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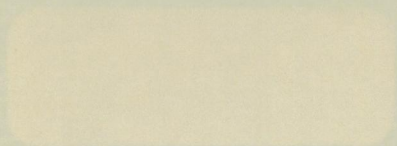
Design, Department of
FACULTY OF FASHION & TEXTILES
~~DEPARTMENT OF WOVEN TEXTILES.~~

The aesthetic influence in Japanese textiles for
contemporary fashion.

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Submitted to:-
Faculty of History of Art and Design and
Complementary Studies in Candidacy for the
Degree of *Bachelor of Design*
~~WOVEN TEXTILE DESIGNS~~ 1993.

Submitted 1993.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

To my Thesis tutor Deirdre Campion for her advise and help on researching information for this thesis.

To Library in N.C.A.D.

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INTRODUCTION.

A Painter, Tandanori Yokoo Says,

Increasingly fashion and art are getting closer. Often wearing clothes means wearing an artwork, wearing the imagination of the designer. Wearing clothes is an experience. I think complex thoughts can be developed and expressed in fashion. Soon fashion will be something to experience like reading books and seeing art are now.
-(Koren, Kodansha International, 1987) *ref*

My interests lie in the art fabric and wearable art in the form of clothing and dress. It is a fabric that stands that is unique in its own special beauty. A fabric that could almost be hung within a frame and admired as an artwork, but also a fabric that incorporates all these aesthetic and artistic qualities and uses them for mass production within the fashion and textiles areas. I am talking about a fabric that withholds all the aesthetic notions that are portrayed within the same view as fine art, but has managed through the elements of mass production to be available for more people to wear. A fabric that can be an art piece in the galleries but which is also functional.

A fabric such as this is conceived and created by one of personal involvements while expressive potentials are integrated with the designers use of techniques and chosen materials. The creation of a fabric for wear is like creating a form which is wearable as art or as a garment perceived as art, and is something which holds certain meanings and attitudes of the designer and creator. If the beholder to this fabric is drawn into the world of the makers values, so that they are sharing the vitality, intensity and mystery in the making, he may recognise a work that goes beyond craft.

I have chosen the textile and fashion designers of Japan to best illustrate my views on the use of fabric for wearable arts, mainly because I see an industry which has come forth with the most innovative approaches to textile design. The Japanese have no inhibitions in the creative process. Their designers create for the clothing industry, which has developed itself to a high technological form but have yet managed to integrate into the creation of these processes, a simplistic yet finely - tuned aesthetic.

Although Japan might have started late in its contribution to the catwalks of 'high fashion' the Japanese have never lacked in creativity. In general, Japanese follow European rather than purely American fashion trends in Western dress. However, more recently, Japanese designers like Kenzo, Hanae Mori, Yohji Yamamoto, Rei Kawakubo and Issey Miyake have begun to make their distinctive mark on the world of Paris couture. Possibly due to a later start in the world of fashion, they have never really being influenced by western dress until the 1850's, when the United States forced Japan to open its ports. For these reasons I think the Japanese have managed to keep a hold of their own cultural identity, and in their designs their culture has come to the foreground. From the 1850's, when Western dress became a desirable symbol of modernisation it appears that designers were influenced by this but managed to progress their designs by taking what they needed from Western influence and incorporating it back into their own fashion culture. It is designers such as those mentioned earlier, that are only taking some aspects of Western Cultural influence and are creating a new aesthetic based on old principles deriving from Western influence. What I feel is lacking in Western dress is simplicity and it is these such Japanese designers who have managed to bring simplicity into fashion design in the Western mould, especially through their fabrics, and elevate new and innovative ideas. Creativity among the Japanese, their environmental factors their lifestyle and culture determine specific aspects of Japanese design and ultimately their fashion industry. Also with a population of 110 million people crowded into a small land space, Japan has accepted competition as their fate.

They accept this on a global scale also. In Japan today, major companies share the feeling that one cannot expect to survive without being innovative. This is something that might be seen as a treat in Western civilisations, and is possibly something that needs speculating, but it could also mean that we need also to reassess our methods of working.

What is really significant in Japans textile and clothing industry is the strong relationship between the fashion designer and the fabric designer. This is perhaps something that Western contemporary fashion needs to learn from the East. The realisation that fashion and fabric are interrelated. In Japan there is teamwork between certain fabric and fashion designers, where both sides are co-operating to achieve a better design. Great importance is placed on the fabric used, and is an essential element in creating the end product for the catwalk. One example of this interrelationship is the close alliance between fashion designer Issey Miyake with fabric designer Junichi Arai. Arai is one of the most exceptional fabric designers/textile artist of our day, in the eyes of people like Ann Sutton and the such. Their successful relationship has been proven in the fashion world today. This collaboration between textile designer and fashion designer has undoubtedly come about because Miyakes personal awareness of the fabric, and his genuine respect for the art of textiles. He says of the fabric that:-

Once its made, fabric is like the grain in wood you can't go against it. You know what I like to do sometimes? I like to close my eyes and let the fabric tell me what to do.

-(Penn, 1988, Little Brown & Company). p.N.

Japanese craftsmanship has always been held with higher esteem than the fine arts, and textiles has been an important craft of Japan for centuries. Textiles are not secondary to fashion, as in some countries, but instead exist in parallel, and in some cases even dictate the finished garment.

Simplicity and the humbleness of the Japanese nature, combined with their environmental and cultural beliefs ar qualities which are instilled in Japanese design today.

Within specific fabric and fashion designers of Japan, their designs are presented to us, created for their aesthetic value as well as their technique of handling traditional materials. Works that make a unique personal statement is an approach that continues to be an important direction for many fabric designers in Japan today.

This thesis will discuss how certain contemporary Japanese fashion designer's have managed to understand the special qualities of fabric design and how they place great importance on their choice of fabric as an integral part in their finished designs. It will also discuss Japan's refine design aesthetic and how this can be seen in the textile and fashion world today, and possibly how much the West could learn from the aesthetic. I will be discussing specific designers in relation to these contexts. My main point will be in discussing the art in textiles and the importance of work relationships between fashion and fabric designers and whereby collaborating the two is important in the success of their designs. It will also discuss particular aspects of Zen-Buddhism and the aesthetic values certain Japanese designers such as Issey Miyake and Junichi Arai have used in their methods of creation.

Chapter One discusses the history of Japan's clothing industry and in particular the Kimono and the applied decoration of the Kimono. It discusses the textile industry and the use of Japanese textiles in the Western world and how certain European and American designers have been influenced by Japanese simplicity and their aesthetic ideals in fabric decoration in the form of dress.

In Chapter Two, what is discussed are the aesthetic concepts and a basic explanation of Zen Buddhism and cultural and religious beliefs and how I feel that these are important qualities to specific designers today and how these designers are incorporating these ideals in their designs today.

In Chapter Three, I am discussing particular Avant-Garde fashion designers in Japan and how these designers have recognised the importance of fabric design to enhance their end products.

Chapter Four then discusses a new and very modern approach to textile designing and that is of the textile expression, its concepts and its importance also in the design and art world today. Junichi Arai is one particular designer whom I will discuss within this view of textile expressionism.



These clothes are not a package. They can be seen as anyone wants,
worn as anyone wants.

Issey Miyake .

C H A P T E R 1.

CONTENTS.

A. JAPAN'S CLOTHING HISTORY AND THE KIMONO.

- INTRODUCTION.
- From the 6th to the 8th Centuries.
- From the 15th Century.
- From the 19th and 20th Centuries.

B. THE USE OF JAPANESE TEXTILES IN THE WESTERN WORLD OF FASHION.

- Fifi White - USA.
- Paul Poiret - France.

JAPANS CLOTHING HISTORY & THE KIMONO.

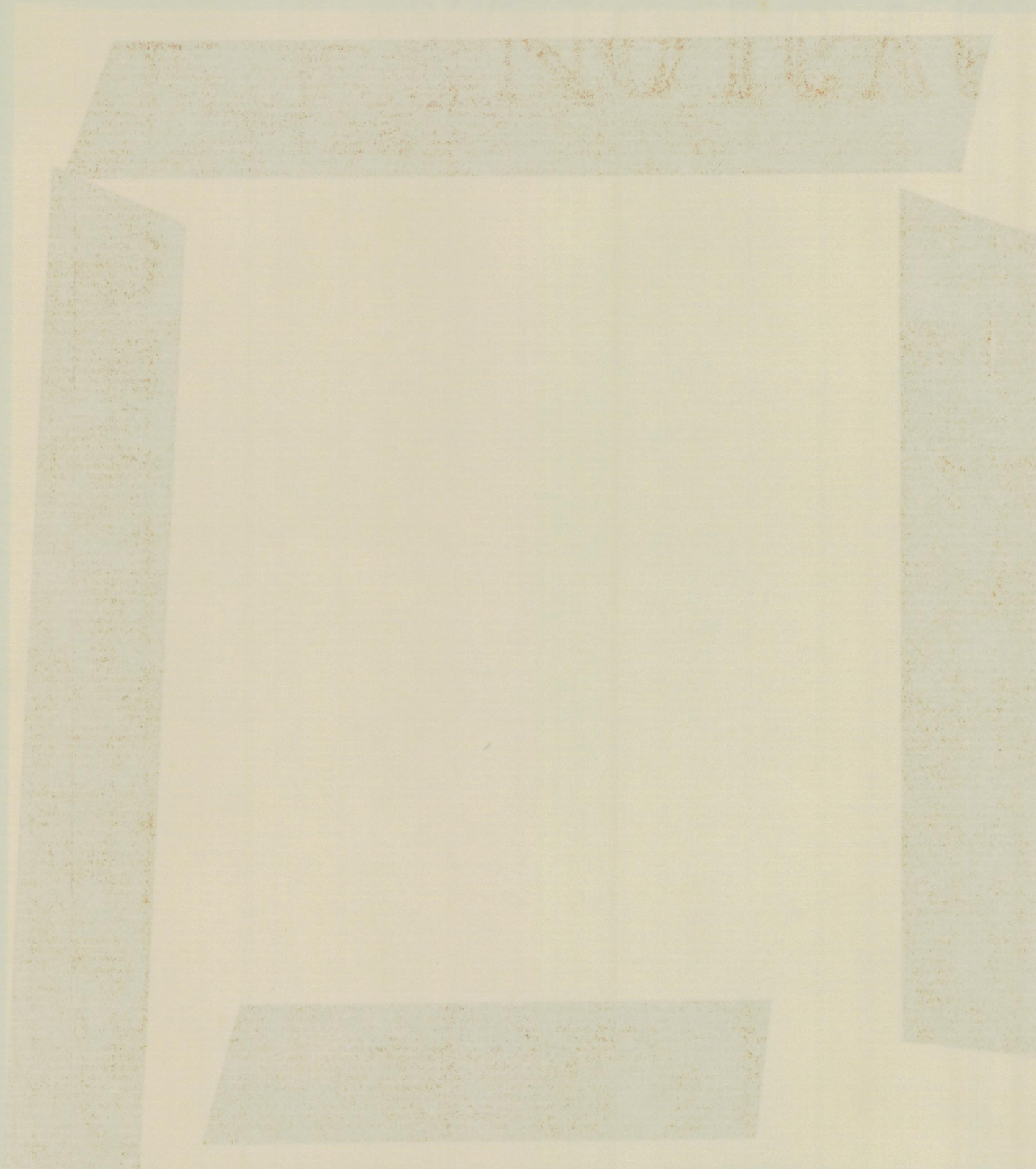
In Japan, a womans beauty was not revealed physically but deduced from her aptness of her choice of colour and materials. The cloth was a blank canvas, and the decorative arts such as needlework, weaving and dyeing applied to the fabric, proved themselves capable of such complete, joyous and varied expressions. For centuries, the fabric construction and applied design has played a significant part in enhancing a woman's beauty, therefore putting the fabric design in a more prominent position than the garment design itself. For centuries Japan has been a country where potters, dyers and weavers are held in greater esteem than their native fine artists, this explains the global strength of Japanese fabrics today. Fashion designer Hanae Mori says,

