impressionist, I might not have found these water lilies quite so transfixing were it not for the setting—a numinous underground chamber on the small, sleepy island of Naoshima in Japan's Seto Inland Sea, a major shipping lane linking the Japan Sea and the Pacific Ocean, between the main islands of Honshu to the north, Kyushu to the west and Shikoku to the south in Kagawa Prefecture, Japan. It's an obscure—and undeniably exquisite—location for what has emerged over the last two decades into a mind-blowing conjunction of art, architecture, and nature.

In the mid-1980s, Tetsuhiko Fukutake, the head of a large textbook publisher based in nearby Okayama, teamed up with the island's mayor to develop the south side of Naoshima as cultural park, beginning with a campground for children. After Fukutake's death in 1986, his eldest son, Soichiro, already well on his way to becoming one of the country's foremost art collectors, returned from Tokyo to take over the reigns of the company (which he renamed benesse "living well") and to continue his father's dreams for Naoshima. He recruited the modernist architect Tadao Ando to design Benesse House, opened in 1992, functioning as both a hotel and a museum. Imagine sleeping within architectural masterpiece where you can slip into the galleries at midnight in your pajamas and sit in front of an enormous Davis Hockney painting, or the gigantic circular Richard Long floor piece, made of flotsam driftwoods collected from the island. The Chichu Museum built in 2004, became the heart of the Benesse art projects, with four master artists of light and time—Claude Monet, James Turrell, Walter de Maria and Tadao Ando. The Lee Ufan Art Museum followed in 2010, each structure built of Ando's signature poured concrete and designed to blend in with the landscape.

My husband, the photographer Macduff Everton, and I are both artists, so our visit to the Benesse Art Site Naoshima—the collective name for art activities conducted by Benesse Holdings and Fukutake Foundation on Naoshima and the neighboring islands of Teshima and Inujima—would be a pilgrimage of sorts, which seems fitting, given the tens of thousands of Buddhist pilgrims who flock to nearby Shikoku, the smallest of Japan's four main islands, is said



coastline on foggy day



*interior, "Pumpkin," by Yayoi Kusama, by the ferry terminal at Miyanoura Port
Benesse Art Site Outdoor Works*



*"Pumpkin," by Yayoi Kusama, by the ferry terminal at Miyanoura Port
Benesse Art Site Outdoor Works*

to be the world's largest mandala. Pilgrims dressed in all white, with conical straw hats, circumambulate the island each year to visit as many of the 88 temples on its religious circuit as they can, thus gaining karmic merit. I admire the forward-thinking vision of Benesse to have created the Art Site Naoshima in part to transform and to heal a beautiful landscape, that, although lying within Japan's oldest national park, the Setonaikai, had been much distressed by the illegal dumping of industrial waste starting in the 1970s. I don't know what merit we might gain on Naoshima, but neither do I expect to leave unaffected.

To get there, we take a train from Osaka to Okayama and thence to the port town of Uno, where we board a ferry for the 20-minute crossing to Naoshima, just one of thousands of islands, a mere 7.81 square km speck in the sea, and home to less than 4000 people. Scrambling with several other passengers up to the top deck to enjoy the view, we watch the boat's frothy wake cut a white line through the grey sea. We are inside a Japanese ink wash painting, with dozens of islands rising like smoke out of the morning mist. Although we are in a major shipping lane, the morning is all stillness, and time seems to slow down as we leave the high speed hubbub of airports, bullet trains and traffic behind us.

Disembarking at the port of Miyanoura, our experience of minimalist art and architecture has already begun. We wait momentarily by the Marine Station Naoshima—itsself a masterfully designed structure by SAANA with stabilizing mirror panels that disappear, creating the a fragile-looking illusion that the flat roof is supported by pencil thin poles—



