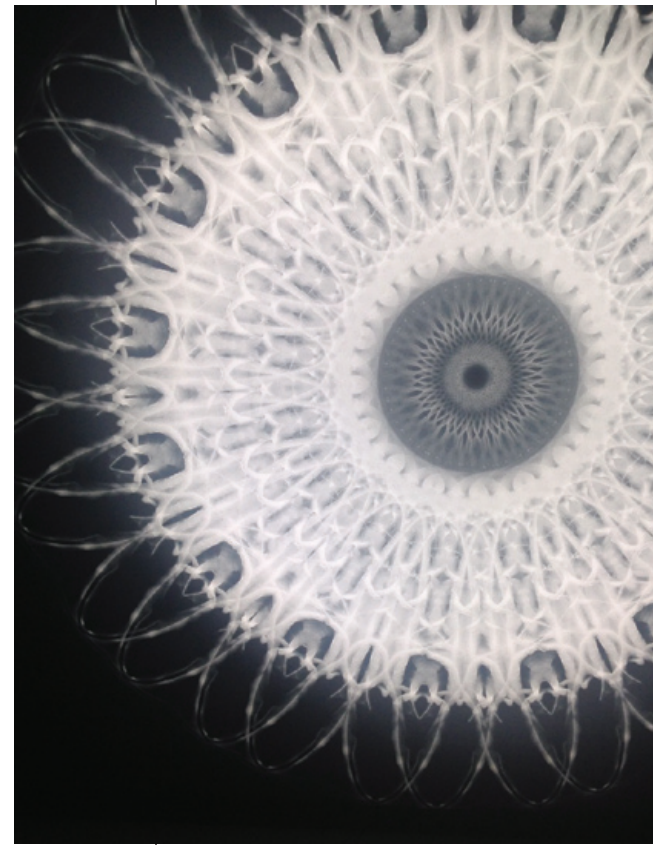
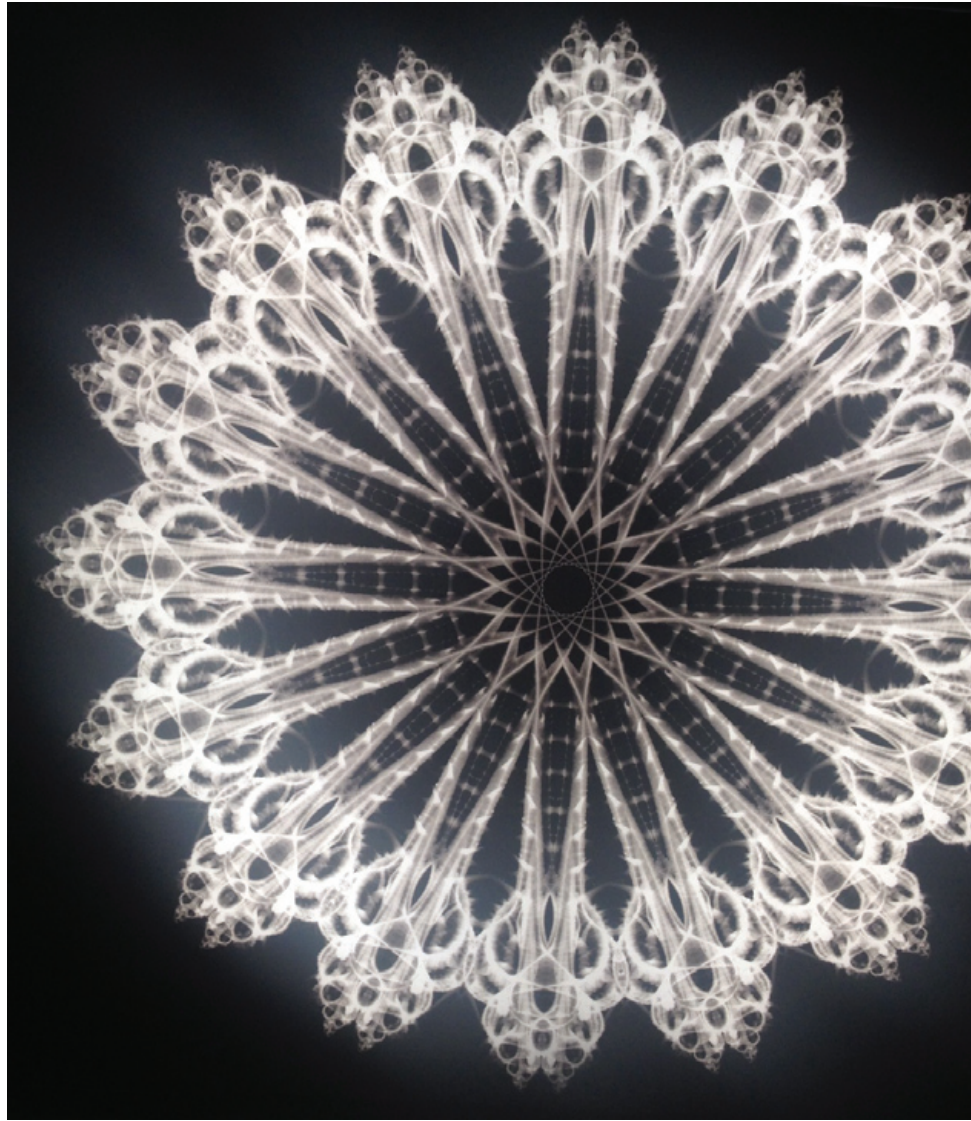