Japanese designers have the tremendous richness of Japanese history and tradition behind them. Even though they may be studying in the Western mould, they have this depth of tradition to draw on that goes back more than 1,000 years. Its a kind of nourishment.

- (Koren, 1987, Kodansha International p.48)

I do not think it is possible to discuss the history of Japanese costume without discussing the Kimono. As far as research has shown, it has been the Kimono that has led to new ideas in Japanese fashion. The simplicity of this essentially rectilinear, two dimensional shaplessness of Japanese clothing construction has allowed for designs to become more sculptural, and has led to a creation of a more innovative type of garment.





Starting from a simple idea always proves better than getting stuck with a complicated original design. The plainness of the shape of the Kimono has also allowed for the experimentation with textiles throughout history. Dyeing and weaving techniques have been experimented with and explored for centuries, all of which have been used on or for the Kimono, as a painter will use his canvas. Throughout its history Japan has borrowed textiles, techniques and designs from its neighbouring country - China, as well as from Korea, India and South East Asia. However, the Japanese culture has proven to be the dominant aesthetic in designing and even though they have borrowed techniques from other countries, they have still managed to keep a secure identity with their fabrics and their design.

From The 6th To The 8th Century.

In the development of Japanese dress the most apparent subject is simplicity. It was, possibly the Chinese, who originally gave the Japanese their refined ideal of simplicity in dress construction. From the 6th to the 8th century the Chinese influence prevailed in soft, flowing garments, with fantastic hats for men and floating scarves and sashes for the women. It has been in the decoration and applied arts the subsequent changes in fashion have been recorded, while the simple silhouette has remained essentially unchanged.

In the 6th and 8th centuries the Japanese Imperial Court, whose everyday life was spent seated on the floor, adapted the Chinese form of dress and made them stiffer and more voluminous and added layer upon layer of undergarment, as this happened the body effectively disappeared, allowing the fabric of the Kimono to be more prominent. The ornamentation, colour, texture and quality of the fabric not only was more significant than the garment but was important to the person wearing it. What was more important still, was the choice of colour and textile quality that would enhance the wearers inner beauty.

According to the founder of the Sodo Kimono academy, Norio Yamanaka, "those who make the Kimono their own must first make their spirit and character a thing of beauty." -(Koren 1987, Kodanoha International p.59).

It could be said that the textile artist working with Kimono, made it their canvas and the wearer the holder of these works of arts.

FROM THE 15TH CENTURY.

In the countryside, among farmers and fishermans wives there developed a refined tradition of folk textiles, first using hemp and similar bast fibers and then, from the 15th Century, cotton was used. Here they began to explore dyeing techniques and applying decorative techniques onto the Kimono. Indigo was the main dye used, and decoration was achieved by ikat weaving, stencil dyeing and tie-dyeing. Quilting and patching were done throughout the country but especially on the Sea Coast. Other forms of needlework became highly refined in the north where the cooler climates demanded thicker fabrics. Most of these clothes were made relative to environmental factors and neccessity. They are admired today for their durability, interested patterns and coarse textures.

From the 19th to the 20th Centuries.

During the 1850's, Japan became accesible to the West. From this point on Western clothing became a desirable symbol of modernisation for the Japanese. Japan realised the neccessity in keeping up with fashion trends and government workers were told to wear suits because Japanese began to think of their own fashion as less appealing and saw the people dressed like beggars in comparison to Western dress. They began to feel inferior and therefore sought a new type of costume and dress. Western forms of dress were increasingly adopted by the Japanese, particularly those who could afford it. In 1890 Japan's first fashion magazine was published. Arising from the interaction of both Western and Eastern cultures new forms and identities were being offered to explore, and the Japanese reflected and manifested their interests in fashion. As men wore suits or Kimono's with bowler hats.

In the 1950's following the deprivation of war and under the influence of Americal troops still stationed throughout the country, Japanese women discovered 'capri paints' which were like khaki pants. Although, the Kimono still struggled as a form of dress for the Japanese at this time it did not disappear completely. There was however, some form of rebellion against the wearing of the Kimono as evereday dress, particularly for women. Under the inspiration from the West, women began to see more varieties in clothing expression and they sought after it. Also with Japan wanting economic status internationally, they realised that to belong in Western industry one needs to dress in a manner that would be respected in Western civilisations. According to Penny Sparke, along with shipbuilding, the textile industry led the Japanese industrial developments of the last years of the nineteenth century. This strength permitted Japan to move quickly into the production of fashion garments, at first just for the domestic market but later also for export. It has developed steadily in the years since 1945 to the extent that Japan now has a thriving fashion industry, catering for a mass market both at home and abroad. (Sparke, 1987, p.110).

The shape of the Kimono began to lose its identity and due to the influence of Western dress, fashion designers in Japan began to experiment with the cut and look of the individual garments. They had the simple shape of the Kimono to experiment from. The Kimono to the Japanese became like a building block to reform and up-date for the world of fashion. One particular area of the clothing industry which retained its special qualities was the textile industry. It has been in the later years of the twentieth century that Western countries began to borrow fabrics from Japan, because they recognised the fabric's of the Kimono were withholding special qualities of craftsmanship. So, the Japanese managed to borrow ideas on the cut and shape of the garment but the West counter-acted this by borrowing the fabric's of the Kimono and integrating them into Western fashion.

THE USE OF JAPANESE TEXTILES IN THE WESTERN WORLD OF FASHION.

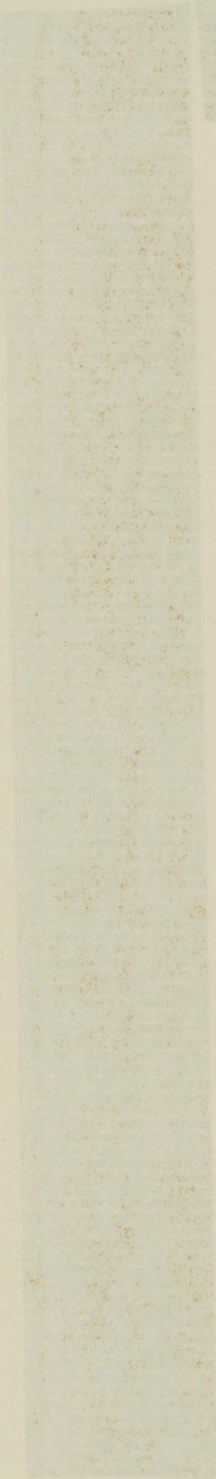
It was in the early 1990's that a handful of American artists transformed the Kimono's fabric's into a new stage of exploration. One such designer, Fifi White, was inspired by the fabric decoration and construction of the Kimono. She says that,

I collect from many cultures, but Japanese arts stimulate me the most. The Japanese have an extraordinary affinity for surface pattern and design.

-(Bullis, 1989, Ornament .12 p.23).

"I HAVE BEEN TRYING TO CREATE A NEW FASHION
GENRE THAT IS NEITHER JAPANESE NOR WESTERN." —
Issey Miyake

ABOVE A cotton and linen knitted coat
constructed from one square piece of
material like a *furoshiki*, with sleeves
attached. RIGHT A coat/dress
combination made of acrylic knit and
wool.



In realising that Japanese traditional techniques of weaves and decoration were not been continued as they had been, she decided to go to Japan to search for Komono's. Because of the shape of the Kimono and its width of the fabric, that is strips, which are twelve to fourteen inches wide and up to twelve yards long, meant that Kimono's could be unstitched and reconstructed into garments with totally different silhouettes. It was designers such as Fifi White who recognised the qualities in the fabric, and who sought the potential of the Kimono for transformation and reconstruction. Fifi White is first stimulated by the fabric, and before she thinks about the shape of the garment, she first decides which fabric patterns work together. She has a tremendous respect for tradition and believes that through the reconstructing of the Kimono fabric, has created a means of preserving the fabrics natural beauty, rather than allowing them to be destroyed when the Kimono is discarded.

Reconstructing the Kimono is not a new idea, however. For centuries, in Japan when a women needed something new to wear on a public occasion, for example a tea ceremony, she would bring her old Kimono to her own dyer to change the colour or decoration of her Kimono. For centuries, silk Kimono's among the wealthy, were cleaned by been taken apart and each piece cleaned seperatly. Those less well off usually reweave their Kimono's as they could not afford to buy new ones.

