

Artist Statement

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In Japanese art history, *Jomon Doki*, pottery from the Jomon period (approximately 14,000 BC to 300BC), is understood to be the beginning of Japanese art. Very little traditional or contemporary art in Japan, however, references these art historical origins. Through my research, I have come to a hypothesis about the symbolism present in this ancient art form and how it relates to human nature and culture, and I articulate these ideas visually and structurally in my painting practice.

Jomon means “cord-patterned” in Japanese. The cord pattern of the pottery is symbolic for snakes. In the Jomon period, people lived in forests and saw snakes as symbols for the origin of life, eternity, and strength. Snakes were worshiped, and this symbolism can still be found in numerous Japanese traditional customs, such as ropes for Shinto rituals and decorations for New Years. As snakes form a spiral in their act of copulation, so are the fibers of a rope twisted together to give it strength.

Moreover, from a linguistic approach I found important connections between ropes, language and visual culture. The verb *tsutaeru* means “to pass on,” which I think derives from the noun *tsuta* meaning “ivy” or “vines.” I believe that people saw similarities in snakes, ropes and vines and used them to visualize the significance of passing on life and wisdom in circular form, over seasons and generations.

Through all of my research, I came to create this series of paintings visualizing my hypothesis. Today, most Japanese people think of things in binaries, that everything has a beginning and an end, a traditionally Western way of thinking. This mode of thinking believes that human nature and culture progress over time. However, I believe that human nature does not progress. We make the same mistakes over and over again. As people from the Jomon period saw, I believe things change in circles but do not move forward in straight lines. Therefore, these paintings express this ancient form of thinking and seeing, in a circular sense of time.