

*MICHELE OKA DONER: INTO THE MYSTERIUM*

The submerged aquatic world contains primal essence, a fragrance. It perfumes our lives.

– Michele Oka Doner

## EXHIBITION

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**SYNOPSIS.** *Into the Mysterium* features fifty-five of New York City-based artist Michele Oka Doner's unique photographs. Never before exhibited publicly, each magnetically beautiful work measures 15" x 22.5" and is presented in a custom frame, painted and stained by Oka Doner. This exhibition also premieres her new four-channel video installation, *Mysterium Alive* (run time: approximately 10 mins.), which creates an immersive, enveloping experience for viewers and furthers the aesthetic and sensory impact of this compelling presentation. An important collaborative project, *Into the Mysterium* deftly navigates disciplinary boundaries and provides a wealth of opportunities for cross-curricular dialogue.

**BACKGROUND.** Fascinated with order, Michele Oka Doner is captivated by humanity's desire to collect and arrange as well as by our compulsive need to create taxonomies and impose names, thereby bringing regimentation and predictability to an otherwise messy world. The artist is equally enthralled by nature, a palimpsest on which all creatures' passage through the mortal realm is written. For Oka Doner, even the simple act of taking a walk represents a remarkable opportunity to immerse oneself in the spirit of place and to allow time to collapse in on itself. She sees in twigs, stones, pebbles, leaves, sticks, seeds, pods, shells, and husks vestigial remnants of a world that is both eternal and fleeting: they are *Disjecta Membra*, or scattered fragments that can be knit back together into new stories by those who are truly in touch with the rhythms of Mother Nature and Mankind's majestic legacy. Oka Doner is precisely that person. With her Midas touch, the artist transforms what others might call detritus—but what she would label "Mother Nature's marginalia"—into works that are notable both for their material beauty as well as their intellectual impact. They equally speak to her deep interest in civilization's push-pull relationship with nature (which ultimately bows before no one) as well as the paper-thin membrane separating order from chaos.

Understanding Oka Doner's intellectual and aesthetic priorities provides an invaluable lens through which to view *Into the Mysterium*. Born of an ostensibly straight-forward fact-checking visit to the Marine Invertebrate Museum (University of Miami, Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science [RSMAS]) in 2004, this compelling project is the fruit of the artist's enchantment with the hidden museum and its 93,000 specimen jars. For when Oka Doner fatefully crossed the Museum's threshold more than a decade ago, she was inspired to capture what she saw: whispers of ancient time embodied in creatures whose subtle beauty was other-worldly. That they were already neatly systematized and categorized (the Museum's specimens comprise twenty-three separate phyla) only added to their allure. And thus, Oka Doner entered the Mysterium, taking us back to our aquatic roots and inviting us "into a oneness of being."

Represented by Marlborough Gallery, Oka Doner's work is held in many notable public collections including the Art Institute of Chicago, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, le Musée des Arts Décoratifs (the Louvre), the Princeton University Art Museum, the University of Michigan Museum of Art, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Yale University Art Gallery. Among the many awards she has received are the Award of Excellence, UN Society of Writers and Artists; Pratt Legends; Artist in Residence, American Academy in Rome; New York State Council of the Arts Grant; and an Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree from The University of Michigan. Publications by Oka Doner, or about her work, include Michele Oka Doner: Natural Seduction (Hudson Hills Press, 2003); Workbook (Oka Press, 2004); Human Nature (Charta, 2008); and Miami Beach:

Blueprint of an Eden, with Mitchell Wolfson Jr. (Feierabend 2005, Collins Editions 2007). Everything is Alive will be published by ReganArts in 2017.

## DETAILS

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EXHIBITION: *MICHELE OKA DONER: INTO THE MYSTERIUM*

ORGANIZING INSTITUTION: Lowe Art Museum (University of Miami)

TOUR DATES: February 2018 – February 2020

CONTENTS: 55 Archival pigment prints (hang-ready in customized frames). Four-channel video (borrower is responsible for sourcing projectors unless other arrangements are made in advance with the Lowe).

MATERIALS: Jump drive with formatted introductory wall text copy, tombstone labels, and six high-resolution digital images (together with relevant captions/credits) for Marketing/PR purposes.