So during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Japan might have borrowed ideas and styles from Westerns in dress and fashion, but the West has counter-acted this by transforming and revitalising and giving a new dimension to the innovative designs of Japanese textiles world wide.

Paul Poiret is an example of a French fashion designer of the early twentieth century, who was inspired by the Japanese aesthetic and the Kimono. Poiret was primarily concerned with revolutionising the feminine shape by freeing it from the corset. Poiret belonged to an age (1909-1939) or the three decades in Paris couture, where fashion had become radical, beautiful and ever changing. Paris at this time, the cultural capital of the world sought new feminine ideals of freedom and movement in clothes. With travel becoming more accessible, Poiret was one designer whose own travels provided the incentive and inspiration for his work from Eastern and Oriental influences, ranging broadly from Persian to Japanese.

He was concerned with interpreting freedom of spirit in creating garments which hung loosely on the body. The Kimono was one significant Eastern costume which provided him with ideas for these new experiments with clothes with freedom of expression being the primary concern. The simplicity and shapelessness of the Kimono offered him the freedom to experiment and explore with both shape and the fabric. Poiret was also extremely stimulated by the exquisite fabric's.

The Japanese placed great importance on their choice of colour for Kimono's. This choice in colour declared, and was the main thing that enhanced a woman's beauty. As with the Japanese, Poiret too realised the significance in choosing colour in making a woman look beautiful. One could say that his ideas of fashion and dress came from the Japanese aesthetic of simplicity. As with the Japanese designers he placed extreme importance on the fabric as much as the construction of the garment.

Although for centuries, Japanese fashion held no strong significance in the world of high fashion, it is obvious to see how some forms of design have inspired designers both past and present, such as in the form of Poiret and Fifi White.

Within the notion of a freedom of expression and the creation of beauty, the Kimono and its ideals has revealed important concepts in the world of fashion. The Japanese artistic and craft culture has become something to draw ideas from.

Decorative ideals of the Kimono are important from the view of a Japanese aesthetic. The rules of colour symbolism are highly structured, and only children wear bright colours and pattern, always derived from nature but stylized in a flat graphic manner, is also used for more than just decoration. In the Kimono, it is used for both variety, to counteract the strictness and uniformity of the garments shape and proportions and to enhance the areas of greatest attractiveness in women, such as the back of the neck. The simple symmetry of the Kimono's shape imposed no rigid limitations on it's decorator. It is hard to recall any other costume of any other time or place that has encouraged such freedom.

Although the Japanese have been able to Westernise their society, but they still have managed to preserve a keen sense of their own special identity. What appears to be the influence of Western culture on Japan from the 1930's onwards has really been just another means of Japanese fashion designers realigning themselves with their own traditional culture in an international context. These approaches have not, just been in a need to address an international market, but also as a means of its looking at its own traditions and removing what is no longer needed, whereby retaining the important qualities and coming to terms with them once again, but within a new context.

C H A P T E R 2.

CONTENTS.

1. THE AESTHETIC IDEALS IN JAPANESE CLOTHING DESIGN AND THE ZEN WAY OF
LIFE AND ITS INFLUENCE IN JAPANESE CONTEMPORAY TEXTILES FOR FASHION.

Japanese designers have managed to accumulate and retain, particularly in fashion and textiles, its cultural values rather than letting one replace the other. Coming from Japanese cultural and religious beliefs has evolved a very finely tuned aesthetic towards design. Although the Japanese beliefs have always been taken from abroad, for example the Buddhist culture, they are used to absorbing foreign influences and making them their own. There is a time and a place within Japanese culture for each one. The fundamental Japanese belief in the changes, brought about by the cycle of the seasons, encourages its highly flexible attitude towards cultural variance.

In order to understand Japan's cultural past and how it has been integrated into the present, we need to know where some of the basic aesthetic ideals originate. The most important reason why these aesthetic traditions are still relevant to contemporary culture, is the fact that they have always been based on 'popular' rather than 'aristocratic' values. So therefore it is possible in Japan to talk realistically about 'shared values' and 'known rules'. It is difficult to understand these aesthetic codes. In relation to the success of Japanese industry world wide what Westerners need to assess is the Japanese flourishing group activity and stability. Communication and work relationships are as important to Japanese designers, as is the success of the their fashion industry.

The strongest influence upon Japan's traditional aesthetic values has been that of Buddhism. Introduced, yet again from abroad, from China in the sixth century, Buddhism joined Shinotoism to become one of the two most influential religions in Japan. Buddhism brought with it a more philosophical approach to life and a strong link between aesthetics and morality underpinned the Buddhist creed. According to Penny Sparke, Buddhist monks organized their lives in their monasteries on the idea of the 'economy of means'.



1871-1872

1871-1872

1871-1872

1871-1872

According to Buddhist belief, poverty, austerity and simplicity were a means of contemplation and spirituality (Sparke, 1987 p.11). Another concept which originated from Buddhism, is the idea of living one's life in direct contact with the rawness of nature. One particular aesthetic concept, from the same origins, that has been the centre of a great deal of discussion in Japanese art and design over the centuries, particularly in relation to the European Modern Movement has been that of 'Sabi'. It refers, specifically, to the timelessness, simplicity, and purity of Japanese objects functions well then if must look good. These aesthetic concepts are relative in numerous areas of contemporary Japanese design, and in particular my point is in proving that it is also in textile design and the clothing industry. Coming from Zen-Buddhism there is also the concept of expressing spirituality through minimal aesthetic means. The Japanese have always been very concerned with spirituality, and today there are specific Japanese fashion and textile designers like Issey Miyake and Junichi Arai who work within this concept of spirituality. They have the ability to see deeper into an object or fabric as this case might be.

Zen teaches us not merely to hear, but to listen, not just to look but to see, not only to think, but to experience. These are just some of the basic qualities of Zen, but to me, they are the relevant ones in defining these special fabric's that people like Junichi Arai, are creating for the fashion industry. However what was equally important in Japan was the importance of materials, of craftsmanship and, above all, of the spiritual and moral context for these aesthetic rules.

It has been through the Zen-Buddhism influence and teachings that crafts such as textiles, have been raised from craft to high art. Among most Japanese there is an instinctive awareness of beauty and as with fabric designers their too, is an instinctive aesthetic awareness in a designers choice of materials and colours and how he uses them in a simplistic manner.

These designers have a quick appreciation of form and colour and their feelings for simple elegance, are gifts which may well be envied in Western culture.

Colour is also significant in Japan's textile world. The Japanese regard colour as something that changes with time, rather than as an eternal, unchanging thing. This concept comes from the Buddhist view of the changes in the seasons. Their descriptions of colour, such as *SAKURA IRO* (cherry blossom colour) and *MOMIJU IRO* (maple-leaf colour) are broad representations instead of descriptions that are static and unchanging such as Pink and Rust. They also took into consideration qualities such as fading and light. Their interpretations of colour are purely from nature, again coming from the Buddhist aesthetic of one's intimacy with the rawness of nature. Nature and the cosmos and the system of order and harmony in creation, are ever changing. They are a cycle, like everything else. Colour is not a fixed entity but something that changes ceaselessly. The colours that have decorated Kimono have been conceived with this concept of colour.

These Buddhist and aesthetic concepts in textile design today, destroy's our impulses to categorise, and the teachings of the Zen, which teaches us not just to look but to see, and not only to think but to experience. Therefore we are forced to experience directly materials, processes and form. This influence allows for a broader view to expand. Firstly we would look at the beauty of the fabric, for example, and then we recognise the amount of labour and sophisticated technique that have been involved. Therefore we recognise a personal attachment between the creator and the object. But because of the influence of the Zen in seeing beauty in the simplicity also, we see the fabric first for its beauty and simplicity in its creation. We recognise that the maker has made the fabric for us to admire in whatever way we want.

Secondly we then accept their hard labour as a personal attachment between the maker and the fabric. This leads us to want to discover and study what is the form and construction of the fabric in elements such as colour, texture and formal structure and this may also involve an analysis of the makers intentions and values relating to the fabric. Coming from this aesthetic, within Japanese textile design, it seems that the simpler and more beautiful it looks the more we want to know why?

It has been designers such as, Issey Miyake and Junichi Arai who both appear to work under the influence of the Zen teachings that are applying a completeness in their creations in the form of a spiritual, and aesthetic awareness onto the fabric, the garment, and ultimately the wearer. It is designers such as Miyake and Arai, who are creating a unification between all these elements of nature, spirituality, beauty and philosophy into a functional manner, that not only makes sense but is also making clothing a spiritual and personal form of expression.

Junichi Arai has supplied some of the most exquisite and beautiful fabrics to designers such as Miyake, Kawakubo and Yamamoto in the 1980's. It is a tribute to people like Miyake, Kawakubo and Yamamoto that they understood Arai's creativeness. Miyake in particular has managed to prompt his creativity by giving him Zen-like briefs and presenting him with a word like 'clouds' or 'poison' and from this nature concept it is then up to Arai to create a textile like these descriptive words. 'Clouds' for example triggers a very simple image but if meaning is seen deeper into the nature of clouds, as would happen to someone who accepts the Zen Buddhist teachings, then what emanates from this, as with Arai, is an exquisite fabric design that has originated from an extremely simple idea.



Clothes have to be seen on the outside, as well as felt on the inside.
Issey Miyake,



In Japan, it has been the fashion designers who have provided the arena for textile development. And today, Japan is a paradise for textile designers world-wide. The success of Japanese design has as a whole has evolved from a continuous close link within traditional Japanese culture, between aesthetics, religious belief and nature. There aesthetic sense is their order in chaos. But it has also been successful through its adaption of high technology. So many traditional Japanese aesthetic concepts have carried through into the present, providing a close link with the past and a strong sense of cultural continuity.

I feel that it is these aesthetic and traditional traits that are emanent with Japanese designers such as Miyake and Arai today, that make their designs special and which have given fashion a whole new dimension today. Maybe, we in the West can learn something from these special traits. These concepts have been proven to be successful in a functional world, so why not sit back and learn a bit from the teachings of the Zen?.

C H A P T E R 3.

CONTENTS.