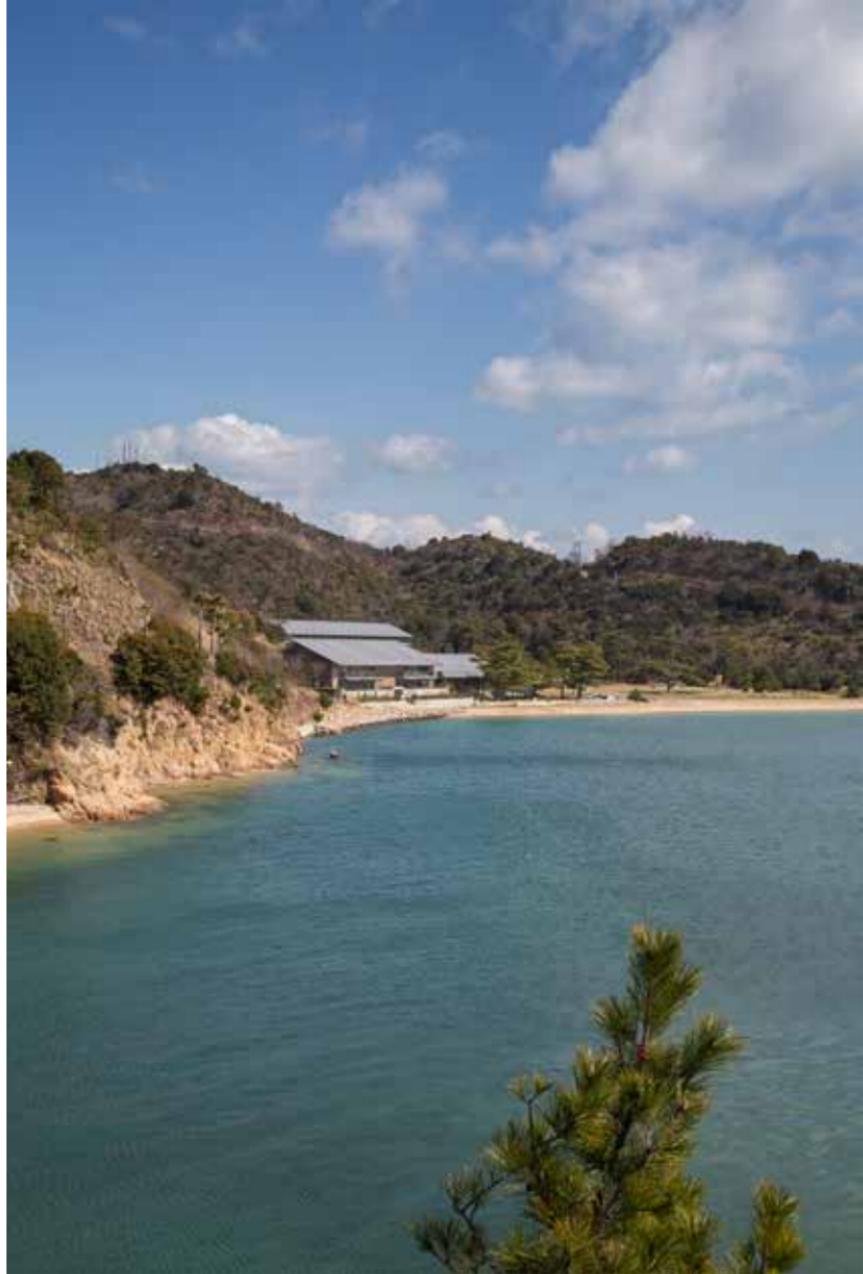
passenger ferry, view of foggy coastline crossing between Naoshima and Uno



