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John Rocha - A Cultural Compendium

by

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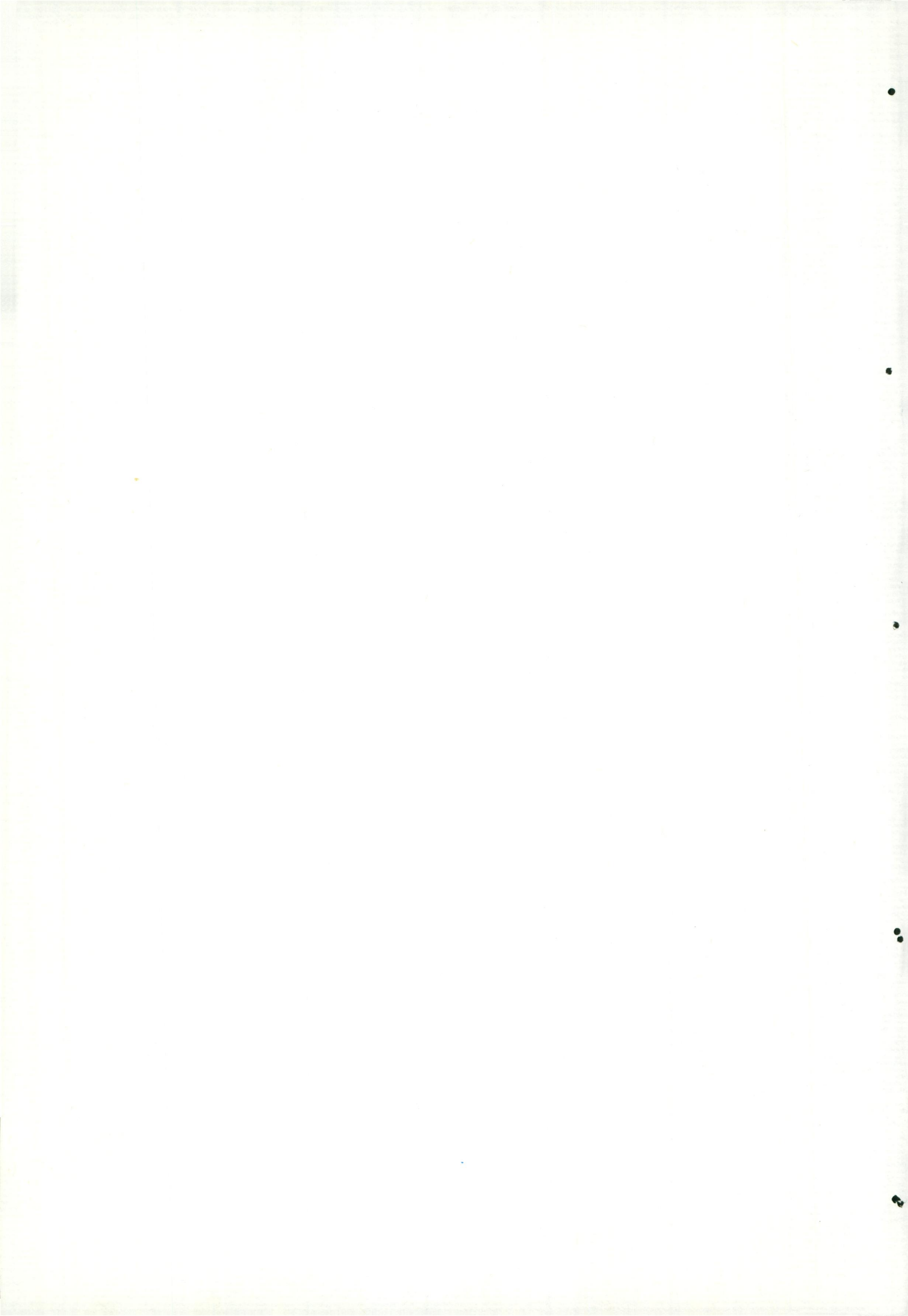
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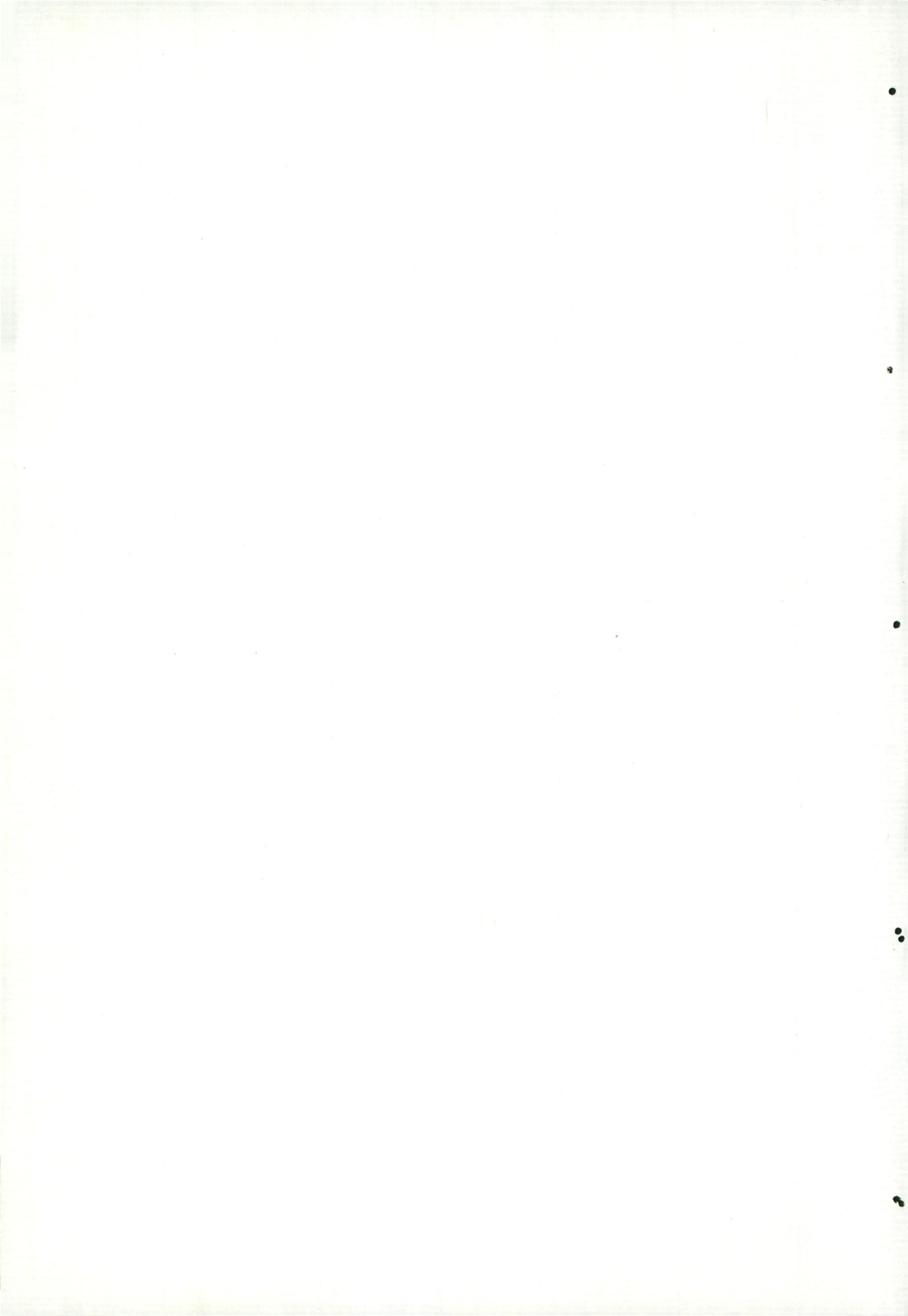
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>PAGE NO.</u>
List of Plates	4 - 5
Biographical data on John Rocha (1953-1995)	6 - 7
Introduction	8 - 11
Chapter I : East meets West, the Debate.	12 - 23
Chapter II : Rocha and the East.	24 - 37
Chapter III: Rocha and the Irish Heritage.	38 - 52
Chapter IV : Rocha and Contemporary Ireland.	53 - 64
Conclusion:	65 - 66
Bibliography:	67 - 68
Illustrations: (Fig 1 - Fig 31).	