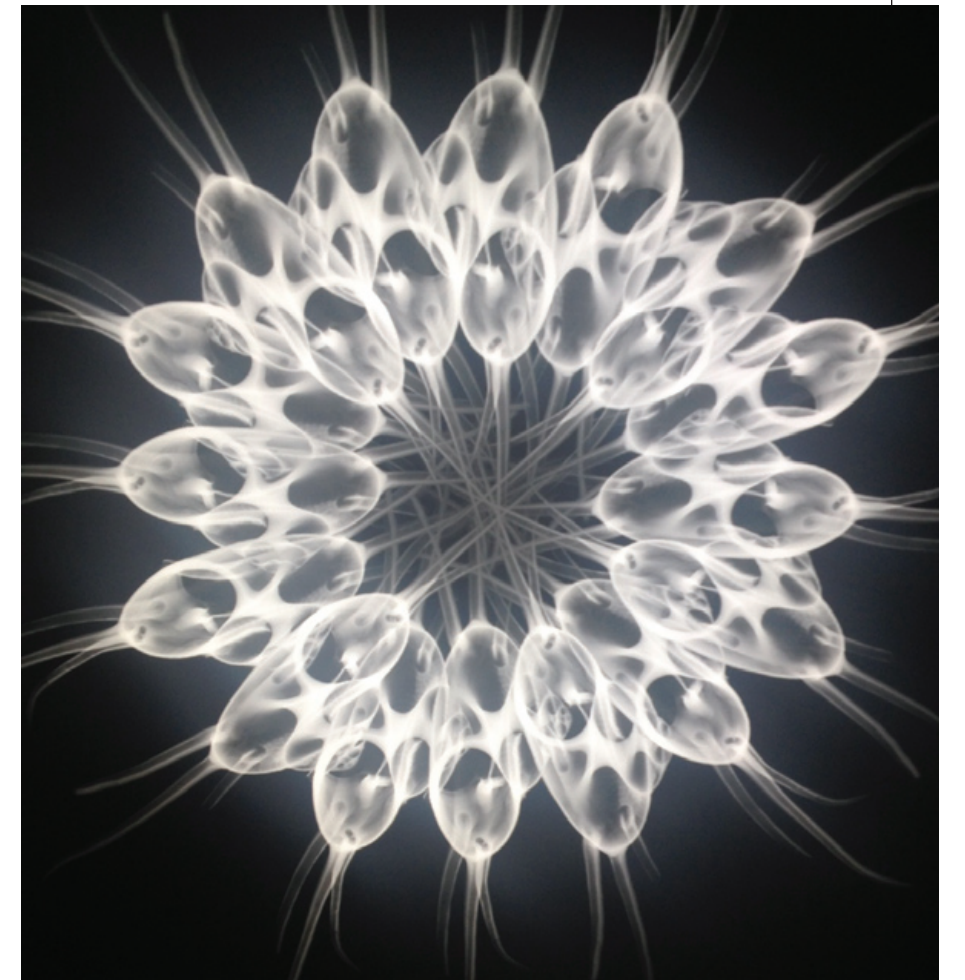