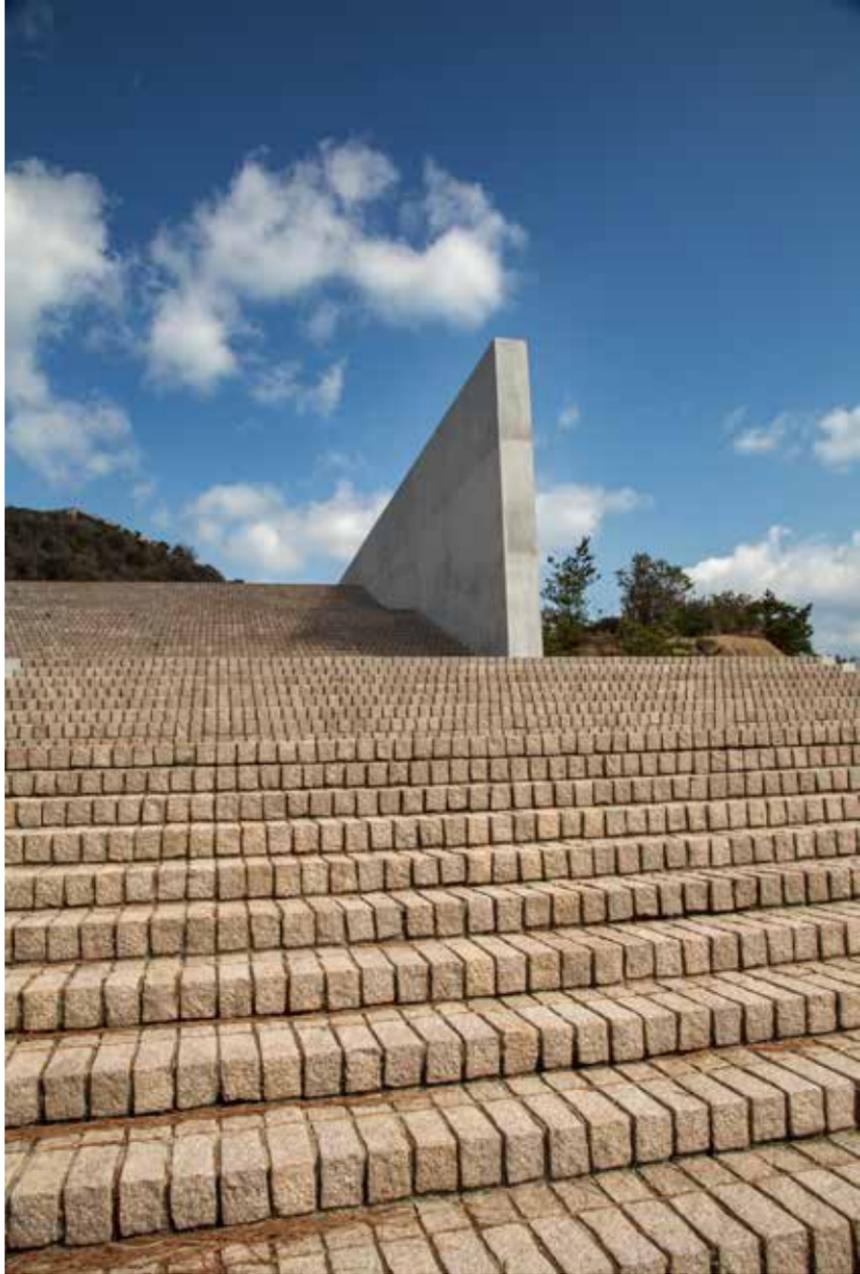
passengers capturing photographic memories on ferry to Naoshima



Torii, Tsutsuji-so



Benesse House Beach, on the Inland Sea



*steps leading up to "Seen/Unseen Known/Unknown," by Walter De Maria
Benesse Art Site Outdoor Works*

for the shuttle bus that will deliver us to Benesse House, which today comprises four separate Tadao Ando–designed buildings. Ours was the Park (the others are designated Oval, Beach, and Museum), which opened in 2006. It is a light-filled two-storied structure of concrete softened by recyclable laminated wood, with walkways that link to the spa, shop, and restaurant., and, of course, there’s art:in one corridor a six-panel composite photograph by Hiroshi Sugimoto depicts ink black silhouettes against a charcoal sky ingeniously capturing the spirit of the island’s pine trees in darkest night. The guest lounge overlooks a reflecting pool featuring a George Rickey kinetic sculpture beyond which lies a broad sloping lawn populated with fantastical colorful animal figures by French sculptor Niki de St Phalle. After a refreshing cup of tea, I beeline it to the Chichu Museum along an ascending water garden and path abloom with a palette of Monet colors (quite literally: many of the same flowers grown by Monet is his beloved garden at Giverny are planted here). Sited on a hill alongside the remains of a terraced salt field, the museum is built almost entirely underground—chichu means “inside the earth”—leaving just the slightest tracery of a footprint that, from a bird’s-eye view, is as subtle as a line drawing, a mere hint at what lies below. It presented a new vision of architectural intervention in the landscape and it became the heart of Benesse art projects, presenting three master artists of light and time; Claude Monet, James Turrell, Walter de Maria with Tadao Ando. Ando offers the most slender means to explore and to define space so that light and shadow may play, which, as the day turns to night, reveals the color of time.



photographs by Hiroshi Sugimoto mounted outside, with “Cultural Melting Bath: Project for Naoshima,” by Cai Guo-Qiang, below, near the beach, Benesse House Museum



"Full Moon Stone Circle," by Richard Long, Benesse House Museum



"Slag Buddha 88," by Tsuyoshi Ozawa, based on the 88 temple pilgrimage route on Naoshima

The complex is accessed via a tall concrete entryway that is Ando's reinterpretation of the torii, the traditional gates found at the entrance to Shinto shrines; like them, it suggests a transition to a hallowed space. I continue to walk through a series of unadorned concrete switchbacks passing sunken interior courtyards patterned with wedges of sunlight.