LIST OF PLATES

- Fig. 1 : 1a, Kenzo suit.
1b, Rocha garment, 1989.
1c, Traditional Eastern dress.
- Fig. 2 : 2a, 2b, 2c and 2d are all garments from the 1994/5
Autumn/Winter collection.
- Fig. 3 : 3a, Rocha, 1989.
3b and 3c, Kenzo garments.
3d, Rocha, 1990.
- Fig. 4 : Prewar diving women dressed in characteristic
narrow-sleeved kimonos.
4b, Rocha, Autumn/Winter 1994/5
- Fig. 5 : Traditional Japanese kimono worn and folded.
- Fig. 6 : Rocha, 1995 Spring/Summer collection.
- Fig. 7 : Rocha, 1984.
- Fig. 8 : Rocha, 1986 collection.
- Fig. 9 : 'Elle' magazine, article, Nov 1993.
- Fig. 10: Kenzo garment.
- Fig. 11: 11a, and 11b Rocha, 1994 Spring, Summer.
11c, Rocha 1989.
- Fig. 12: Kawakubo sweater.
- Fig. 13: Rocha sweater 1992.
- Fig. 14: 14a, Rocha 1986.
14b, Rocha 1989.
- Fig. 15: 15a, Rocha 1994 Spring/Summer, menswear.
15b, Rocha 1992, menswear.
15c, Rocha 1991, menswear.
- Fig. 16: 16a, Rocha menswear.
16b, Rocha menswear.
- Fig. 17: 17, Rocha, 1986.



LIST OF PLATES (CONTD..)

- Fig. 18: Kawakubo design 1994.
- Fig. 19: 19a, Rocha, 1985 collection.
19b and 19c Kenzo 1984 collection.
- Fig. 20: 20a, Rocha,
20b, Rocha 1994 Spring/Summer.
20c, traditional Eastern style buttoning.
- Fig. 21: 21a, Rocha.
21b, Japanese woman wearing traditional clothing.
- Fig. 22: Rocha, 1994 Spring/Summer.
- Fig. 23: 23a, Rocha 1994, Autumn/Winter.
23b, Rocha 1994, Autumn/Winter.
- Fig. 24: 24a, 24b, Rocha garments.
24c, 24d and 24e, traditional Eastern costume.
- Fig. 25: Kenzo, bridal attire.
- Fig. 26: 26a, 26b, 26c, 26d all by Rocha from Spring/Summer
1994
- Fig. 27: 27a, 27b, 27c all by Rocha from 1994 Spring/Summer
1994
- Fig. 28: Rocha 1994, Spring/Summer 1994.
- Fig, 29: Rocha, 1995, Spring/Summer collection.
- Fig. 30: Rocha, Spring/Summer 1994.
- Fig. 31: 31a, Rocha.
31b, historic example of Irish coat.

JOHN ROCHA - BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

- 1953 : Born in Hong Kong to a Chinese Mother and Portuguese father, the second youngest of five children.
- 1970 : At the age of 17 he left Hong Kong for England.
- 1970/3 : Trained as a psychiatric nurse in England.
- 1973/77: Studied fashion design at Croydon College of Art and Design, part-time at night. During this time Rocha had an Irish girlfriend, Eily Doolan.
- 1977 : Rocha went to Ireland with Eily Doolan and there met Mary Moylan who was a practitioner of traditional Irish crafts and he also absorbed the Irish style.
- 1980 : Rocha moved to Ireland to live there and set up in the clothing business. Rocha and Doolan based in Kilkenny traded under the name "Drabola and Kilroch".
- 1984 : The business failed as did Rocha's marriage to Doolan.
- 1984 : Rocha re-established himself in the clothing trade again, with Irish business woman Odette Gleeson who owned a shop in the prestigious Powerscourt shopping centre. The shop was called "Chinatown" and sold Rocha's clothes as well as Italian designer clothing.
- 1987 : Rocha as well as Irish designer Paul Costelloe, won the "Fil D'Or" award for their use of linen fabric in high fashion, this award was presented to both designers in Monaco.
- 1988 : The "Chinatown" label and business collapsed, Rocha and Gleeson, decided to live and work in Italy.