1. AVANT-GARDE FASHION - JAPAN, AND THE SIGNIFICANE OF TEXTILES FOR DESIGNERS SUCH AS:-

KAWAKUBO

MIYAKE

YAMAMOTO



Japan's success in the world of fashion derives from the tensions that exist between Western inspiration and the perpetuation of the traditional Japanese values. However, the Japanese are now actually pointing the way forward to countries such as France and Italy - the long standing leaders of fashion trends. The main contribution of Japanese fashion to the West, and the reasons for its acclaim, comes mainly from its aesthetic awareness and the desire to create a new image for the modern woman.

Emanating from the aesthetic ideals of Japanese culture, has come about some of the most inspiring contemporary fashion designers of our day. What I feel is important, are designers who are fully aware of the significance of the fabric in the finished garments. I have chosen three fashion designers who are obviously at the foreground in recognising textiles and their relevance to their design work these are designers who are the forefront of the fashion industry of Japan today. They are creating a new freedom in interpretation in the use of fabric, and are giving textile designers a chance to explore personal expression through fibre.

Applying designs to fabric's was a way of emphasising the uniqueness of its wearer. Depicted in a Symbolic manner, they are still popular traits to Japanese fashion designers, such as Kawakubo, Miyake and Yamamoto. It is these designers who have recognised the possibilities of expression through fiber.

For example, Japanese designer Rei Kawakubo, has said that, through her work, she tries to emphasise fluid, free movement of the whole body. The fabric is meant to accentuate and translate organic rhythms such as breathing and walking, while at the same time revealing the complex beauty of its own texture.

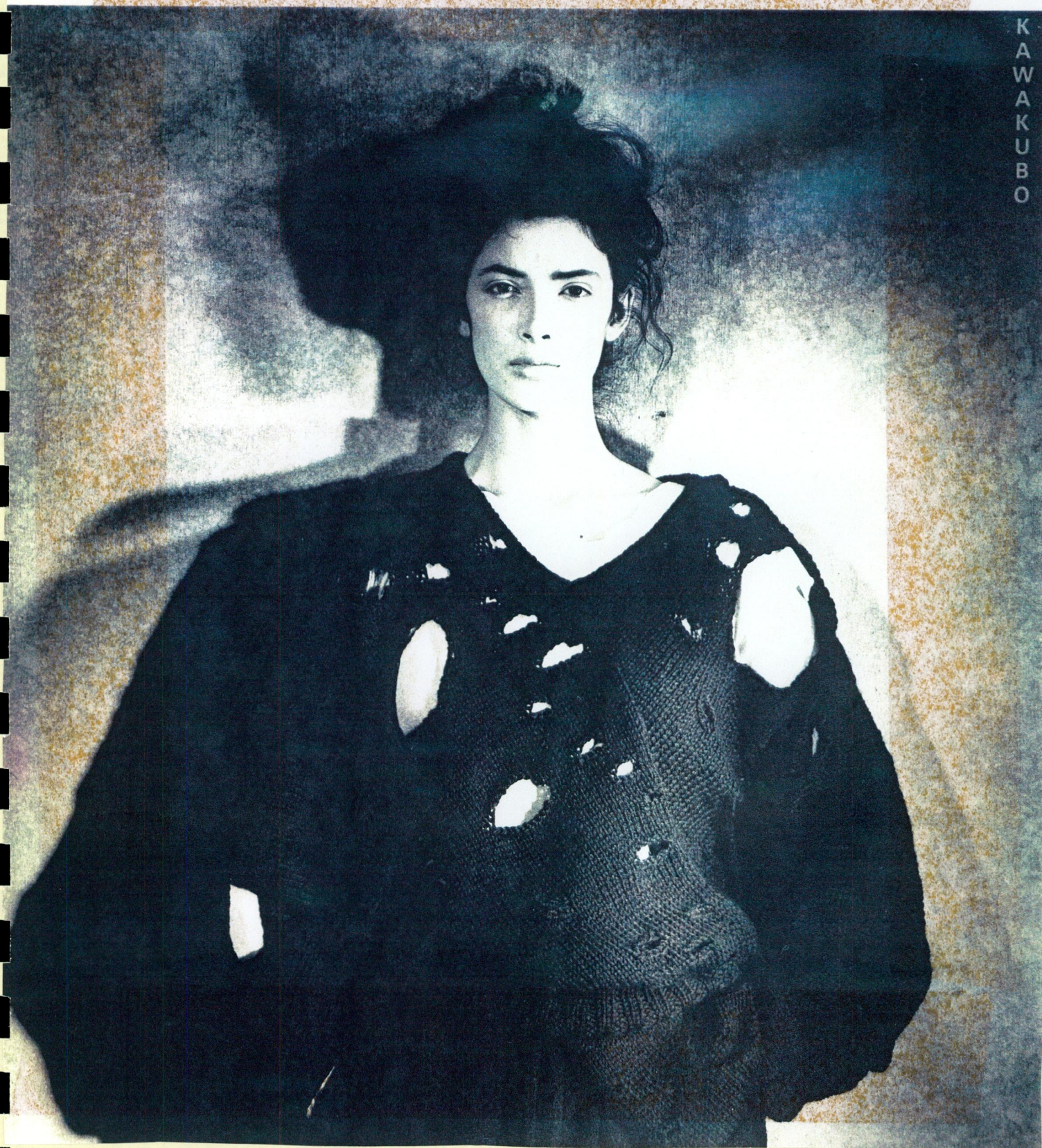
According to Kazuko Koike-

I think Rei Kawakubo is one of the most influential people in women's history because her fashion concepts are accepted and followed by so many Japanese women and young people. To my eyes she is the leader of a conceptual or a religious movement.

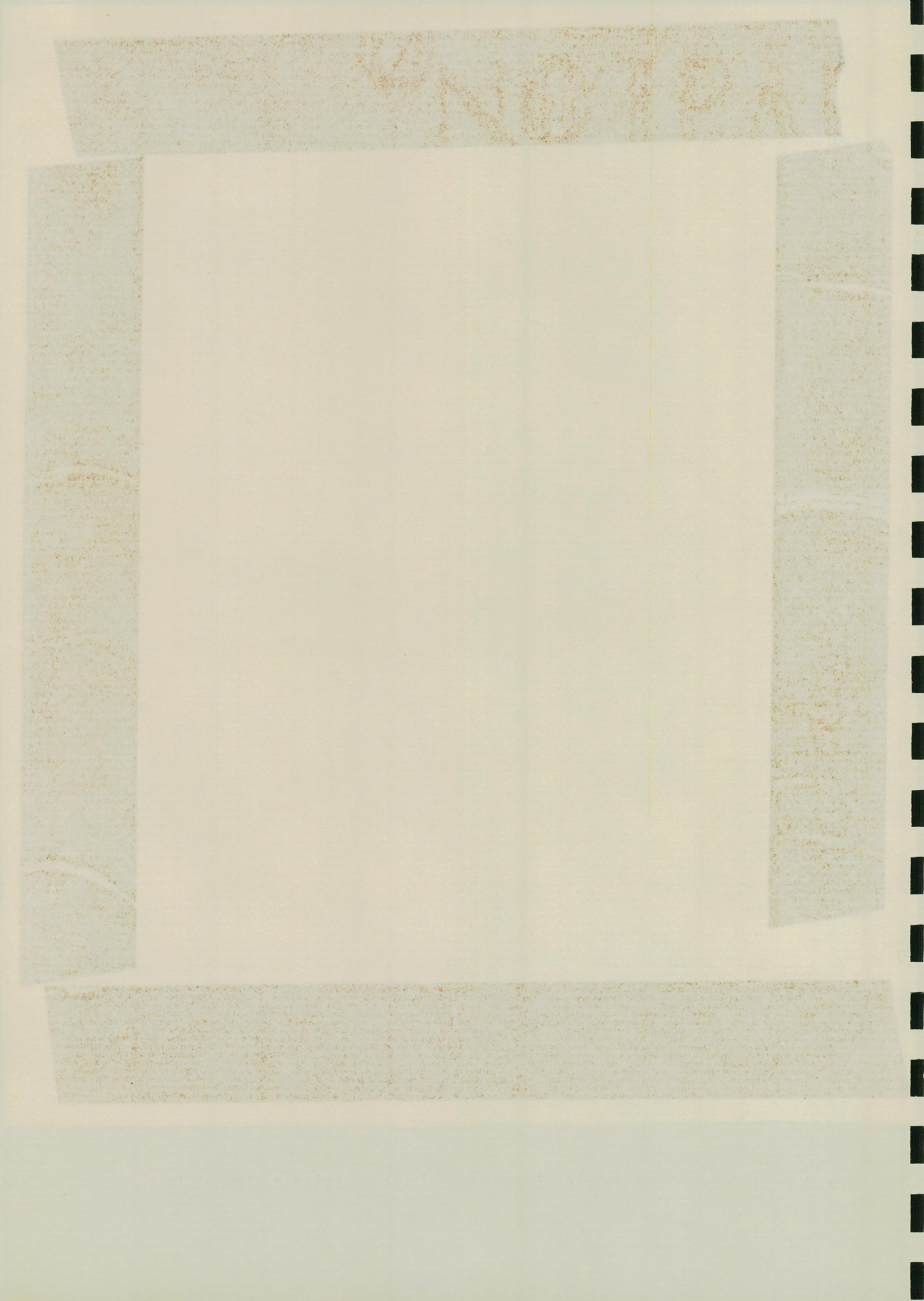
-(Koren, 1987, Kadansha International, p. 108)

Kawakubo was born in Tokyo in 1942 and has created a fashion style that appears cool and solemn, when seen at first. But beneath the obvious surface which we relate to there is magic and poetry in her work. Her designs are conceptually clever and experimentally humanistic. The dark colours she uses have an illusionistic and perceptual effect, they make the wearer smaller and less obtrusive. She has the purest and strongest Avant-Garde vision and this is reflected in her designs and the fabrics she uses.