My first stop, after taking off my shoes, is the Monet gallery, a naturally lit room purpose-built to showcase five paintings from the artist's Water Lilies series, including a breathtaking six-meter-long diptych, the pride of the collection. Nearly blind, his eyes clouded with cataracts, Monet lunged at these canvases like an ecstatic stabbing at the world, his sight of the waterlilies came from someplace within, like Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

A small sign points me to the next gallery. I wait my turn to enter the gallery, as only a few persons are allowed in at a time. A museum guide then escorts us into a white-walled space where we climb a set of steps that leads into a room suffused in violet light. Edges disappear as I walk further into the space. When I turn my gaze back towards the entry the white gallery wall suddenly appears as radiant saffron – yellow vibrations borne out of a violet field, a hallucinatory shift of color. This is *Open Field*, 2000, one of three light installations by American artist James Turrell. The artist takes a lesson in complementary color theory and makes it visceral. It's the optical equivalent to Monet.

Throughout time humans have created shapes in order to contain, observe, and revere space. Greek and Roman

reflecting pools mirrored the stars in the firmament. Around 2000 years ago Hadrian restored the ancient Roman Pantheon, a circular temple consecrated to all the gods with an oculus to the sky. Closer to the present time, American painter Georgia O'Keeffe held half a cow's pelvis bone up to the sky, in order to frame the unblemished cerulean light of a New Mexican desert. Turrell uses light itself instead of water, marble or paint to carry on this tradition. In an adjacent gallery Ando and Turrell designed the ultimate room with a view: the piece *Open Sky* is just that. I sit on a marble surround-bench with sloping back, easing into a comfortable upward-gazing position to regard the changing light in this one small patch of heaven. As simple as can be, and in the gloaming, profound.

The third artist in the Chichu collection is Walter De Maria, who, like both Turrell and Monet, is focused on the phenomenon of light and time. His piece titled *Time/Timeless/No Time* embodies the ceremony and cadence of a cathedral and is sited at the very bottom of the museum off of the triangular sunken courtyard filled with chunks of rough marble, articulated by the changing patterns of sunlight and shadow. A massive orb of granite polished to a mirror sheen sits beneath a rectangular skylight on a platform midway up a set of wide concrete stairs. Along the signature Ando walls, 27 trios of four-foot-tall gilded mahogany pillars milled as triangle, square, or pentagon are positioned on the ground, midway up the wall, and nearly to the top of the ceiling. The granite orb reflects it all: the pillars, the stairs that wraparound it like a collar necklace, the mutable sky. The gallery's east-west alignment—like the Seto Inland Sea itself—



"Peristyle V" by George Rickey, Benesse House Park



*visitors outside "Seen/Unseen Known/Unknown," by Walter De Maria
Benesse Art Site Outdoor Works*



"Relatum-Pint, Line, Plane," by Lee Ufan, at entrance to Lee Ufan Museum



*museum employee cleaning metal plate after visitor walked over it leaving shoe prints, part of
“Relatum-Pint, Line, Plane,” by Lee Ufan, at entrance to Lee Ufan Museum*