ROCHA BIOGRAPHY (CONTD..)

- 1988 : While living in Milan, Rocha designed for and was marketed by the "Reflections" group, under Franco Broccalan who also managed Kenzo and Jean-Paul Gaultier. At this time Brown Thomas, the upmarket retail store approached Rocha and asked him to design a range of clothing which they would manufacture and sell through their fashion chain A-Wear. This move by Brown Thomas was initiated by Deirdre Kelly, the clothing range was called "Chinatown".
- 1988/90: Rocha continued to live in Milan designing for Reflections, he also designed the diffusion range for A-Wear, as well as a designer range for Brown Thomas.
- 1990 : Due to the success of this new alliance between Rocha and Brown Thomas Rocha returned to Ireland with his family.
- 1991 : Rocha launched his men's label, "Chinaman", this brand of clothing was sold in A-Wear, also in the men's department.
- 1992 : The "Dochas" collection was launched, this collection was for Autumn/Winter 1992/93.
- 1993 : Rocha was named "British Designer of The Year", for his "Saoirse" collection which was his Spring/Summer 1994 collection.
- 1994 : In October Rocha became the first Irish designer to show a collection in Paris along for the Paris fashion week. The collection was his Spring and Summer garments for 1995.
- 1995 : Rocha establishes International Headquarters in Temple Bar, Dublin in partnership with Frank and John Gleeson.

INTRODUCTION

John Rocha is an Irish fashion designer who has been catapulted to fame in the last two years, in 1993 he was named "British Designer of the Year". Rocha was born in Hong Kong, lived there for seventeen years, subsequently moved to England, trained in fashion design in Croydon College of Art, and then moved to Ireland. It is in Ireland that he has chosen to live, work and base his business. This thesis is concerned with what influence Hong Kong, (the East), and Ireland (the West) have had on his work and how this compendium of cultures is evident in Rocha.

There is a fusion and tension of cultures in Rocha's work, between the East and West. In the context of this thesis the East is a broad term for the Orient and Asia while the West represents Europe and America. Craik's book The Face of Fashion- Cultural Studies in Fashion, was a source of inspiration in approaching this study of fashion and the fundamental differences which exist between cultures. Jacques' article Western culture defies the rising Eastern sun in the Sunday Times, made me realise that this East/West tension does not only exist in the field of design, but is a completely new phenomenon. According to Jacques the Eastern hemisphere of the world is threatening a Western created, Western dominated world. This causes a redress in wealth, supremacy and culture. The cultural aspect fascinated me as economically the East has proven to be more efficient than the West. Would the East prove supreme in culture and art also? What seems to be the case today is that culturally there is not a definitive culture. Instead there is reflected through the work of Rocha, a global vision, and aesthetic which incorporates both cultures, the East and the West.

Rocha has never been discussed and analysed in this cultural light before and this thesis is an attempt to place Rocha in this new global vision and dual cultural light. It will aim to show that the subtlety in his work is elements of inherent and borrowed design which lend themselves to two diverse cultures. This duality in Rocha is used as a lead in to the various newspaper and magazine articles written about him but it is never accounted for in his designs. It has been overlooked by fashion journalists such as Deirdre McQuillan, and Rocha's previous manager Deirdre Kelly. This cultural fusion sets Rocha apart from Irish contemporary designers and gives him an edge in fashion design. Rocha will be related to other contemporary Eastern designers who appear to fit this new category of design such as, Miyake, Kawakubo, Kenzo and Yamamoto. Rocha is primarily an Eastern designer as he was born into the Eastern culture. The Eastern influence is evident in the form and structure which Rocha uses. Chapter two aligns Rocha with his Eastern origins, identity and style. This Eastern element is sometimes only obvious in small tailoring details.

The Western influence is accountable to the influence which Ireland and it's heritage has had on Rocha. Chapter three analyses Rocha's designs and relates them to historical references of Irish clothing. The impact of this on Irish culture and in the fashion world will be discussed, as will it's popularity. Due to the success which Rocha has achieved with this distinct look the question as to whether this look will be his legacy or not will be argued in chapter three. An interview with Kelly and McQuillan were imperative in answering these queries and in analysing Rocha in an Irish context.

Chapter four Looks at Rocha in terms of recent events such as the Paris show. The Irish designer Sybil Connolly will be related to Rocha, contemporary Irish designers are so distanced from this cultural fusion that it is impossible to draw any similarities from their work. This distance in fact substantiates the cultural position of Rocha, and what culture if any he belongs to today. Rocha has no records of any of his work, he doesn't believe in holding onto the past, "if it's gone it's gone", (Rocha, Interview, 20/05/94). As a result I have researched newspapers, magazines and files in an attempt to find as many visual aids as I possibly could. The focus in this thesis is based on Rocha's designs from 1984 to the present day 1995. This will allow for comparisons and contrasts to be noted with traditional Eastern and traditional Western clothing.

This theory of hybrid designing evolved from an indepth study and analysis of Rocha's work. Initially I focussed on the Irish influence in his clothing and found the the concept of an individual representing an alien culture bizarre. This prompted me to look at what is inherent to Eastern design, many of these traits were evident in Rocha's work dominating certain seasons, while other seasons leaned towards the Irish influence. This openness to alien cultures appears to be shared by other Eastern designers. Kenzo in particular seemed to knit elements from the Eastern and Western culture together and similar to Kawakubo and Miyake this whole form of design threatened the firm grasp which Western designers possessed in fashion design. After reading Jacques' article I realised that the stronghold which the East had in fashion design was not just an isolated phenomenon but part of a whole global and social movement.