Kawakubo emphasise's the use of natural materials and uses only natural dyes in her fabrics, among them, calligraphers sumi ink for her Grey colours. She dries silk and natural rayons in the sun to create a crinkled effect. Her fabrics are generally undecorated on the surface, this is the opposite to Western notions, that plentitude and beauty are the same thing and her work strongly contrasts with the highly patterned and heavily textured fabrics and forms of Western fabrics and fashion. However, she is fully aware of the aesthetic possibilities of fabrics in her clothes. She is also interested in fabrics that have flaws in them, flaws that are intentional as part of the finished design. Kawakubu says herself that-



Kawakubo thinks of the fabric with "holes" in it as being a kind of lace.



The machines that make fabric are more and more making uniform, flawless textures. I like it when something is off - not perfect. Hand-weaving is the best way of achieving this. Since this isn't always possible, we loosen a screw of the machines here and there so they can't do exactly what they're supposed to do.

-(Koren, 1987, Kadanshan International, p.117).

Her clothes, radical experiments in fabric and form are closer to sculpture than the traditional view of fashion as body packaging. She has become a major figure in the transformation of modern Japan.


In discussing briefly, the work of Yamamoto (Yohju), I feel the important qualities of this contemporary designer's ideals are his use in incorporating the "quiet" Japanese aesthetic ideals and a deep, human feeling into the essences of the clothes he designs. He is the most eloquent and philosophical of designers. He sees fashion as a part of a powerful generative force in nature, coming yet again from the concept of nature, originating from Zen Buddhism. In his Spring/Summer collection of the 1984, he displayed an expressed in his work the moods of Japanese Summer - a rainstorm, cicadas, silence, and then burst of green fabric which symbolised growth and birth. His clothing expresses a different spectrum of his design and philosophical ideas. He says that-

When you are honest and skillful and put in emotion into your work, a product is 'given' to you. When I see something that in fact I made, I think this is not made by me, but by nature - a natural happening. Perhaps European people use the word 'God'.

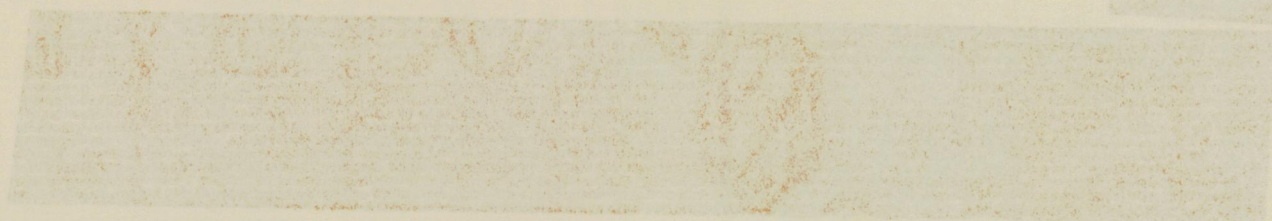
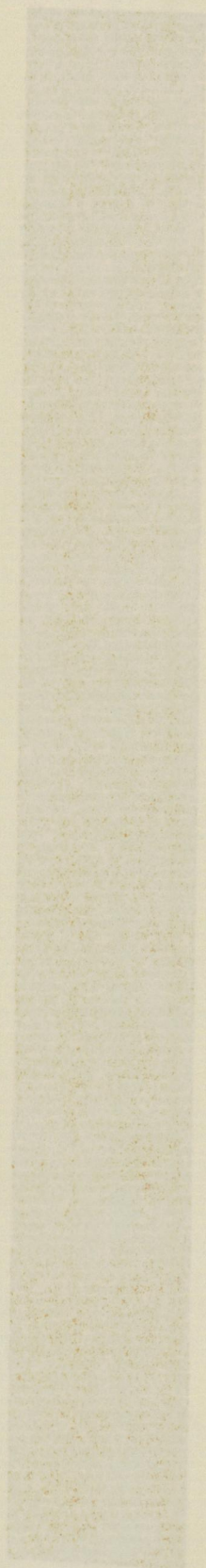
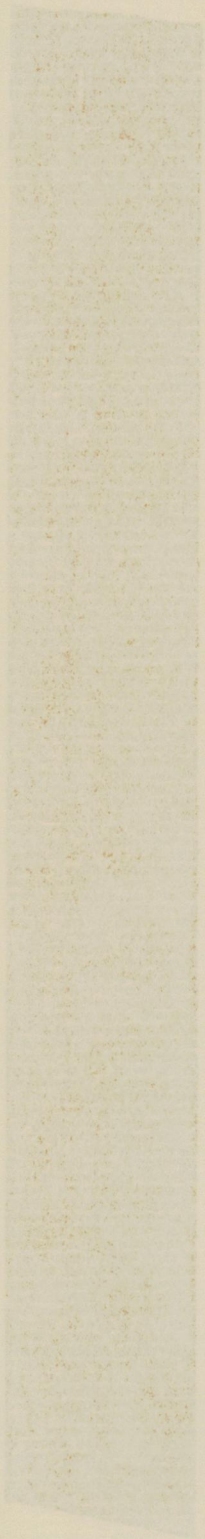
-(Koren, 1987, Kanasha International, p.93)

3

Kawakubo's clothes inspire photographic attitudes so strong as to influence the direction of fashion photography through the mid-1980s. These 1984 Comme des Garçons clothes were photographed for a promotional booklet by Peter Lindbergh.



SIX MONTHS BEFORE A COLLECTION BEGINS THE FABRIC IS DECIDED. THEN IT'S MADE OR BOUGHT. I HAVE A VAGUE IDEA FOR THE KIND OF TEXTURE I WANT IN THE NEXT COLLECTION. AS FOR CLOTHES SHAPES—SOMETIMES I'LL WORK ON SHAPES UP TO A FEW WEEKS BEFORE A SHOW. BUT ONCE A FOCAL POINT FOR A COLLECTION IS REACHED, THE WHOLE COLLECTION FALLS INTO PLACE."—Rei Kawakubo



Mainly it has been people such as Issey Miyake - designer and artist extraordinaire, who has recognised and who is purely sensitive to the values and importance in fibre expression. His work draws from Japanese cultural beliefs and his designs combine a refined craftsmanship with ceaseless experimentation of fabric and form. He is a fashion designer but also a sculptor whose medium is cloth. So it could also be said that he is a fibre artist. Issey Miyake says:-

You have to learn from fabric every single time you use a new one. Then, the better you know it, the more you keep learning. The weight, the body, the fall of the fabric all determine what it will eventually be made in to.

-(Penn, 1988, New York, p.36)

Idealism, buoyancy, and challenge are all suggested in his designs, his fabrics and the freedom of his forms. He is a designer who works from fabric. He realizes the artistic creations that can evolve from fabric. His permanent textile designer Makiko Tamura explains:-

He will say to me words like 'light' or 'pure' or 'abstract', and I respond with fabric. We play catchball like this. He wants to see how I will interpret.

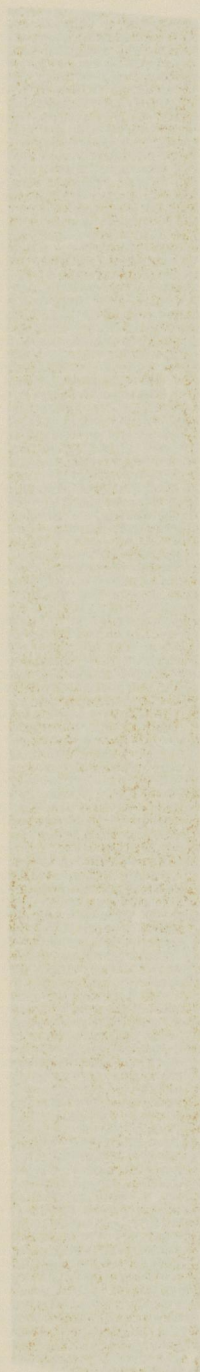
-(Callaway, 1988, Sunday Times Magazine)

He is like a mentor or teacher to textile designers but there's an element of the unexpected in him. His approach to fashion design is different to most others. He tries to create a new fashion genre that is neither Japanese nor Western. He expects his clothes to become part of someone physically. He believes that people buy his clothes and they become his tools for the weavers creativity.



You have to learn from a fabric every time you use a new one.
Then the better you know it, the more you keep learning.
The weight, the body, the fall of the fabric all determine what it
will eventually be made into.

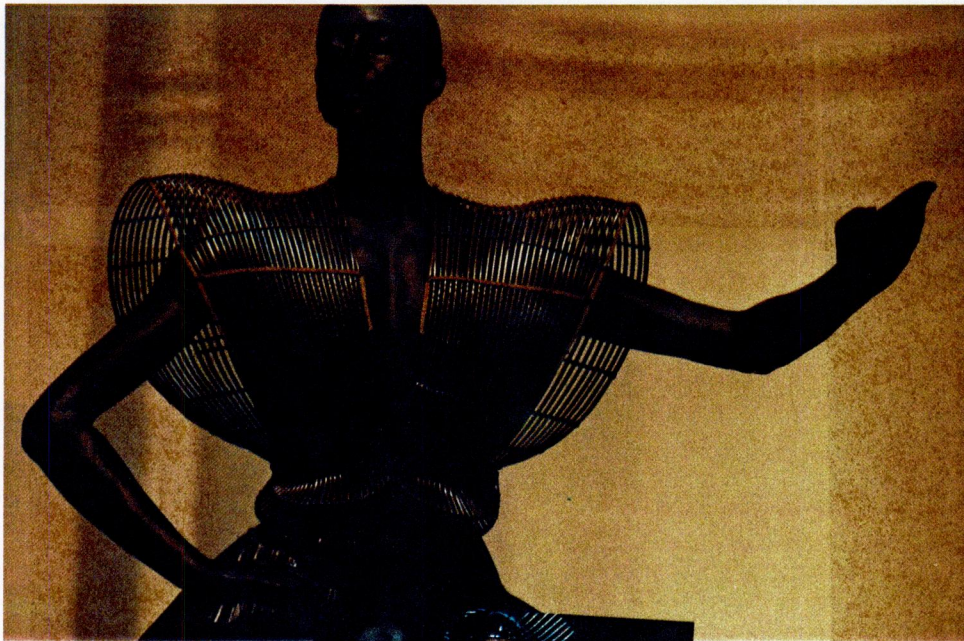
Issey Miyake.