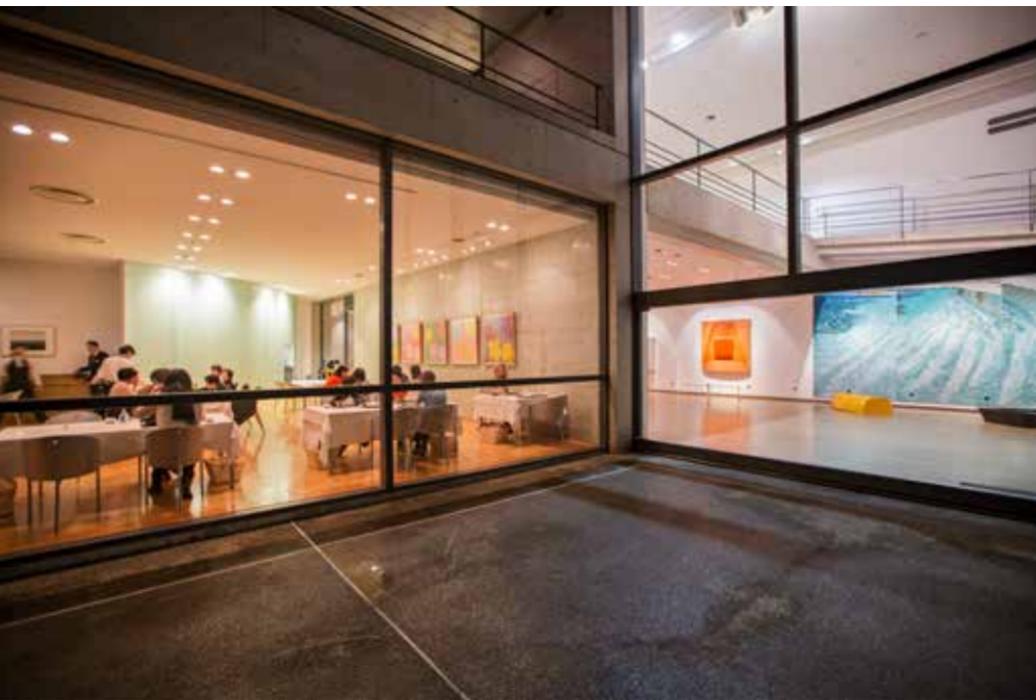
entrance, Lee Ufan Museum



photographs by Hiroshi Sugimoto, Benesse House Park



Benesse House Museum, hotel, and restaurant



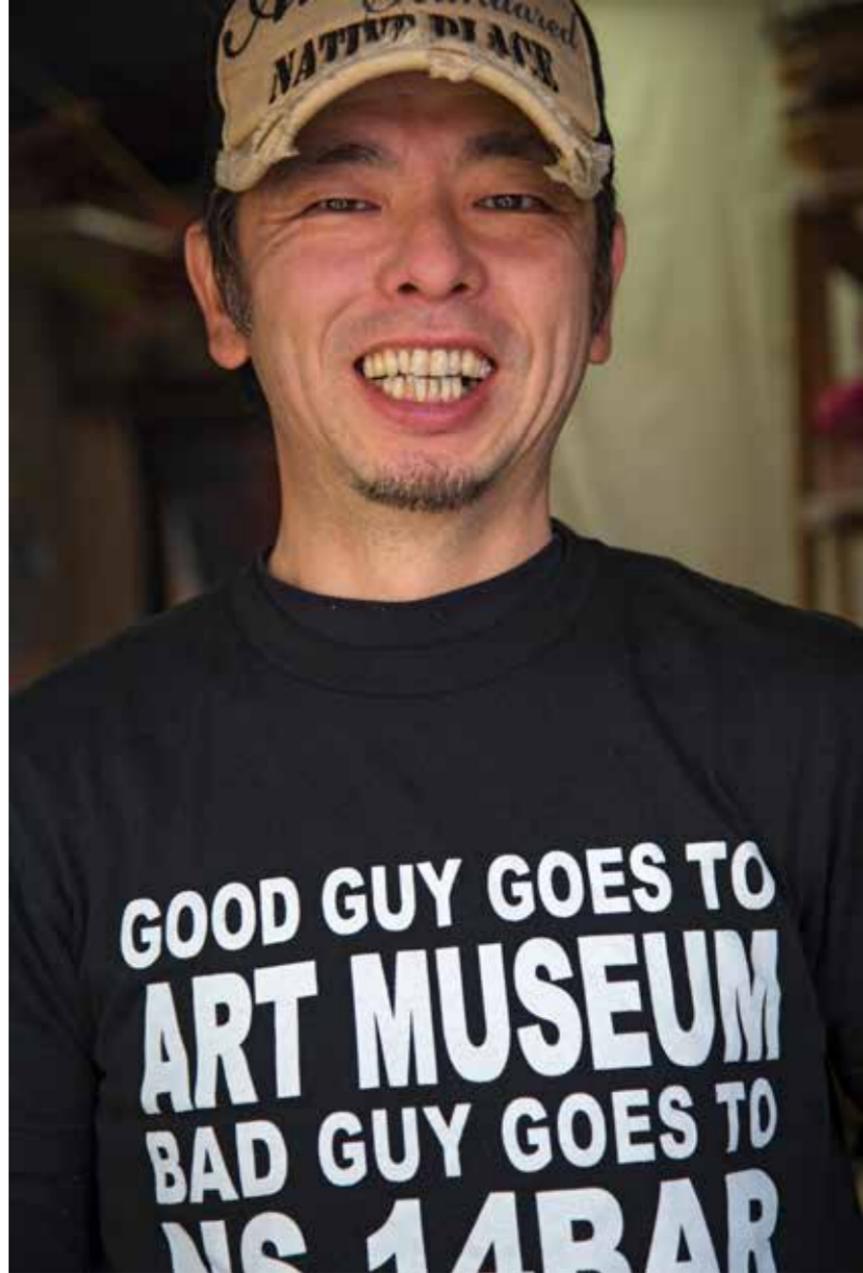
Benesse House Museum, hotel, and restaurant