This new phenomenon is happening right now in the field of business, economics and design. The world has never witnessed a movement like this before. The consequences could change the way we perceive the world and it's future.

Rocha is a designer who is part of this whole flux and this is how the thinking for this thesis evolved. Rocha is just one perpetrator of this new movement, the influence which he has had in Ireland and England alone is profound. This new movement and the infiltration of Eastern designers is a vast movement but this study aims to focus on Rocha and analyse his contribution through design to this new world, this global culture which embodies East and West.

EAST MEETS WEST, THE DEBATE

CHAPTER ONE

John Rocha's design work is the embodiment of the tension and duality of two cultures that is, both the East and the West. These cultures are very different and diverse in lifestyles, cultures and attitudes. Both cultures have a history which has involved domination, war and colonisation, the dominating culture usually being the West.

When both of these forces are brought together, when East meets West on a co-operative basis then something new occurs. The term for the amalgamation of both cultures has been described as "Global" (Jacques 1994 p.10) Rocha has been hailed as a "global" designer by Deirdre Kelly of A-Wear, manager of the Irish fashion group. He has been called "modern" and "international", with an "Irish" sense of style, this duality and paradox is instrumental in the success and appeal of his clothing. Rocha balances elements from both cultures and forms an equilibrium which can incline either toward his origins or else towards his adopted home in the West.

Western dominance no longer determines world history and progress as it has done in the past. The Eastern sphere of the world has become a powerful and threatening force to the West and the new century will be dictated by the most powerful of the two. The phrase, "West is best", described by Martin Jacques in his article entitled Western culture defies the rising Eastern sun, is one for considerable debate. (Jacques, 13/11/94 p.10) This phrase is no longer applicable in the light of what has happened in the last twenty years where the East has successfully penetrated the global market.

There is no supreme culture today, instead there are trends towards either the Eastern or Western culture. This economic transformation demands a new world. We can no longer associate modernisation with Westernisation as was the case in the past, examples being the Renaissance and the Reformation,

It is simply no longer possible to imagine that the the history of the West is the history of the World.

(Ash, 1992,p.6)

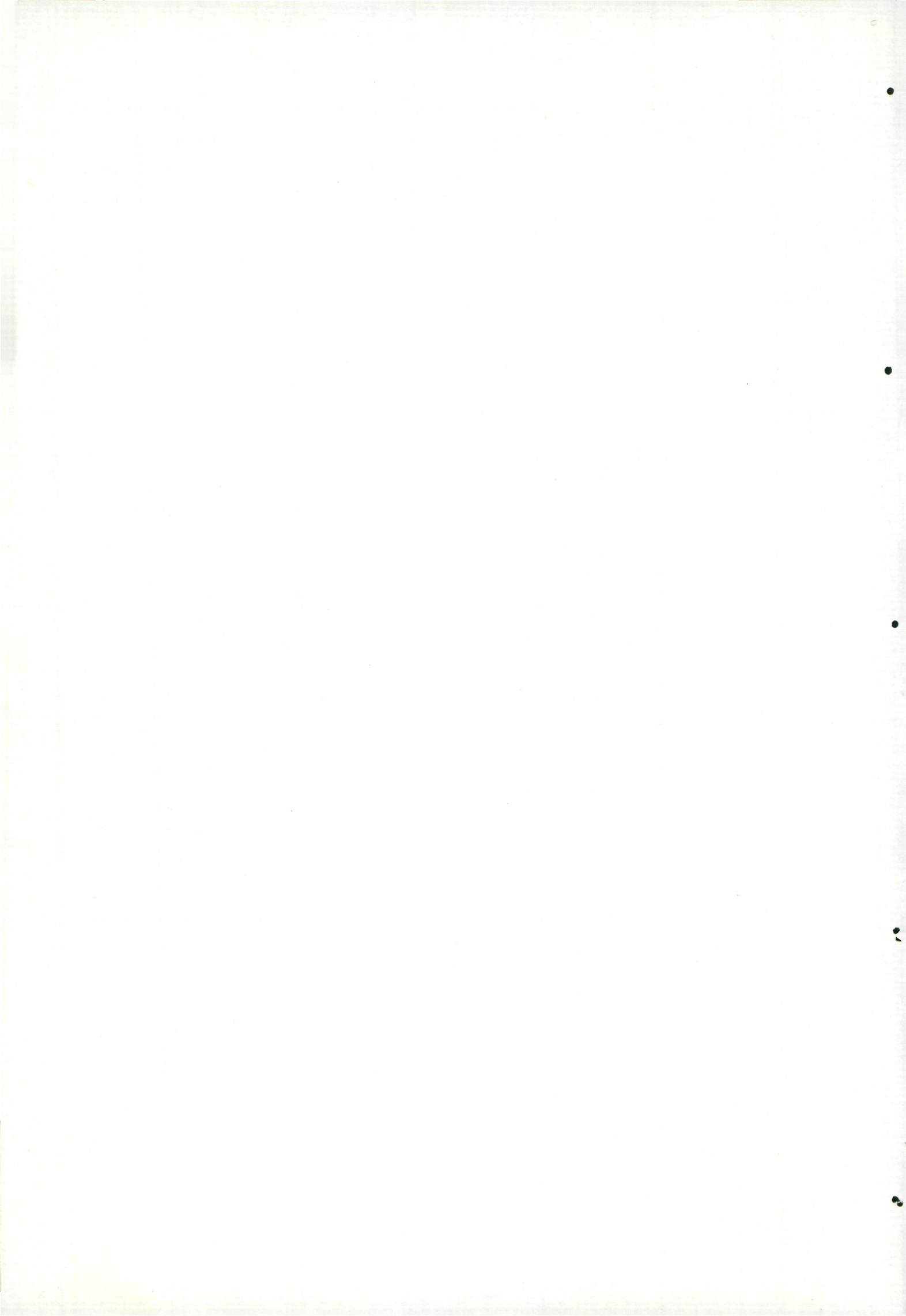
History has witnessed mistakes and has come to recognize bad decisions. Japan and the East learnt from these mistakes when rebuilding the framework of their countries after Western domination.