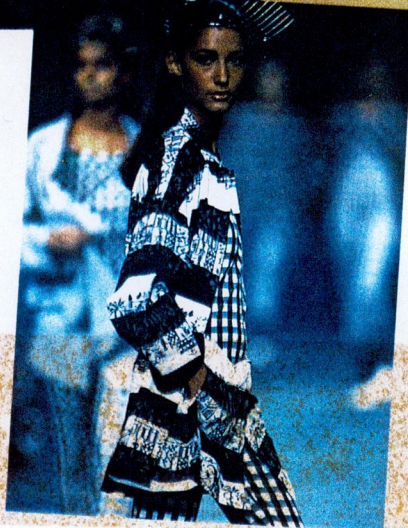
He has given fashion a whole new dimension and has also raised somewhat the importance of fabric design to the same levels as art and sculpture. He feels that clothes need to be seen on the outside, as well as felt on the inside.

I am Japanese and we have a fantastic tradition not only of art but of people's mind's, lifestyles and nature. In order to create extraordinary fabrics we can use technology and tradition at the same time. Here in Japan I can easily work and communicate with the people.

- (Koren, 1987, Kadansha International, p.87)

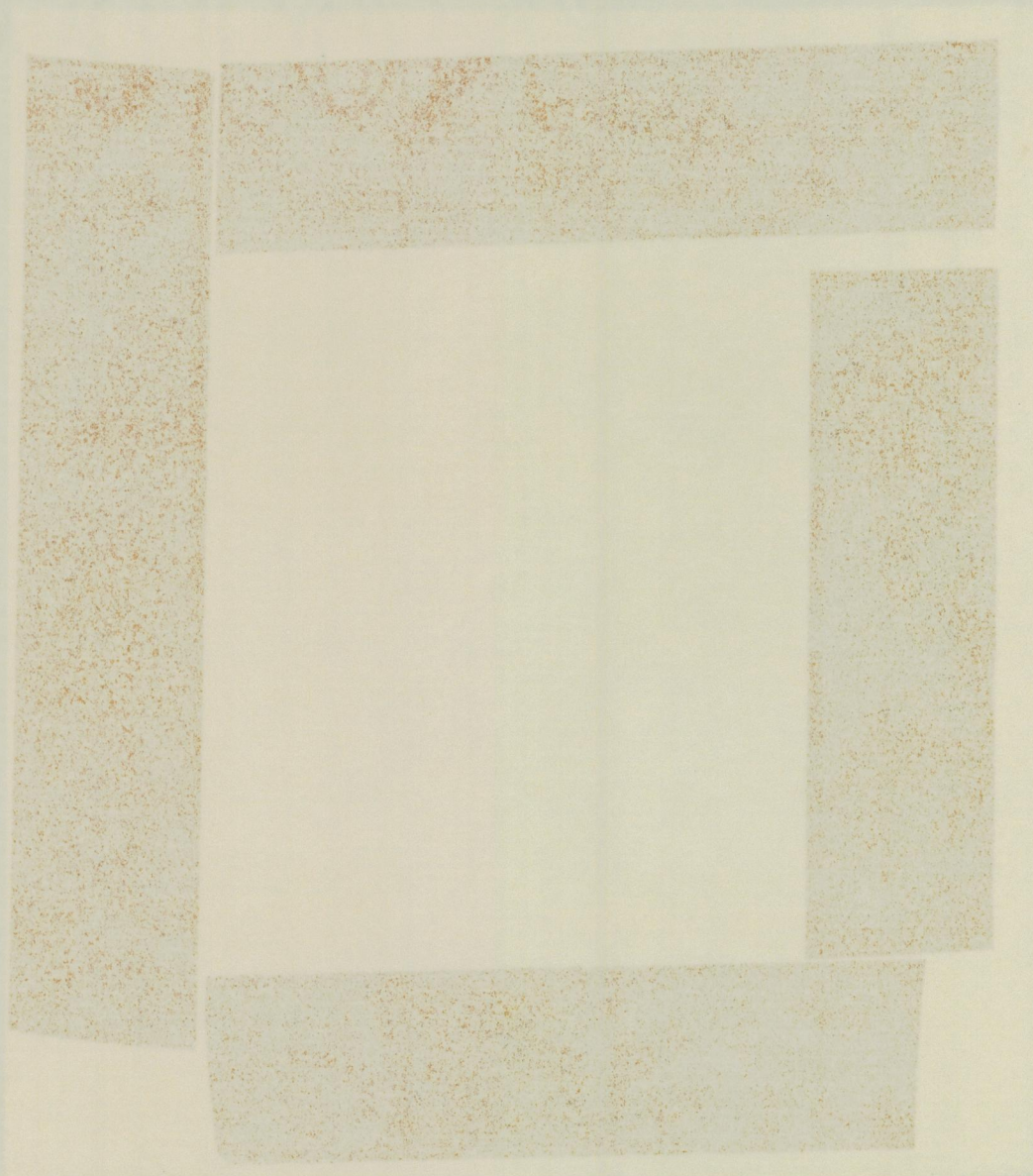


Issey Miyake, Bodyworks In this cage-like bodice Miyake eroded the distinction between clothing and sculpture thereby giving fashion design a whole new dimension.



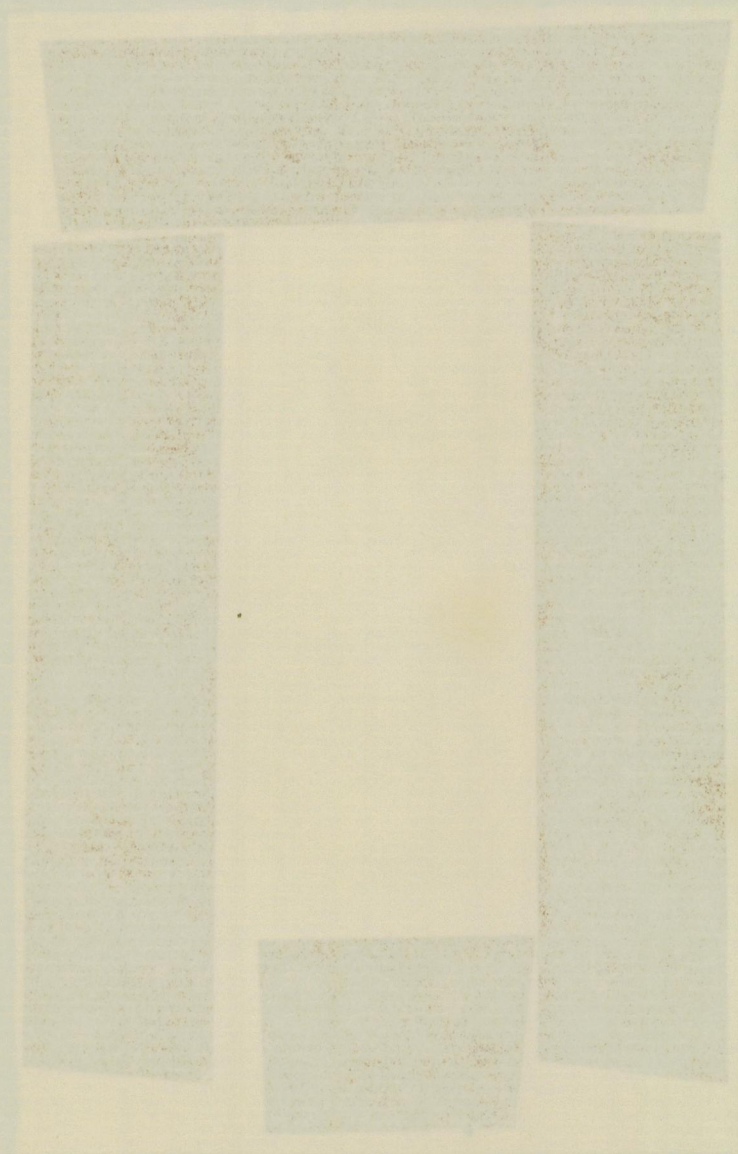
Issey Miyake, Spring/Summer collection 1987 Miyake continues to design loose-fitting, casual clothing in a style that is all his own. By the 1980s he had multiplied the number of his international outlets, and now caters for a wide sector of the market.

Issey Miyake giving Japanese fashion design a whole new dimension to the Western Catwalks.



Issey Miyake's sculptural collection and his approach has,
nonetheless inspired garments which are , eminently wearable.

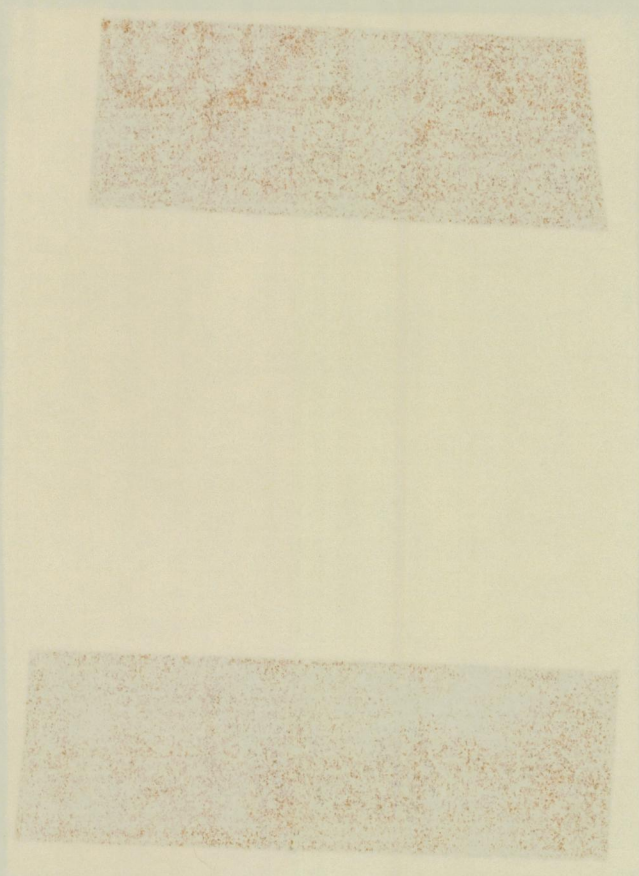






REI KAWAKUBO,

With its dramatically asymmetrical detail, Kawakubos design for her Comme des Garçons collection demonstrates her debt to the concept of 'imperfection' which derives from traditional Japanese aesthetics.