museum staff, Benesse House Museum



Bassha Nabe, Naoshima hot pot cooking in boiling miso broth



restaurant cook



art visitors on rental bikes

cat cafe



にゃお島



夕
写真撮
下さい。

cat in window of Cat Cafe



Terrace Restaurant, Benesse House



*marinated Spanish Mackerel of Inland Sea with radishes, Yuzu dressing
Terrace Restaurant, Benesse House*

allows for the sun's path, intervening clouds, the forces of nature, to cast an ever-changing light. When sunlight hits one or a few of the golden pillars they become luminous organ pipes resounding a silent music—could this be what's meant by music of the spheres? It does not elude me that De Maria was also a composer of music.

The miracle of light is one that the traditional Japanese screen makers knew. Gold picks up the slightest hint of light, so that even in the island's darkest days of winter, candlelight would bounce off gold-leafed screens and illumine the room. The flat blue buzz of modern day fluorescence devours light and is a disastrous substitute. I reflect that a fellow from a small town in California who created the land-art work *Lightning Field* brought such an awareness of golden light into this room at the bottom of an underground structure on a remote island in Japan.

So much of this art experience is possible because of the masterful yet modest architecture of Tadao Ando. His thoughtful and collaborative approach has contributed much beauty to the tiny island of Naoshima. In large part his collaboration with other artists works to create room for silence, for a space in which to quiet one's inner chatter and in that stillness, to see things anew. His collaborative spirit is evidenced with the Lee Ufan Museum that opened in 2010, to celebrate the work of the Korean-born artist who was one of the leading figures in Japanese contemporary art in the 1970s and known for his minimalist palette, attention to light and shadow, and use of natural materials such as stone, terra cotta and pigment. Ufan's sky-soaring pole sculpture in front of the





Gokuraku Temple



*Go'o Shrine, by Hiroshi Sugimote, who restored Edo period shrine
adding an optical glass staircase*



water basin, Go'o Shrine

Museum entrance compliments Ando's horizontal concrete walls which we follow, once again, into an underground series of galleries. Looking up, the sky is a dazzlingly blue triangle, framed by the architecture.

I catch up with Macduff at the edge of a pond as he's photographing Slag Buddha 88, a work by Tsuyoshi Ozawa that comprises 88 small Buddha statues cast from industrial waste dumped illegally on Teshima island. It's just one of 20 outdoor installations scattered around the Benesse House area, each a discovery tucked into the landscape. Other highlights include Cai Guo-Qiang's Cultural Melting Bath, a congregation of craggy Chinese scholars' rocks centered on a working hot tub near the beach (hotel guests can book a soak); several balletic works by the American sculptor George Rickey; and Yayoi Kusama's giant, oft-photographed fiberglass Pumpkin, which sits alone at the end of a concrete pier looking out toward Shikoku and the Hershey's Kiss-shaped island of Ogijima.

A lingering evening stroll along a beach scattered with shells and sea glass leads us eventually to the Issen restaurant at Benesse House Museum, which features pieces (many of them site-specific) from more than two dozen international artists, including Jennifer Bartlett, Richard Long, and Bruce Nauman. We are served a multi-course kaiseki meal—pickled vegetables, sashimi, custards, grilled kobe beef—while enjoying both a view to the artwork and to the sea, where I track the pattern of lights from ships passing between the Pacific Ocean and the Japan Sea.



*guests enjoying hot tub at “Cultural Melting Bath: Project for Naoshima,” by Cai Guo-Qiang
Benesse Art Site Outdoor Works*

The next day, a brief ride on a small passenger boat takes us across to the 14.5 square km Teshima island, with a dwindling population of about 1000 people. One of the missions of Benesse is to revitalize local communities with an aging, diminishing population, encouraging a preservation of nature, integrated with contemporary art and architecture with the hope that such efforts would bring fresh interest in the islands. Benesse expanded its art program in 2010 when the Setouchi (Setouchi is another name for the Seto Inland Sea) Art Festival brought 950,000 visitors to the art islands of Naoshima, Teshima and Inujima. In 2013 the Setouchi Triennial was an 8 month long art festival, sited on a dozen islands was a global event, with the next set for 2016.

