



Mergers and Acquisitions

Björk acts locally and thinks globally with the debut of her latest video on the newly launched MOCAtv.

| By Andrew Myers |

"Strrrrata," says Björk, the 47-year-old Icelandic songstress, songwriter, actress and artist, rolling the "r" in an acrobatic, northern European feat of mellifluousness: "I'm obsessed with strata."

She's referring to the theme of "Mutual Core," her song addressing the volatile merger of tectonic plates that serves as a metaphor for much more (lovers, cultures... you name it), as well as its much-anticipated video, which premiered in November on MOCAtv, the global video channel for original art and culture programming recently launched by the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) as part of YouTube's year-old original channels initiative.

Björk, who has been nominated for 12 Grammys, one Academy Award and two Golden Globes, and who obviously knows about multiple layers of experience, emotion, creativity and collaboration, might as well be referring to the organic strata that came together to make the "Mutual Core" video itself.

First came the songwriting. "The chorus happened in Iceland, the verse in Brooklyn," Björk says, explaining she'd been experimenting with a touch-screen music program that replaced single lines with chords—evoking, for her, layers being "squished" together. "It's very much how chords work in musicology," she adds. "I went with an emotional context, but it's visual science and emotional music as equals."

Next came the video's conception. "Last April, in the morning, I had an email from [music producer] Mark Bell about the possibility of this video," says Andrew Thomas Huang, the 28-year-old USC arts school grad and wunderkind whose 10-minute color-saturated surreal short, *Solipsist*, won this year's Special Jury Prize for Experimental Short Film at Slamdance.

"I tried not to get my hopes up—[working with Björk] being a dream come true."

Then came fusion. Impressed by the merging of human bodies and "elemental things" she saw in *Solipsist*, Björk thought, "wow," then made what she considers her primary contribution in the creation of her acclaimed music videos: selecting the director. "It's important to contact people personally, to see what then happens organically, with no pressure," Björk says, adding that she proposes "broad ideas"—emotional elements, a color palette—then trusts the director completely. "I back off. Andrew wrote the script, took my hints and went much further."

Ultimately, as is often the case, the video's final layer involved additional costs, which was problematic. "CD sales are not exactly paying for such side projects anymore," Björk says.

Enter MOCA. "Jeffrey Deitch [the museum's director] had approached me in the past, which confused me a little because I'm a musician more than a visual artist, but I was very flattered," Björk says. She describes MOCA's role in the project as that of a generous, supportive and appropriately distant parent. By premiering on MOCAtv, her "Mutual Core" music video joins the ranks of works by artists such as Death Grips and Japanner.

"Organic, healthy, a good way to do it," says Björk, summing up the video's development—and, from where we sit, her own multilayered career.



TUNE IN From top: Icelandic artist Björk; director Andrew Huang at MOCA