C H A P T E R 4.

- THE TEXTILE EXPRESSIONISTS, THEIR CONCEPTS AND THEIR IMPORTANCE IN THE DESIGN AND ART WORLD TODAY.

Textile art, quite as much as the other forms of contemporary art, has come to realise that the very notion of artistic creation has evolved and extended into unfamiliar realms. Barriers are beginning to erode and collapse and the artists of the fiber medium have found new freedom, that is a freedom of the loom and perhaps more important a transformation of purpose. New forms of treatment and technique have evolved to produce innovative and visually exciting fabrics. To weave is also to write the visual. The revival of textile materials has touched all the disciplines of modern art. Artist's and designers have sought new qualities in their materials. New visions of creation that are breaking free from conventional and traditional ideas and formats of weave. Freedom of every angle has evolved. To a textile designer like Junichi Arai, never is space blank but instead an intertwining of threads that have paths to lead one through the other.

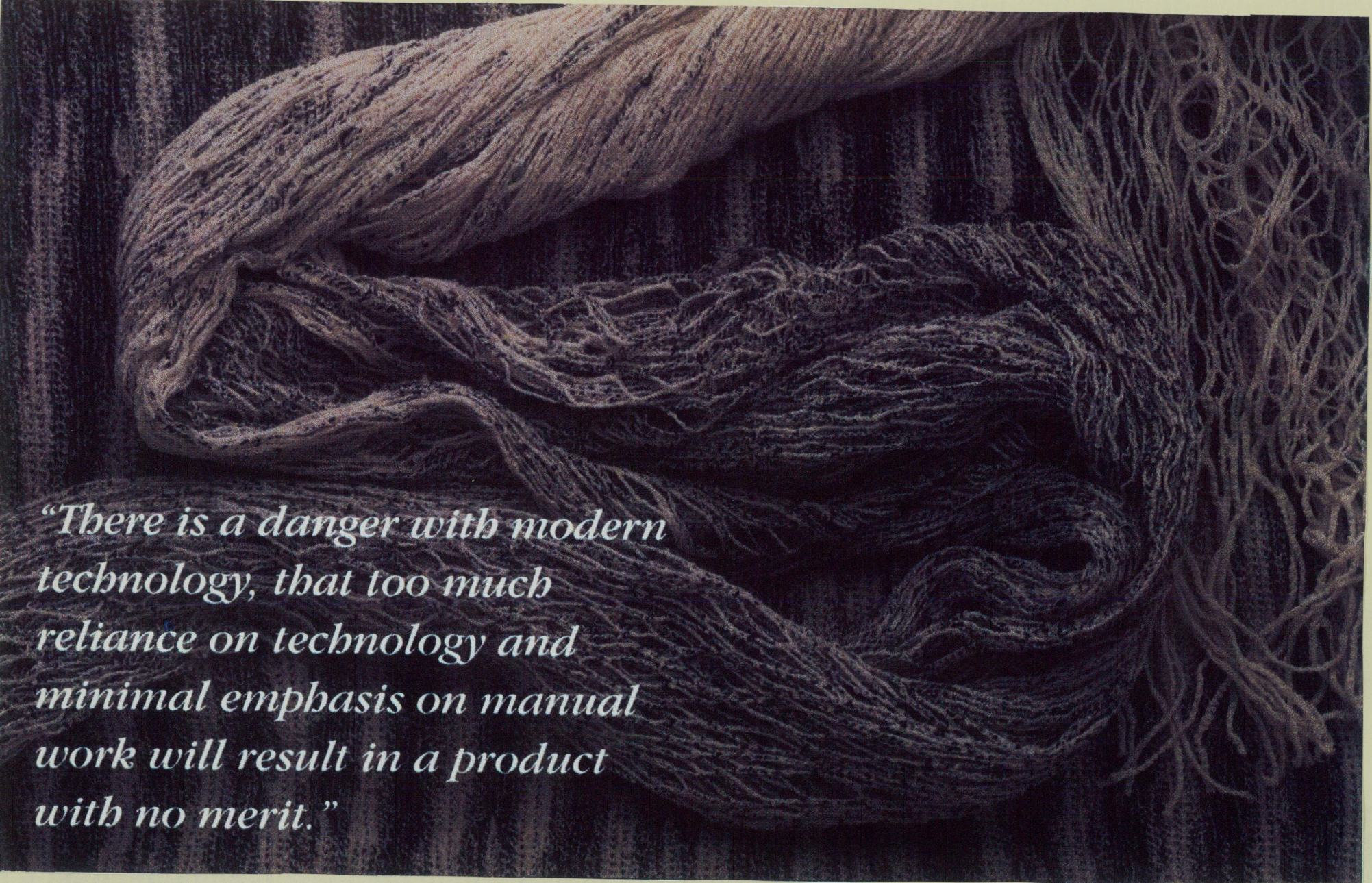
In the world outside Japan today, critics are failing to cope with new movements in the craft world and a lot are still unwilling to accept these changes in visual expression. To me, any personal or creative expression presented to us visually, is an art creation. Craft or art, if the imagination and makers beliefs are being portrayed, then to me this is art. Craft s mastery of material and technique to produce an object by hand, add to these skills the intention and imagination of the maker and what you have is wholeness of an object. The only difference therefore between art and craft is that most fine artists do not have this mastery of material and technique. But most art critics today seem to believe that if any art work looks sloppy and clumsy they recognise this as a sign of the artists struggle. Really it is just lack of skill and discipline with materials.

There has always been divisions in the art world and one would have hoped that with a shared point of view that recognise the pluralism in art today, the old questions of art versus craft would have been long resolved. I feel that this is so important and that is why I look with such respect and admiration to the Japanese because of their awareness of craft and art on the same level and in most cases they have held craftsmanship with greater esteem than fine art.

Maybe if there were more people like Junichi Arai then there would be multiplicity as well as pluralism and this in turn would create enough force in making expression through fiber more important in the art world, then maybe the critics would recognise the importance of an object seen as aesthetically pleasing as well as a visual statement. It is people like Junichi Arai who give me the incentive to succeed and feel more confident about expressing my ideas through fibre.

There textile expressionists (as I like to call them) are presenting us with a pictorial and visual statement with the added quality of handle and tactile senses. All these evoke an aesthetic awareness in the beholder or wearer as the case might be. The Japanese certainly have this aesthetic awareness in their nature to be inspired by and to be able to produce fabrics that work within this realm.

Junichi Arai produces fascinating textiles that can also be termed under the context of these textile expressionists. He was born in 1932 to a family of weavers in Kiryu, Japan and began his career in his fathers Kimono factory. In the 1970's Arai began to be consulted by Japanese fashion designers such as Issey Miyake. His use of innovative techniques and materials complemented the new wave of fashions of Japan. The textiles he produces give a new high-tech look to Japanese fabric's, however he says of high-tech designing that,



"There is a danger with modern technology, that too much reliance on technology and minimal emphasis on manual work will result in a product with no merit."



There is a danger with modern technology, that too much reliance on technology and minimal emphasis on manual work will result in a product with no merit.

-(Fiberarts, Vol. 15, No.4)

Arai is aware of the craftsmanship that should be involved in creating fabric, however, he is still fully aware of the aesthetic principles in creating a fabric that looks like an art piece. As Ann Sutton has said of his fabric's-

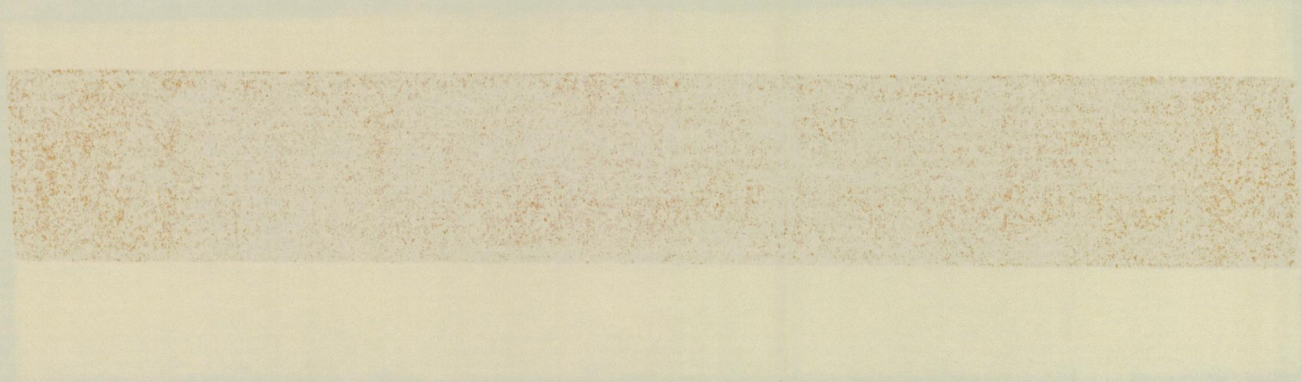
He created cloths that combine the aesthetic qualities of fabric's from the past, of other cultures, with the technological wizardry of the present and the future.

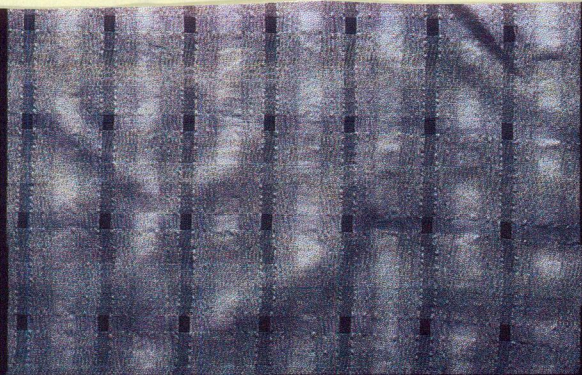
-(International Textiles, 1992)

When Arai works from Zen like briefs, such as those coming from the nature aesthetic, with titles like 'crystals' or 'amethyst' he presents us with a creative visual expression, which is an art creation as well as a design which is also functional for modern fashion. He has a wondrous technique in combining design, art technology and craft in creating his fabrics. It is important to remember that, just as much as we need to accept new technology, we also need to accept the changes in visual expression, especially with that of the textile artist such as Arai, who created a pictorial and visual statement with the added qualities of handle and tactile senses within the fabric, which in turn evokes an aesthetic sense in the wearer, and it is this aesthetic principle, which to me, make craft separate from most principles of fine art. But why must there be any separation? Why is it not possible that more importance could be placed on the craftsmanship and aesthetic qualities within the areas of the fine art also?

