

# THE **FASHION** CUTTING **FROM** EDGE **JAPAN**



**27 September 2005 – 26 January 2006**

Transformable skirt, The Wizard of Jeanz by Hiroaki Ohya, 2000. Powerhouse Museum collection.

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## Introduction

Radical and conceptual, challenging and uncompromising, fashion from Japan demands attention. In the 1970s and 80s designers Issey Miyake, Rei Kawakubo and Yohji Yamamoto emerged as avant-garde forces on the international fashion stage. Since then fashion from Japan has been acclaimed for its ability to challenge conventions, embrace technology and signal new directions. Today a new generation continues the legacy of experimentation, united in their ability to create clothes with a distinctive edge.

*The cutting edge: fashion from Japan* is exhibited in the Asian Gallery, which is dedicated to a program of exhibitions about Asian cultures both historical and contemporary.

## About the exhibition

The exhibition features the major designers — Issey Miyake, Rei Kawakubo, Yohji Yamamoto and Junya Watanabe — as well as a new, younger generation including Jun Takahashi, Hiroaki Ohya, Kosuke Tsumara, Masahiro Nakagawa and Naoki Takizawa.

The exhibition is divided into four sections:

- textile innovation (*opposite the glass lift*)
- major designers
- new generation
- Neo-Japonism: the view from Japan.

A video screening continuously at the rear of the exhibition features interviews with Australians influenced by Japanese fashion, including Lee Lin Chin, the presenter of *Fashionista* on SBS, and the designer Akira Isogawa.

*Running time: 25 minutes.*

## Extending your visit

The new exhibition *Inspired! Design across time* (on level 4) features examples of historical and contemporary dress, including a 2005 outfit by Comme des Garçons.



Undercover Jun Takahashi, Melting Pot collection, Autumn/Winter 2000–01. Kyoto Costume Institute collection. Photo by Takashi Hatekeyama, courtesy KCI.

## Syllabus links

The exhibition links to the following syllabus areas:

### Primary

- Human Society and Its Environment
- Creative Arts
- LOTE — Japanese language studies

### Secondary

- Society and Culture
- Design and Technology
- Textile Design
- LOTE — Japanese language studies

### Tertiary

- Fashion
- Textiles
- Society and Culture
- Design
- Asian Studies
- Japanese Language and Culture

## Textiles: tradition and innovation

Innovation with textiles is a feature of fashion from Japan. Japanese fashion designers often create their own textiles or employ a textile specialist who works with them to realise their vision.

Japan's successful entry into the world fashion market was largely made possible by the strength of its textile industry. Century-old textile traditions of weaving, dyeing and fabric manipulation have continued in an industrialised context. And these time-honoured traditions have been matched by experimentation, making Japan a world-leader in the production of technologically advanced textiles.



Three-dimensional dress, Yoshiki Hishinuma, Spring/Summer 1998. Powerhouse Museum collection, gift of Yoshiki Hishinuma.

## Issey Miyake

*'I try not to fear radical things'*

— Issey Miyake

Issey Miyake is a major figure in international fashion and the first Japanese designer to establish an avant-garde reputation.

Miyake (b 1938, Hiroshima) set up the Miyake Design Studio (MDS) in Tokyo in 1970, after completing a degree in graphic design and an apprenticeship studying couture in Paris and merchandising in New York. From its beginnings, MDS has been committed to creating innovative and experimental clothing.

As part of Miyake's exploration of what clothes can do and be made from, he has collaborated with artists and poets, choreographers and photographers. While at times producing works that are more at home in an art installation, Miyake has also realised his aim of creating practical, modern clothes that transcend fashion trends.



Minaret dress, Issey Miyake, Spring/Summer 1995. Powerhouse Museum collection.

## Rei Kawakubo

*'I want to suggest ... different aesthetics and values'*

— Rei Kawakubo

Rei Kawakubo's unconventional designs for her label Comme des Garçons have attracted international acclaim and controversy since the early 1980s.

After studying the history of aesthetics at university in Tokyo, Kawakubo (b 1942, Tokyo) worked in advertising as a stylist for fashion shoots. In 1973 she established Comme des Garçons ('like some boys'), which became a commercial success in Japan and was introduced in Paris in 1981.

While Kawakubo's designs have changed dramatically since the 1980s and her collections are unpredictable, she has been consistent in her attempts to defy conventional notions of beauty.



Cotton dress, Rei Kawakubo Comme des Garçons, Autumn/Winter 1984. Kyoto Costume Institute collection. Photo by Takashi Hatekeyama, courtesy KCI.

