

# JFLA LECTURE SERIES 10 FUTURE BEAUTY: 30 YEARS OF JAPANESE FASHION

## EVENT REPORT

by [Colin Marshall](#)



Though the traveling exhibition *Future Beauty: 30 Years of Japanese Fashion* may come no closer to Los Angeles than its temporary home at the Seattle Art Museum, where it runs now through September 8, we at the Japan Foundation nevertheless enjoyed a personal tour through the movements, designers, and clothes that make up its subject. Kyoto Costume Institute Director and Chief Curator Akiko Fukai and Los Angeles County Museum of Art Senior Curator Sharon Takeda took us, with a lecture, slide show, and extended question-and-answer session, through the genesis, heyday, and aftermath of the most exciting, "monolithic"

period in Japanese fashion: the 1980s. That already stylistically vibrant decade saw worldwide dress enriched by the aesthetic personalities of such still-active creators as Rei Kawakubo, Yohji Yamamoto, and Issey Miyake.

Ever since the country's opening in the late-nineteenth-century Meiji era, Japan has had a distinctively creative relationship with Western dress, whose influences it has variously incorporated, assimilated, re-interpreted, and rebuffed ever since. The Japanese designers who best embody this complicated stylistic relationship, the first generation to seriously study Western fashion, came to prominence in the 1970s, contemporary with but standing aesthetically apart from the rise of punk as an ethos and Milan as a fashion center. In what "appeared to be an endorsement of shabbiness," Kawakubo, Yamamoto, and Miyake eschewed the rising slick, form-fitting, multicolored wave, favoring instead monochromatic, black-intensive palettes, experimental materials, wrinkles, holes, and "curious lumps." These designers brought together traditional Japanese aesthetics, as laid out by novelist Junichiro Tanizaki's *In Praise of Shadows*, with the kind of separate but highly advanced technological innovation for which their country had then become widely respected.

Alas, said Fukai and Takeda in response to an audience question about whether it could all happen again, the 1980s now seem to have offered a moment in Japanese fashion that nobody could ever replicate. They don't see the same creativity in Japan now that they saw then, and moreover, they suspect that no designer could truly shock us today — due in large part, no doubt, to all the shocking already successfully performed by Kawakubo, Yamamoto, and Miyake. However, they added, Japanese consumers still desire high-quality workmanship and refined aesthetics, and they certainly remain willing to pay for them. After the 1980s ended, the 1990s, as we learned from the lecture, gave rise to the entire "Cool Japan" movement, which led from the high-school street fashions of Harajuku right up to the elaborate costumes of Western pop star Lady Gaga. Having seen all this, we can't possibly count out Japanese fashion in the 21st century.



# FUTURE BEAUTY: 30 YEARS OF JAPANESE FASHION

**LECTURE BY AKIKO FUKAI, DIRECTOR AND CHIEF CURATOR, KYOTO COSTUME INSTITUTE  
MODERATED BY SHARON S. TAKEDA, SENIOR CURATOR AND DEPARTMENT HEAD,  
COSTUME AND TEXTILES, LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART**

Date: Friday, June 28<sup>th</sup> starts at 7pm

Venue: Goethe-Institut Los Angeles (across the Courtyard from JFLA)

Address: 5750 Wilshire Blvd. Suite 100, Los Angeles, CA 90036

Admission: Free

What is the soul of the contemporary Japanese fashion that so captures the world's attention?



Issey Miyake, Rei Kawakubo (Comme des Garçons), and Yohji Yamamoto showed their collections in Paris for the first time more than thirty years ago, roiling up both criticism and praise for their radical departure from Western conventions of fashion design. Yet in fact, it was their unique aesthetic sense that continues to influence the fashion world of their successors with the idea that Japan's fashion represents the future ahead of its time.

Tracing thirty years of Japanese fashion, the exhibition *Future Beauty: 30 Years of Japanese Fashion* is finally arriving in Seattle here in the United States, having made its way through London, Munich, and Tokyo, and Akiko Fukai, its curator, heads to Los Angeles as soon as she ties up its Seattle opening. Join us as we investigate with her the soul of Japanese fashion.



**PHOTO CREDITS (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT)**

**COMME DES GARÇONS/ REI KAWAKUBO, AUTUMN/WINTER 1983 COLLECTION OF THE KYOTO COSTUME INSTITUTE, GIFT OF COMME DES GARÇONS CO. LTD., PHOTO BY MASAYUKI HAYASHI**

**ISSEY MIYAKE, SPRING/SUMMER 1995, COLLECTION OF THE KYOTO COSTUME INSTITUTE, PHOTO BY KAZUMI KURIGAMI**

**YOHJI YAMAMOTO, AUTUMN/WINTER 1996, COLLECTION OF THE KYOTO COSTUME INSTITUTE, PHOTO BY TAKASHI HATAKEYAMA**



Akiko Fukai is Director and Chief Curator of the Kyoto Costume Institute. She received her master's degree in the History of Fashion at the National University of Ochanomizu, and also studied Art History at the Université de Paris IV (La Sorbonne). She has organized several major fashion exhibitions in Japan, Paris, and New York, including *Revolution in Fashion*, *Japonism in Fashion*, *Fashion in Colors*, *Luxury in Fashion Reconsidered*, and *Future Beauty: 30 Years of Japanese Fashion*. She is the author and editor of many books, including *Japonism in Fashion* (Heibonsha, 1994), *Fashion* (Taschen, 2002), *The Century of Fashion* (Heibonsha, 2005), and *Reading Fashion from Pictures* (PHP Institute, 2009).

**PHOTO BY KAZUO FUKUNAGA**

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