SCULPTOR  
ELIZABETH TURK  
DISCOVERS  
SACRED  
PATTERNS IN THE  
STRUCTURE OF  
SHELLS



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: 32 Comb Murex; 64 Murex; 16 Turban; 16 Volute. The title of each piece includes the type and number of shells combined to create the image.



# Micro Mandalas

Those who live by the sea and the sand often take the wonders of our world for granted. It's up to artists to remind us of what we're missing, to see the hidden. That's what sculptor Elizabeth Turk does with her new work. But this series is not made of marble, her usual medium. It's a photographic journey inside the stone, to see what it's made of, and more.

The black and white images on the walls of SCAPE gallery through Feb. 13 ([scapesite.com](http://scapesite.com)) are microscopic photographs Turk has taken of shells. Some reveal the delicate calcium carbonate structure of a single shell, while other images are comprised of dozens

of the same type of shell, photographically laid on top of each other.

The images reveal patterns that seem stunningly familiar. Mandalas, crosses and other sacred symbols that are hidden in the sand beneath our feet and in the marble and stone that are the foundations of so much of civilization's monuments and art.

"To me it was shocking," Turk says of what her artistic and scientific inquiry revealed. "We all gravitate toward these sorts of symbols. The geometry and the architecture of it is stunning to me. And the perfection."

Turk is known for her large marble sculpture. The Newport Beach artist creates

the substantial and yet somehow stunningly ethereal work at her open air Santa Ana studio. She mainly exhibits it in New York City, where she also has a home, though she's familiar to OC art aficionados from a residency she had at Grand Central Art Center in Santa Ana and a show at The Shed gallery then in Newport's Cannery Village.

When she was awarded a MacArthur Grant in 2010, the foundation noted that her marble work includes allusions to "the self-organizing systems of the natural world...the botanical, skeletal, and architectural structures."

Why is it that humans seem to gravitate to marble, Turk wondered. Marble is limestone,

compressed by the weight and heat of the earth and the sea. Limestone is made up of shells and other biological detritus collected at the bottom of lakes and oceans eons ago. So Turk's lifelong body of work is at some foundational level supported by the seemingly delicate structure of shells.

The exploration of her marble medium drew her to the Smithsonian Institution, where she was in residency with a coveted research fellowship. There she explored shell samples collected over a century or more. "I'm an early riser, so I'd go in and just start opening drawers."

Turk also had access to sophisticated x-ray cameras and other equipment. "We're so lucky to live right now and have the extension of what we can see," Turk says. "It changes our belief system."

She took photographs of the shell structures, and layered them together. "They fit into one another and created these beautiful geometric patterns," she says.

Humans are hard-wired to see patterns, but when viewing the work it's impossible to miss the sacred symbols that seem to exist within the structures of shell and stone.

Turk takes it further, showing in an astonishing iPad display synchronicities between her images and designs seen in science, nature and religion as diverse as Kepler's drawings from the 1600s of the orbit of Mars; Celtic knots and Buddhist symbols; the golden ratio and Fibonacci sequences.

"It seemed to confirm ideas of commonality and impermanence I've explored in my work, while also reducing the importance of my ideas about these things," she says.

There are elements of New Age thought and hard core quantum physics at play in the work. But if the ideas lead toward the esoteric and ethereal, just look at the evidence within. It's hard to ignore and solid, like marble. -KEDRIC FRANCIS

∴ [scapesite.com](http://scapesite.com)