The East has created a modern successful environment where the country is driven economically rather than politically. The East has absorbed Western ideas and culture as well as mistakes, while still retaining a strong sense of their own heritage,

In the end, Japan's special talent in design is to borrow first from elsewhere, but then, on the basis of shared cultural traditions, to turn what is borrowed into a new, unique and distinctly Japanese phenomenon. It is this which in the end, makes Japanese design so rich culturally and so exciting visually.

(Sparke,1987,p.139)

Colonisation has to assume responsibility for this duality of cultures. Since 1498 when the Portuguese explorer Vasco de Gama arrived in India, Europeans actively entered the life of Asia. The West imposed their culture on the Asian world. Little or no respect was shown for an indigenous culture. Once the West abandoned the hold it had on the East these countries were able to establish and develop themselves.



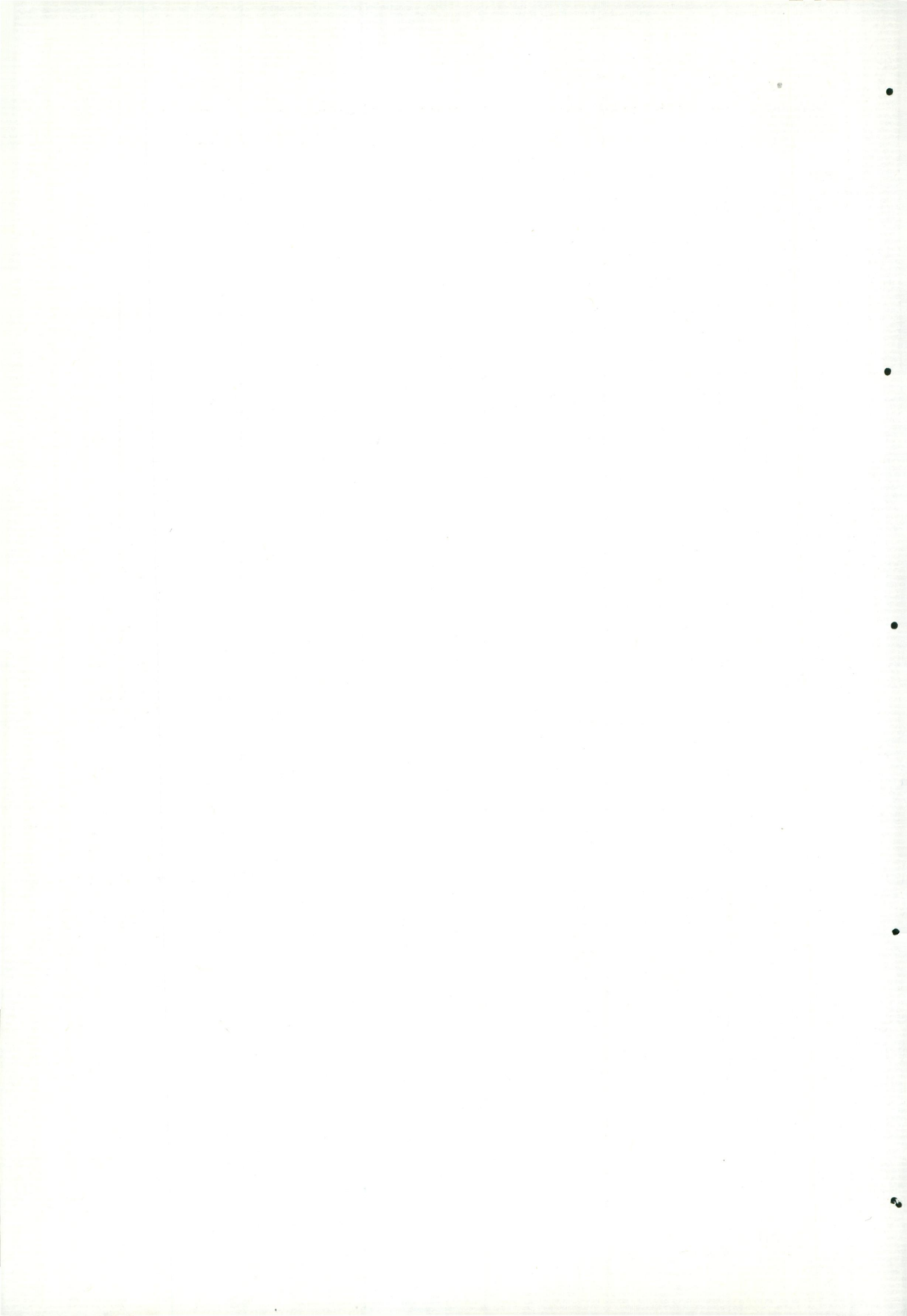
Subsequently the East formed a modern economy and lifestyle which was predominantly of their own culture with traces of the Western culture. Colonisation not only embodied world supremacy and economic wealth, it also involved a clash of dress between both cultures. Fashion designers of the West have long been associated with plundering other cultures for new fresh ideas and themes for their ever transient occupations ;

Like birds of prey, they (designers) rob the nests of other fashion systems in a process of appropriation and cannibalisation. These stylistic motifs are then reconstituted in a process of bricolage, the creation of new patterns and modes from the kaleidoscopic bits and pieces of cultural debris.

(Craik, 1994, p.ix and x)

"Appropriation" and "cannibalisation" are aggressive descriptions but these were the ploys of the colonisation game in the bid for supremacy. Cultures struggled and clashed, dress symbolized the struggle between the colonisers and the colonised. The Western nations coerced the natives to emulate their clothes, language, customs and manners while discarding what was inherent to their own distinctive cultures. Identities as a result often became mixed and confused. Bearing testament to this in Korea women developed a form of dress by combining both elements of Eastern and Western dress as a means of infiltrating the traditional patriarchal system.