CATALOGUE: A fully illustrated catalogue—featuring an artist’s statement and contributed essays by cultural journalist Manuela Hoelterhoff, artist James Prosek, and Research Professor Emeritus and Director of the Marine Invertebrate Museum Nancy Voss—is available for purchase.

SPACE REQUIREMENTS: Approximately 2,500 square feet.

SECURITY. Moderate. Light level restrictions consistent with photography.

SHIPPING: Borrower is responsible for the cost of one-way shipping and for making in-bound shipping arrangements with a recognized fine art transport agency. Carrier must be approved by Lowe in advance.

PARTICIPATION FEE: \$18,000.00 + Wall-to-Wall Shipping and Insurance

CONTACT: Eugenia Incer

Assistant Director for Collections & Exhibition Services  
Lowe Art Museum  
[eli2@miami.edu](mailto:eli2@miami.edu) or 305.285.5423

## CHECKLIST

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### Video

- 1.) *Mysterium Alive*, 2017  
Four Channel Video Installation with surround sound  
Dimensions variable  
Length approximately 10 min

### Photographic prints

All works:

Archival pigment prints, 2017

Print dimensions: 15" high x 22.5" wide

Framed dimensions: 15-5/8" high x 23-1/8" wide x 1-1/2" deep

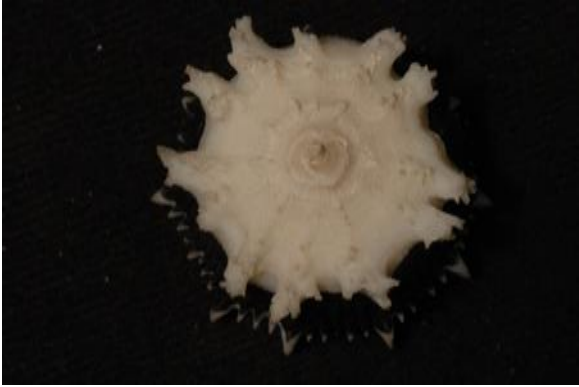
- 1.) *Yellow Flower*



- 2.) *Horizontal Red Folds*



3.) White Orb Star



4.) Round Star



5.) Serpent Starfish



6.) Serpent Starfish II



7.) Electricity

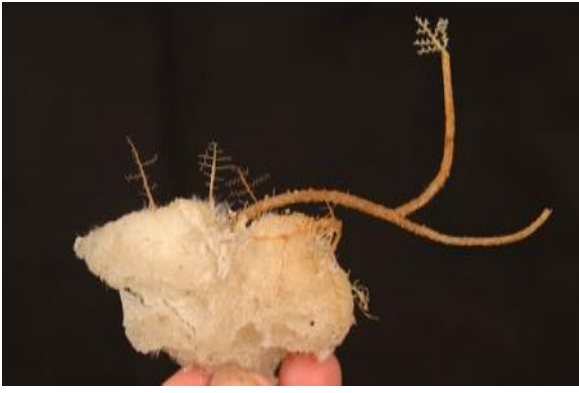


8.) Luminous Disks



9.) Tree





10.) Mysterium Jars I



11.) Mysterium Jars II



12.) Mysterium Jars III