We hop a local bus to tour the three main sites, starting with Christian Boltanski's Les Archives du Coeur, which overlooks a desolate beach on the island's northeast tip. An ongoing project, the small building records individual heartbeats, including yours if you are willing to add to this archive of the most primal drumbeat of all, the human heart.

Located in the livelier Ieura area, Yokoo House is a collaboration between renowned painter Tadanori Yokoo and the young Tokyo-based architect Yuko Nagayama, whose restoration of the century-old home (complete with hand-hewn beams and vernacular charred-wood siding) introduced screens of red- or smoke-tinted glass. Inside, Yokoo's plucky mix-up of traditional with pop is evident both in his vivid paintings as well as an art-scape in which he positions select boulders in a typical Japanese scene—boulder, stream, bridge—but these rocks are painted cadmium red,

positioned around a mosaic-tiled stream; the latter is glassed over, allowing me to walk over this chromatic waterscape. My senses are turned about when I enter a tall, cylindrical silo-like structure whose inner surface is wallpapered with reproductions of pastel-colored postcards of Japanese waterfalls. It's with some trepidation that I step nervously out onto what seems to be a bottomless well. When I look upward and see the ceiling mirror that creates this brilliant illusion, my jittering knees are finally calmed.

Teshima means “rich island,” endowed with dense forests, spring water, rice fields, and dairy farming. (The fertile land fell largely into disuse when hard hit by the illegal dumping of industrial waste that began in the 1970s. The waste is now properly processed in a treatment plant in Naoshima.) I walk along the rebuilt rice terraces from a project initiated by the Committee of Teshima Food Project in conjunction with Fukutaki Foundation and the town of Tonosho, intended to activate fallow fields. Below these terraced fields lies the dome of the Teshima Art Museum.

I once visited an aged woman, a hermit, who lived in a low, elliptical cave that looked out across green barley fields to the starkly pinnacled hills of upper Mustang in Nepal. Her cave was soot-black from countless cooking fires. She had no possessions save for a pot and some Buddhist talismans made of thread and beads. Entering the Teshima Art Museum brings her primitive dwelling unexpectedly to mind. Conceived by Pritzker Prize-winning architect Ryue Nishizawa and sculptor Rei Naito, the milk white teardrop-shaped dome suggests a cross between flying saucer and grotto, with two oval openings in its ceiling that cast circular



Teshima Yokoo House



basketball nets on backboard in the shape of the island



entrance, Teshima Yokoo House

pools of sunlight onto the smooth concrete floor, and at times create a sort of wind-tunnel effect, amplifying birdsong and breezes. It's also a bold fusion of art, architecture, and nature designed to house Rei's singular installation *Matrix*: though pinholes in the slightly sloped floor, tiny droplets of ground water bubble up, bead, wriggle, and trickle down to join larger puddles of water under the oculus.

I become transfixed by this aqueous ballet and I'm not alone. There are at least 20 other people inside and no one's saying a word. One couple is holding hands, utterly silent, gazing downward, perhaps inward. Another lady is so overcome that she sits on the floor hugging her knees, quietly weeping. Suspended from the roof, small bits of thread, bead, and ribbon, are the only observable objects besides the pools of water within the museum. Like the devout and slightly mad Buddhist woman in her cave, this meditative space seems to express a common desire: deep longing for the utter reduction of sensation, so that in this unfettered emptiness one might "see the light."

After a couple of nights at Benesse House we move to Tsutsuji-so, a well-kept hostel of Japanese cottages, yurt-style tents, and camper accommodation that's just a five-minute walk up the beach. Though I miss my sleek, Ando-designed room and elegant multi-course *kaiseki* dinners at Benesse, it doesn't take long to succumb the simpler pleasures of Tsutsuji-so. Our cottage's spare, square tatami room is just steps from the beach, with sliding *shoji* screens that transmit the soothing sounds of the waves. Making up the futons feels like playing house; I position them on the tatami, layered with soft comforters, and we sleep like kittens—but not before the cafeteria overwhelms us with a huge platter of sublimely fresh rock fish, prawn, scallops, squid, and vegetables, which we cook by turns in a pot of boiling miso broth at the table. This traditional Naoshima dish "Bassya-

Nabe” literally means both a fisherman’s catch and the “plop!” sound of tossing his day’s catch into a pot of boiling broth.