Today cannibalisation is replaced by combination. Eastern designers such as Rocha, Miyake and Kawakubo, have absorbed the Western culture and evolved a unique blend of what they have learned and what is inherent to their origins.



Eastern designers have combined cultures and it is because of the East's

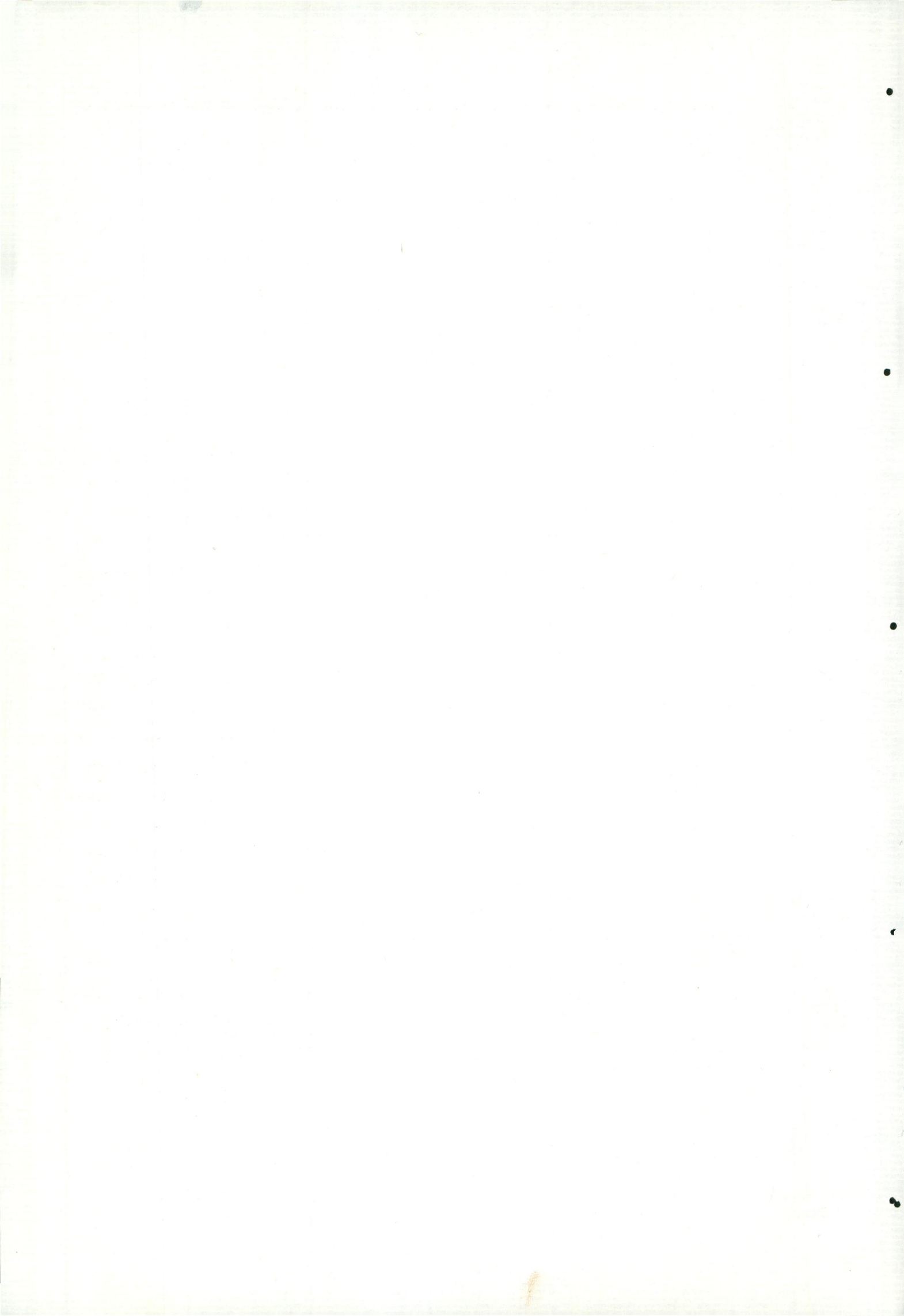
....openness to foreign influences but at the same time it's determination to bring to these influences something of it's cultural past,

(Sparke, 1987 p.45)

that shows us that these Eastern designers enjoy more mobility in the fashion domain than Western designers, Eastern designers can combine East and West and market this combination, this "global" look successfully.

The Western aesthetic has never been questioned or threatened as the Eastern one has. The West has never experienced colonisation by an alien culture. Consequently Eastern designers can cross the cultural boundaries quite easily and achieve a very distilled ethnic look. This is shown in an analysis of three forms of clothing, fig. 1 displays strong ethnic influences, fig. 2 shows the elements of East and West cohabitating in the various garments while fig. 3 essentially has no identity which can be labelled. Western designers can only imitate or else keep to the traditional Western framework of dress, the combination of both cultures seems to be an impossible task for the Western designers and this restricts their mobility.

An example of this immobility occurred when Zandra Rhodes the British fashion designer was invited by the Indian Government in 1982 to design a collection incorporating Indian style and fabrics as her theme. When her Sari's were shown ; it constituted, people felt, "not a design but an assault". (Khan, 1992, p.4) Rhodes could imitate the Sari but she could not mix the sense of design which was inherent to her with a completely different culture and aesthetic.



Rhodes similar to native Western designers could not reach an equilibrium in design between both of these polar cultures. While her designs may have appealed to the Western market they did not have the global appeal which Rocha and other Eastern designer's clothing have.

This equilibrium of cultures is briefly discussed in Naseem Khan's essay in Chic Thrills, an equilibrium she terms as the, "point of fusion culture" (Khan, 1992 p.71) she also asks what is this point? It is she believes not a compromise but a completely new statement in fashion. Subsequently this raises the question as to whether Rocha from Khan's perspective has evolved a completely new style? In attempting to answer this an analysis of Rocha's design is imperative.