RIGHT: A 'tour de force' shawl: 'Iris' by Junichi Arai c.1980, from a drawing by Riko Arai. Measuring 130 cm square, it is a double-plain Jacquard with a single unit repeat. Both warp and weft are of overspun singles cotton, which condenses so much during finishing that the cloth must be woven to twice the required measurement. This cloth is one of the simpler examples of Arai's involvement with multi-layer Jacquards.



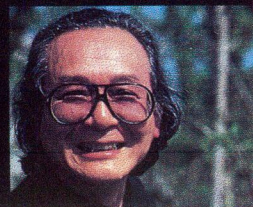


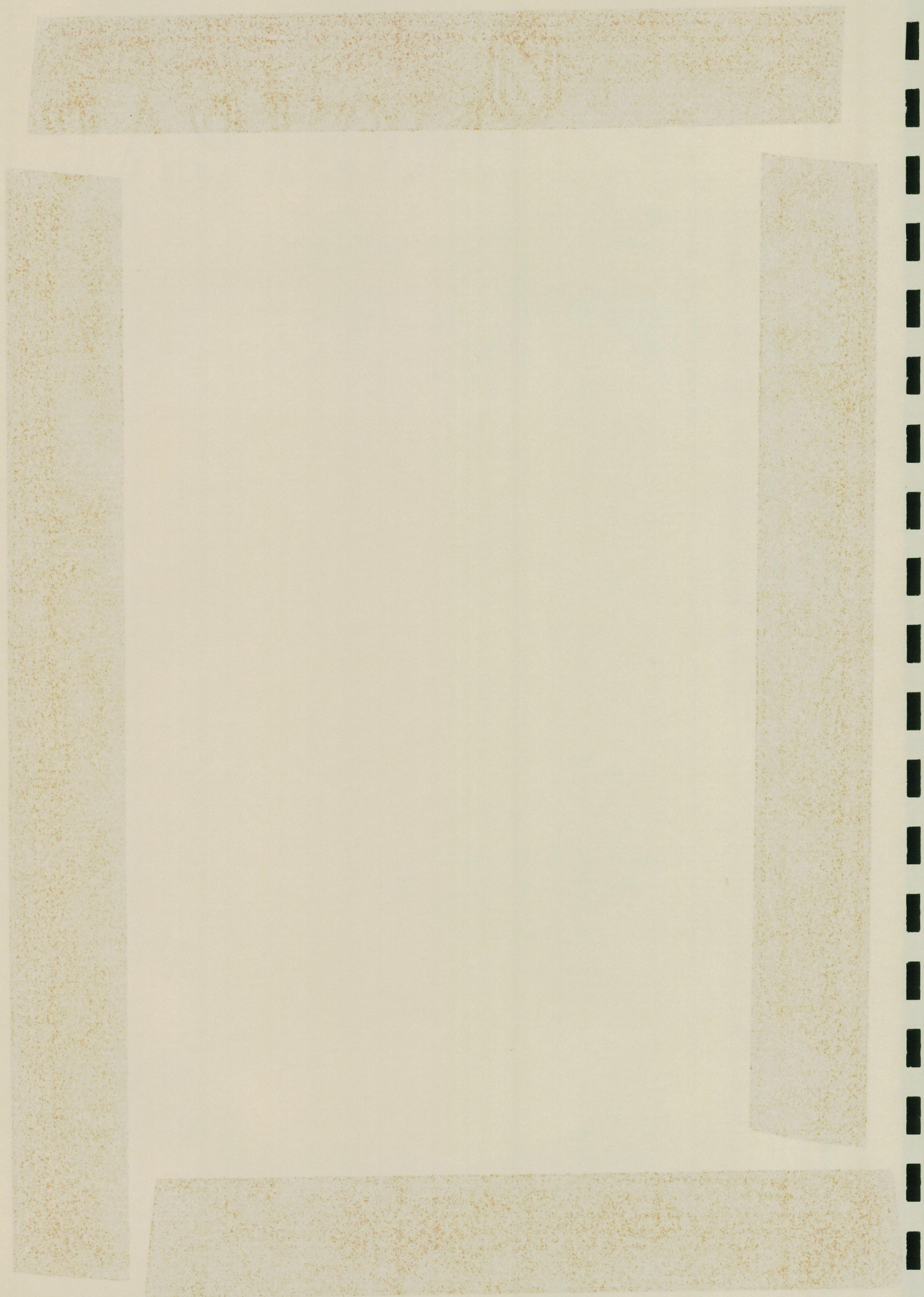


LEFT: Curtaining sheer by Arai. Designed for cross-dyeing, this plain-weave cloth contains six different yarns and fibres, including microfine nylon monofilament which is responsible for the tiny, crisp 'invisible' rectangles.



MAIN PICTURE THIS PAGE & OPPOSITE: Arai's recent experiments include slit-film metallic fabrics which are hot-pressed into semi-rigid irregular plates, sometimes 50 cm across - the one pictured is 8 cm. Each side is a different colour. The larger lightweight plates have been used as armour-like





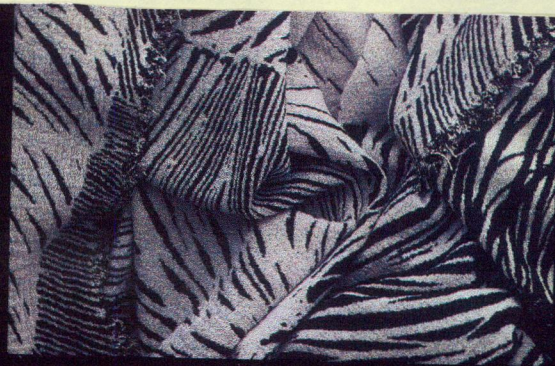
Because of these divisions in the art world, this is why I look to Japanese craft and design, especially within the textile and fashion world, because of their tremendous awareness of holding craft at such a level, which almost surpasses fine art.

Junichi Arai's work involve^os input of skill, discipline even phisical effort, but more importantly it involves the intensity with which the creative and aesthetic factors operate, which are and should be basic to any work of art. It now seems almost as if the craft has ceased to be mere decoration and the craftsmanship has become the rival of the fine Artists. The Japanese present us with fabric designs which are created for their aesthetic value as well as their technique of handling traditional materials.

Arai's work, in particular, is so full of poetic vision and personal insight, and their is symbolic meaning behind every fabric he designs, a very personal meaning of poetry exists in his fabric designs. From his fabric's transcends a quiet power that comes from his inner spirit, strength and sensitivity. He creates a whole mood whereby also creating an art of its own category.

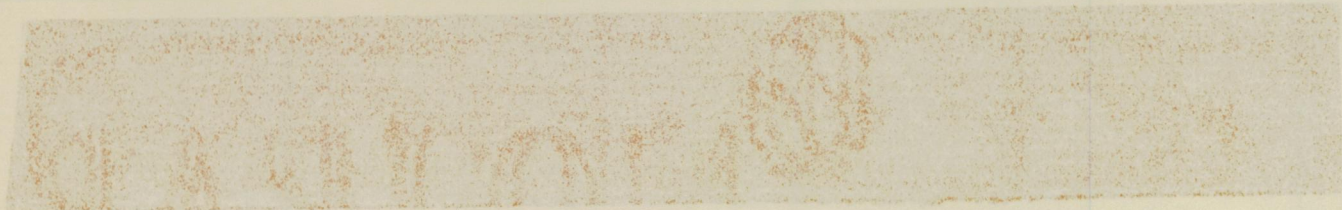
Junichi Arai has taken on the same principles as art, but has expressed them to a professional level of craft and integrated them into society, whereby giving art to the people, by selling his craft/art, independant of the gallery system, this to me is doing all the things that fine art has sought to do for centuries. Art is to inform, it is to provoke an awareness within the spectator, within the ordinary person or within the less creative person. But along with presenting us within art or craft we should also be seeing beauty within certain objects or paintings, to whatever way brighten our lives in whatever way possible, in this modern rat-race of worry, fear and stress.

RIGHT: A 'tour de force' shawl: 'Iris' by Junichi Arai c.1980, from a drawing by Riko Arai. Measuring 130 cm square, it is a double-plain Jacquard with a single unit repeat. Both warp and weft are of overspun singles cotton, which condenses so much during finishing that the cloth must be woven to twice the required measurement. This cloth is one of the simpler examples of Arai's involvement with multi-layer Jacquards.



"We must learn the essence of textiles and garments; that which makes them more than mere cloth and clothes and elevates them to the level of cultural expression." Junichi Arai.

arai



CONCLUSION.

I feel that there is still quite a lot the West can learn from Japan. With regards technology, Japan are definitely at the foreground, and in some respect the West might feel a little threatened by this, so what can we learn from these hard-working people, whose will is never weak?

With regard to textiles and fashion I feel their is a lot we can learn. Firstly in recognising that fashion and fabric are interrelated and that by interrelationships between two designers working from different mediums, can arise an exceptional design. The wizardry of two designers, like that of Miyake and Arai, combined can prove better than segregating the class of their work.

Also what is also important, is that we in the West, could very well learn from their aesthetic tastes, and in accepting craft on the same level as fine Art. We now could look into a deeper and more philosophical meaning behnd a fabric or a clothes design just as much as we could with an art-piece. In the western notion we find it difficult to see more beauty in something, more so than what is on the surface anyway. To see beauty in a fabric in particular, is something which will continue to take time to master.

To me the Japanese are masters of technique, quality and aesthetics and maybe it Western Culture if we were to sit back and absorb certain qualities of the Zen Buddhist teachings, then we might grasp a better meaning and understanding, of life and what is below the surface.

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