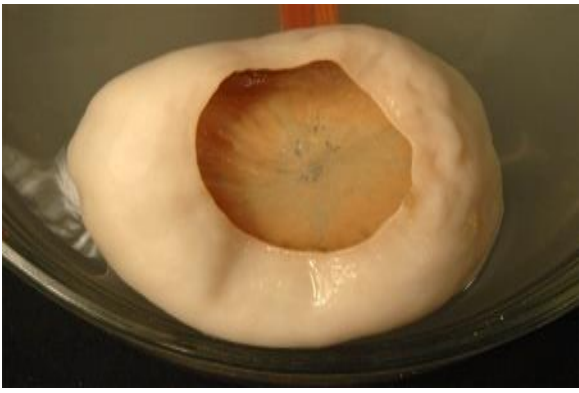
13.) Sponges



14.) Stalked Glass Sponge



15.) Pink Luminous Creature



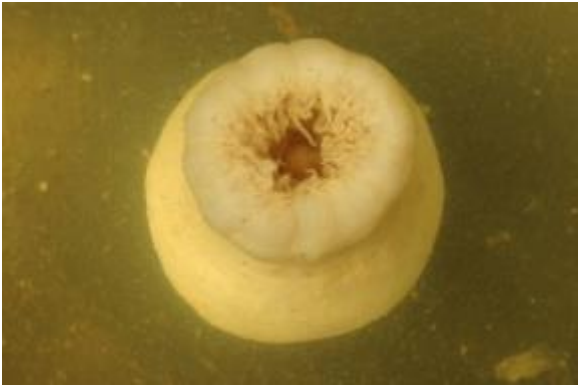
16.) Growth



17.) Delicate Black Coral



18.) Anemone



19.) Branching Black Coral



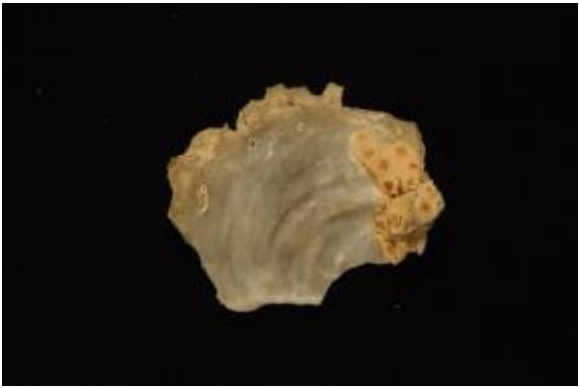
20.) Orange Branches



21.) Yellow-gold Branch



22.) Pearly Mollusk Shell



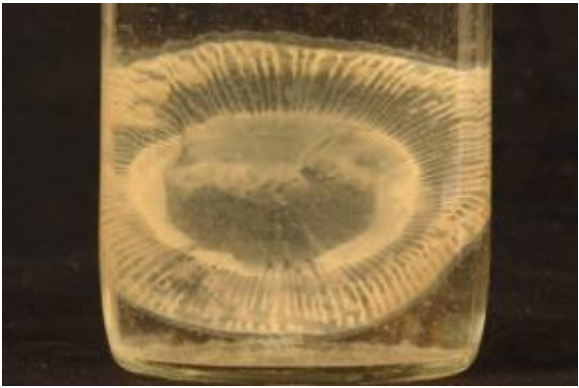
23.) Jelly Fish II



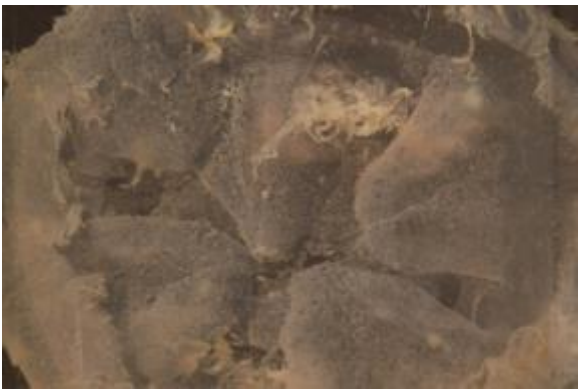
24.) Anemones Cross Section



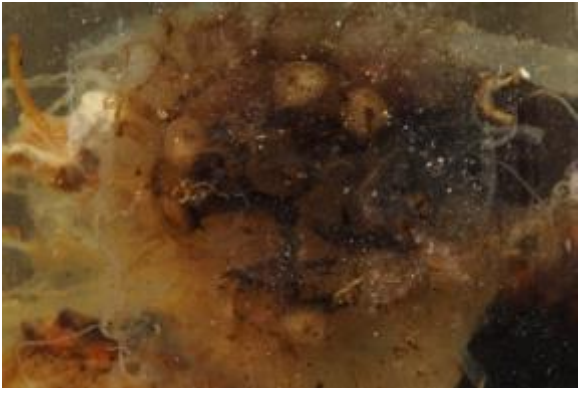
25.) Jellyfish I



26.) Sand Dollar



27.) Jellyfish IV



28.) Umbrella-Shaped Medusa



29.) Polyps Detail



30.) Orange Oval Polyps

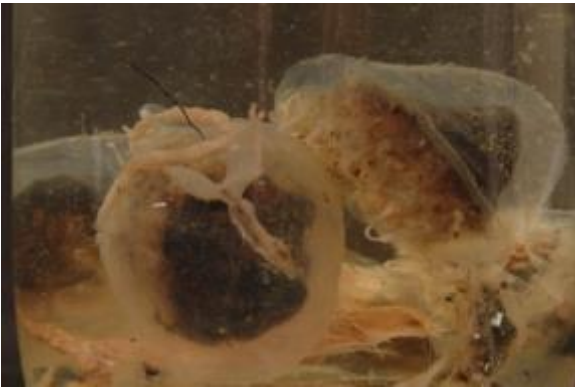




31.) Orange Ovals

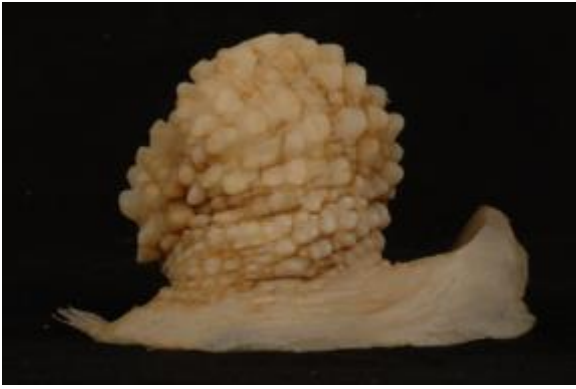


32.) Medusa