Rocha's garments illustrated in fig. 2 illustrate the combination of cultures, these create a new and different style of clothing, his dress belted above the waist is similar in form and shape to the picture of the Japanese women wearing their kimonos around the fire as in fig. 4. The high waist is also similar to the high waisted Japanese Kimono in fig. 5. The Paris show of Spring/Summer 1995 abounded with asymmetrical tailoring in the dresses as presented in fig. 6. Asymmetrical tailoring and forms are devices inherent to Rocha's origins. Eastern origins are responsible for the dramatic angular forms of his clothing and the unusual silhouette which they create shown in fig.7 and 8. These examples give quite a boxy shape to the figure and create a geometric structure as well as incorporating layering of fabric and textures.

Subsequently the question arises, is this design a form of combining both cultures entirely new? If the analysis looks at it from Khan's perspective the answer is yes.

Rocha is combining both cultures as is evident from the illustrations where the Eastern sense, as in fig. 6 of structure is teamed with Western influenced fabrics, some going so far as to have Celtic symbols painted on the asymmetrical dresses. Rocha is certainly pioneering something very different but not entirely innovative. But then as Deirdre Kelly, manager of A-Wear stated,

nobody invents anything entirely new, the only designer who is completely innovative is Issey Miyake

(Kelly, Interview, 17/11/94)

..the innovation she believes is wholeheartedly due to the fact that he has multi-million dollar backing, and fabrics at his disposal.

Eastern designers offered the world a new option, their inherent dress was very different to that of the West. It was more sculptural and not tailored to suit the body as is apparent in fig. 5 where the kimono overshadows the wearer. It is through wrapping and folding techniques that the kimono is worn. The construction is simple yet the garment is elaborate in the way it folds and ties. The traditional Eastern dress did not highlight the contours and form of the body but questioned body-space relations and the function of clothing. These unfamiliar silhouettes actually became a theme in the Japanese designer Kawakubo's design, and reiterates the fact that...

the Japanese influence has partially re-drawn the boundaries of fashion away from "Western" ideals of the body, body-space relations and conventions of clothing.

(Craik, 1994, p.41)

Dress in each culture is viewed in an entirely different way. In the Western world the silhouette of the person has always dictated the form and shape of dress, Western dress accommodated the individual. The Western aesthetic is epitomised by The Renaissance and distant "Golden Era's", when art and culture reached perfection. The Western image of perfection is firmly rooted in history, this could explain why for new designs in fashion the West either looks to previous fashion movements, uses non-western cultures as a source of inspiration or else raids the past.

Anne Hollander explains that non-Western culture's dress alters basic shapes very slowly. She also points out that the individual does not animate in traditional clothing such as the Kimono or Sari. The individual's movement is restricted, because the garment is not cut to the bodyshape it shows no sympathy towards it. What often occurs is that the embellishment on the kimono becomes the centre of attention. (Hollander, 1978 p.xiv). This highlights the clothing itself and not the wearer, the costume becomes an example of craftsmanship and abstract design. The ingenuity in the Kimono in fig. 5 lies in the structure and form of the garment.

The differences in dress are due to each cultures heritage and aesthetic, as Yohji Yamamoto endeavoured to define;

The biggest difference between our Japanese taste and European peoples' taste is in the concept of perfection. When I travelled in Greece and Italy and saw the classical architecture, I saw things that were made in a static image of perfection - I'm not interested in that kind of perfection - I'm tired of it.

(Koren, 1984 p.95)

The different aesthetic was not only evident in the realm of fashion, but also in industrial design. Design in post-war Japan moved at the same pace as advanced technology. As products became more compact modern design altered to reflect this new society which utilised these products as is evident from the design classic the "Walkman". Eastern design accounted for the taste and aesthetic of the West and showed an understanding of the Western culture in their design,

What may seem like the influence of Western culture on Japan from the 1930's onwards is really just another means of Japan's realigning itself with it's own traditional culture in an international context.

(Sparke, 1987, p.9)

Due to this merging and understanding of cultures Eastern products especially the Japanese have become synonymous with quality, technology and sleek modern design.

As we move into the next century both cultures will be reconciled into a new aesthetic; a global aesthetic. East meets West. Similar to other Eastern designers such as Kawakubo, Rocha designs in a broad rather than focused manner. Both Eastern designers believe that the form and shape must take precedence to colour and pattern, this explains the limited use of colour which Rocha and Kawakubo employ in their designs. Rocha balances the softness with the severe. The garments in his "Saoirse" (Freedom), collection featured long fluid dresses and shirts which were balanced by the severe tailoring used in his jackets and trousers as shown in fig 9.

Through these examples of his design Rocha is betraying a sense of national identity of the East, but also an appreciation of the body and the wearer which is a Western notion.

Rocha believes that his clothes should always be secondary to the wearer, unlike traditional Eastern clothing where the clothes overshadow the individual. (Rocha, Interview 20/05/94) This is another paradox which forms the style of Eastern designers.

The future culture may be embodied in Rocha's belief and practice of design. A combination and understanding of both cultures appeals to the global market. Rocha has mobility in both the Eastern and Western domain of the world. In a television documentary screened by RTE, Rocha it said, embodied "an interesting mix between the East and the West", in fashion and design. (RTE 09/11/94) This mix is a kind of duality which Rocha in accordance with fashion forecasts, trends and movements manipulates in order to make his garments appealing. Collections such as "Saoirse" (Freedom) and "Dochas" (Hope), displayed an Irish theme while his collection for Autumn and Winter 1994 leaned more towards his origins of Eastern design, as is seen in fig. 2a and 2b.

Rocha practises his globalness in his aesthetic and design. The duality of cultures are a factor in Rocha's work which are never discussed by fashion critics and journalists, yet have created the edge which Rocha has in the world of fashion design and as such have created a hybrid designer.