In the morning we catch a bus that takes us a couple kilometers north to the old fishing village of Honmura, the island’s second-largest settlement. This is where Benesse kicked off its Art House Project program back in 1998, inviting a number of Japanese artists to transform old disused buildings into showcases of contemporary art. If Chichu is the heart of Benesse, then are its nerve endings. There are presently seven such venues, all of which you can tour in a few hours, crowds permitting. Among them are Kadoya, a restored 200-year-old house that features three artworks by Tatsuo Miyajima (my particular favorite is Sea of Time ’98, a darkened room with blinking LED counters afloat in a shallow pool of water); Ishibashi, the onetime residence of a rich salt merchant, now home to a pair of gorgeous paintings by Hiroshi Senju; and Go’o Jinja, an Edo-era shrine sporting an optical glass staircase by Hiroshi Sugimoto.

Soichiro Fukutaki was visionary, when he wrote, “I have seen the seniors of Naoshima become increasingly vibrant and healthy, developing an appreciation of contemporary art and interacting with younger people visiting the island.” The elderly people we meet on foot or bicycle are lively, friendly, and seemingly proud of their transformed island. My ever-gregarious husband strikes up a conversation with a beautiful woman possibly in her 80s swinging her feet off the wooden porch of a hostel located on a narrow street leading to one of the sites of the Art House Project. She starts talking in

rapid Japanese to Macduff. Not missing a beat he replies in rapid English and this conversation goes on for a several minutes interspersed with laughter and smiles. He swears they communicated just fine. I don't doubt it. Art is its own language, as is friendliness. Perhaps that's the goal of any pilgrimage.

THE DETAILS

NAVIGATING JAPAN'S ART ISLANDS—

Getting there:

Bullet trains from Kyoto or Osaka put you in Okayama in about 75 minutes, after which you can hop a train to Uno Port and catch one of the 16 daily ferries to Naoshima. Alternatively, fly into Takamatsu Airport on nearby Shikoku, the smallest of Japan's four main islands. The prefectural capital of Kagawa, Takamatsu is connected to Hong Kong and Bangkok by flights via Taipei, and is also home to Ritsurin Garden, one of the most beautiful historical gardens in the country.

High-speed passenger ferries cover the distance between Takamatsu Port and Naoshima in 25 minutes.

Where to stay:

For art and architecture enthusiasts, the Tadao Ando-designed Benesse house(81-87/ 892-3223; benesseartsite.jp; doubles from \$##) is a must. There are just 65 rooms spread

across four distinct buildings: Park and Beach, both with views to the sea; Museum, located within the Benesse Art Museum, where you can walk into the galleries at midnight in your pajamas; and Oval, a hilltop annex accessed by a funicular and featuring six rooms with retractable glass walls that radiate out from a central pool.

Friendly lodgings with rates that are easier on the wallet can be found at Tsutsuji-so (81-87/892-2838; tsutsujiso.com; cottages from US\$190). The café here turns out meals that are every bit as memorable as those at the nearby art site.

What to Do

See the art!! The Chichu Art Museum, Lee Ulfan Museum, and the Benesse Museum. If you visit during a Japanese holiday, allow time in the Chichu Museum. The wait to enter the Turrell piece, “Open Field,” can be 20-30 minutes.

There is so much to see, and in addition there are many installations tucked away but clearly marked on the maps provided by Benesse. There are shuttle busses to take you from site to site. Distances are such that biking or walking is an easy alternative for exploring the island, and in this way easier to come upon more of the outdoor art pieces.

Visit the Naoshima Art House Projects (again they provide maps and descriptions) in the Honmura neighborhood, also the location of the new Tadao Ando Museum and the Gokuraku Temple.

There are art projects on both Teshima and Inujima Islands. Ferry and bus schedules make it difficult to visit all of the art installations on both islands in one day. Signage is not as well posted as it is on Naoshima but locals are eager to point you in the right direction.

Resources:

Benese Holdings and Fukutake Corporation. Visit the Benesse art site naoshimawebsite (benesse-artsite.jp) for extensive information about the site's facilities and transportation links, including its art projects on Teshima and Inujima islands





"Relatum-Pint, Line, Plane," by Lee Ufan, at entrance to Lee Ufan Museum



beachwalker and sun setting over Seto Inland Sea



"Le Banc," by Niki de Saint Phalle, Benesse Art Site Outdoor Works