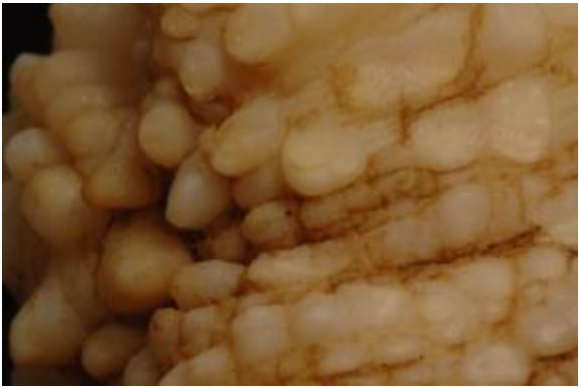


33.) Snail





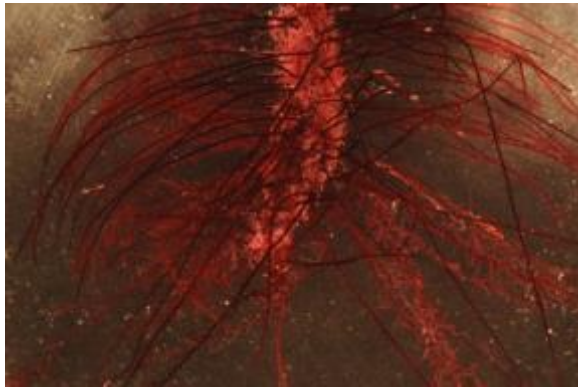
34.) Snail Detail



35.) Jellyfish V



36.) Red Tentacles



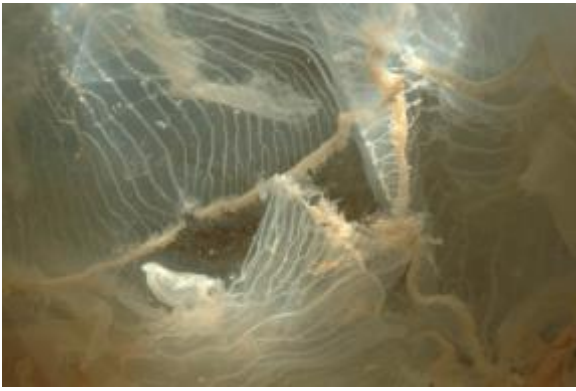
37.) Polyps



38.) Bracelet



39.) Luminous Jellyfish



40.) Jellyfish VI



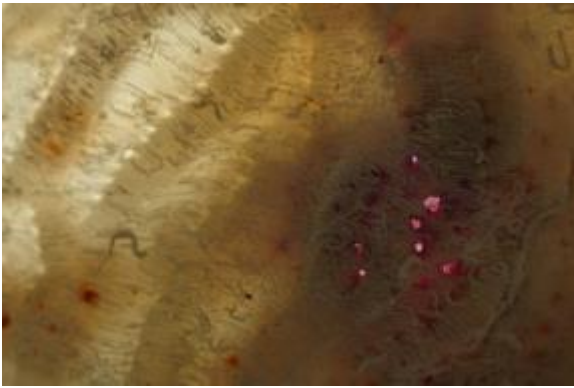
41.) Delicate Orbs



42.) Translucent Jellyfish



43.) Pink Flowers



44.) White Growth



45.) Cactus Coral



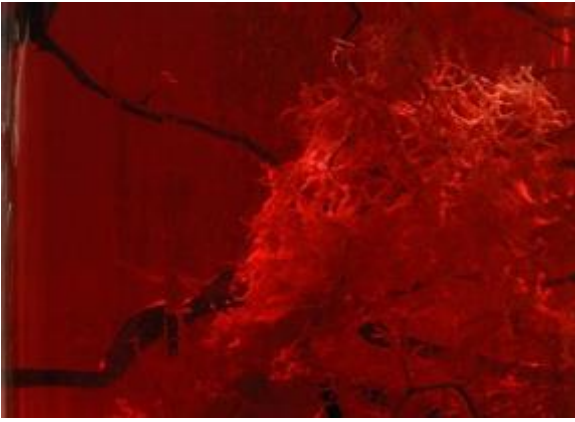
46.) Whip



47.) Deep Water Sea Pen



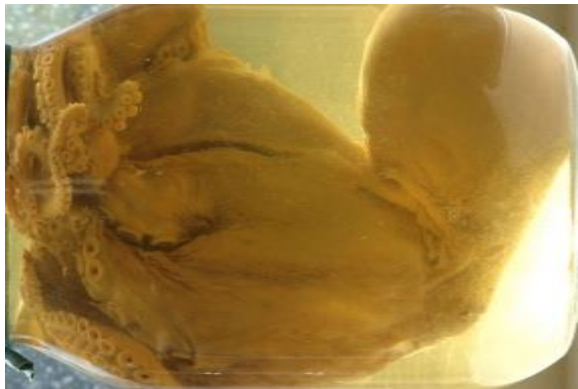
48.) Red Branch



49.) Crinoid

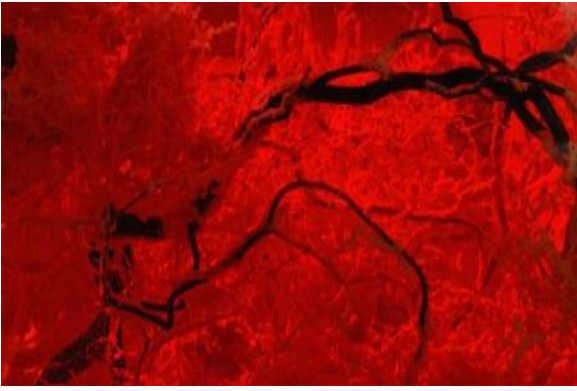


50.) Embryo



51.) Horizontal Red Branch





52.) Sea Flower

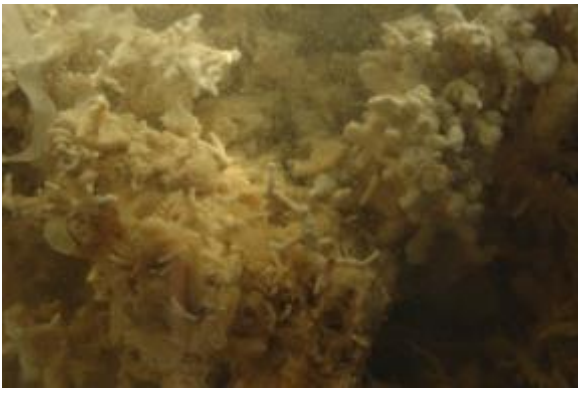


53.) Coralline Algae



54.) Delicate Corallines





55.) Smooth Black Coral