## Yohji Yamamoto

*'There is nothing so boring as a neat and tidy look'*

— Yohji Yamamoto

Yohji Yamamoto's early catwalk shows presented with Kawakubo in the early 1980s introduced a new aesthetic, and attitude, to international fashion.

The son of a seamstress, Yamamoto (b 1943, Tokyo) initially trained as a lawyer before studying fashion at the Bunka Fashion College, Tokyo. After working for his mother, Yamamoto established his own label in 1971. He held his first collection show in Tokyo in 1977 and in Paris in 1981 with Kawakubo, his then partner.

Yamamoto is renowned for innovative tailoring and for creating clothes, most often monochrome, that possess a sculptural abstraction. He advocates asymmetry and eschews conventional forms of decoration in favour of cut-outs, non-functional flaps, and irregular hems and collars.



Felt dress, Yohji Yamamoto, Autumn/Winter 1996. Kyoto Costume Institute collection. Photo by Takashi Hatekeyama, courtesy KCI.

## Junya Watanabe and his contemporaries

*'I put all my energy into new challenges, the perfecting of new patterns and the search for unusual textures'*

— Junya Watanabe

Junya Watanabe is the most celebrated of the younger generation of designers, many of whom also began their careers working for one of the major Japanese fashion houses.

Watanabe (b 1961) began working with Comme des Garçons after graduating in fashion design from Bunka College, Tokyo. In 1993, the Junya Watanabe Comme des Garçons collection was introduced in Paris with financial backing from Rei Kawakubo. Watanabe's designs are acclaimed for their ingenious cut and fabric.

Jun Takahashi is also a protégé of Kawakubo, while Kosuke Tsumura and Hiroaki Ohya have both developed their labels within the Miyake group. The work of these younger designers reflects their own distinctive style as well as the previous generation's legacy of experimentation and innovation.



Collar, Junya Watanabe Comme des Garçons, Autumn/Winter 2000–01. Kyoto Costume Institute collection. Photo by Taishi Hirokawa, courtesy KCI.

## Neo-Japonism: the view from Japan

Japanese aesthetics first made a major impact on fashion in the West when Japan ended its anti-trade policy in the 1850s after centuries of isolationism. Japanese goods flooded Western markets, inspiring the craze for Japanese-influenced art and design known as Japonism. By the turn of the century, European designers were incorporating Japanese motifs, fabrics and kimono-like forms into fashionable clothing.

The first Japanese designers to make a mark in international fashion in the 1970s, Hanae Mori and Kenzo Takada, created Western-style clothing using traditional fabrics and motifs. Contemporary Japanese designers have also drawn inspiration from traditional clothing, and their designs have been described as Neo-Japonism.



Dress with fish-scale print, Masaki Matsushima, Spring/Summer 1997. Kyoto Costume Institute collection, gift of Masaki Matsushima. Photo by Yasushi Ichikawa, courtesy KCI.

## Further reading and resources

### Books

- Aoki, Shoichi, *FRUITS*, Phaidon, New York, 2001
- Baudot, Francois, *Yohji Yamamoto*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1997
- Benaim, Laurence, *Issey Miyake*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1997
- Buckley, Sandra (ed), *Encyclopedia of contemporary Japanese culture*, Routledge, London and New York
- Bullis, Douglas, *Fashion Asia*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1998
- Grand, France, *Commes des Garçons*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1998
- Lunn, Stephen, 'Made in Japan', *Australian Magazine*, 16-17 March 2002
- Takamura, Zenshu, *Roots of street style*, Books Nippan, Tokyo, 1996
- Teunissen, Jose, *Made in Japan*, Centraal Museum, Utrecht, 2001
- Wilcox, Claire, *Radical fashion*, Harry N Abrams, London, 2001

### Internet

- <http://www.nuno.com>
- <http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/tokyorecycle>
- <http://www.isseymiyake.com>
- <http://www.yohjiyamamoto.co.jp>
- <http://www.historyofcostume.com/historyofashion/fashionframe.html>
- <http://www.virtualrunway.com>
- <http://www.street-mg.com/xnew/>
- <http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/exhibitions/fruits/>
- <http://www.finalhome.com>

### Please note

These websites were available and suitable at the time of publication. We advise that teachers should check sites before recommending them to children.

### Exhibition book

Available in the Powerhouse Shop and by mailorder, tel (02) 9217 0129, for only \$34.95 (RRP \$39.95).



For more information on the exhibition *The cutting edge: fashion from Japan*, visit the Powerhouse Museum's website <http://www.powerhousemuseum.com>

For more information about education support or your booking, contact Education and Visitor Services at the Powerhouse Museum:

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