When I originally asked fashion journalist Deirdre McQuillan, and Deirdre Kelly manager of the A-Wear chain, if they felt that there are elements in Rocha's garments which are attributed to Eastern design, they immediately disagreed. But after producing the illustrations contained in this thesis they both agreed that the evidence of Eastern elements in Rocha's clothes was and is undeniable.

The equilibrium in Rocha's work can pendulate towards either culture. This is answerable to the trends and forecasts in fashion design. Forecasts determine whether the time is right for these cross-cultural designers such as Rocha, Kawakubo and Kenzo to use their mobility in the fashion world and move towards their native Eastern culture as in fig.1a, fig. 10 or Western style such as fig. 3. With all of these designers one aspect is apparent. Even if trends dictate that the style is predominantly Western, small elements of their design such as tailoring details on sleeves and cuffs, fastenings the cut of the garment or even their use of fabric always betray their Eastern cultural identity. (fig. 11)

Rocha's style of design is more akin to Eastern form and design than that of the West, he incorporates the Western elements of design in his use of fabric and technique of fabric construction. Western forms of tailoring are employed but never to the same extent as the tailoring of the East. The merging of Eastern form and Irish influenced fabrics form this design equilibrium in Rocha. The equilibrium is the balance between both East and West. This balance is similar to a weighing scales, certain seasons the scales tip more towards the tailoring of the East and the Eastern aesthetic of asymmetry, imperfection and spontaneity.

Other seasons the scales moves towards the Western culture and particularly that of Ireland. What Rocha himself calls in his design a "good balance", can be attributed to the balance of East and West. (Rocha, Interview 20/05/94).

Other contemporary Eastern designers such as Kenzo, Kawakubo, Miyake and Yamamoto are all designers who practise this balance and who grew up in the midst of the phrase "West is best" dominating the world and their own respective cultures.

All of these Eastern designers attribute this mix of cultures to finding an individual style through which they practice fashion design. The dichotomy of cultures cause many paradoxes for Eastern fashion designers. They remain true in ways to their native design and yet design for other cultures. They design garments with a strong sense of individuality but yet produce garments that coincide with fashion forecasts. Their clothes question fashion yet sell to all nationalities. These paradoxes exist but they do not detract from Eastern designers work, as Kawakubo the Japanese designer attempted to explain,

What I do is concerned with the long term,
and yet fashion is cyclical. It is a
paradox, but it doesn't bother me.

(Sudjic, 1990 p.86)

Kawakubo, Rocha and contemporary Japanese designers have come to represent an "eclectic combination of global cultures" (Craik, 1994 p.41).

Not only did the Oriental designers move through this cultural compendium so did the Turkish born designer Rifat Ozbek. Ozbek similiar to Rocha left his native country and settled in Europe where he lives and works today. When he was questioned about his roots he explained :

My origins ? Of course they are important.
I am Turkish. I grew up in that culture.
I spent seventeen years living there. But I
have spent eighteen years living here
(Europe). I think I combine the two. I do
have an impulse to the East, but I don't
think it's any country in particular.

(Brompton, 1989, p.139)

The debate of cross-cultural psychology is still in it's infancy. The pivotal point is that there are universal elements common to people of all cultures ; but cultures are responsible for allowing individuals to perceive the world in a different way, by solving problems and expressing emotions.

Clearly beauty is in the eye of the beholder
- and the beholder is affected by the
standards of his or her culture.

(Shaffer, 1985, p.233)

What this is saying when applied to Rocha is that, beauty which we could interpret as aesthetic is relative to one's culture. This has been proven quite clearly where Yamamoto defined the Eastern aesthetic. Eastern and Western designers have a different style, vision and aesthetic. Rocha similar to Kenzo and Kawakubo understands and respects both cultures and their style becomes a dichotomy of cultures. It appears that Western designers cannot enjoy this mobility as was exhibited by Rhodes.

This intermingling of both cultures represents one aspect of the future for fashion design in the next century. Colonisation and Western supremacy are figments of the past. Modernisation is no longer a Western movement modernisation is a global movement and designers such as Rocha appear to be at the forefront of this interpretation. This interpretation and it's manifestation in Rocha's designs and his expression of a "global" style is analysed in the following chapter. Chapter two will look at and examine the style of Rocha and explore the Eastern element of this hybrid designer and place his work in context with Eastern designers and design traits.

ROCHA AND THE EAST

CHAPTER TWO

This chapter will attempt to reconcile Rocha with his contemporary Eastern designers, their history, traditions and style of clothing. It will focus on Rocha's style and its intrinsic Eastern qualities, as well as his use of the "modern form". In order to substantiate these points other Eastern designers such as Kawakubo, Kenzo, and Miyake will also be discussed. To understand the infiltration of Eastern design into the global market the acceptance and celebration of non-Western cultures as a social movement will be related to Rocha and his contemporary Eastern designers.

We are all influenced by our environment, its social opinions, lifestyle and tradition. Rocha was born into the Eastern culture and raised there, this is essential in understanding his design, personality and style. The psychologist B.F. Skinner believed that,

not only are we products of our experiences,
we have little say in determining the
character of these experiences.

(Shaffer, 1985, p.59)

The environment into which we are born predetermines aspects of individual personalities. The environment in which the individual lives in is constantly influencing the individual and their perceptions. When this theory is applied to Rocha it explains the dichotomy of style which exists in his designs. His designs are constantly changing in accordance with both environments which have shaped him, that is both his home in Hong Kong and his adopted home in Ireland. Rocha's style is a consequence of two very different cultures.

In analysing Rocha's work from 1984 when he first gained a foothold in Irish fashion design until the present day 1994/1995 his designs show recurring elements. These appear in his use of fabric, silhouette and form, tailoring techniques and colour which I will attribute to his style. His use of form and structure varies but there is always quite a strong angular feel to his tailoring and a strong sense of structure. His tailoring shows razor sharp precision in it's execution, whether it is to create flowing forms as in fig. 6 or very geometric shapes as seen in fig. 7 and 8. Layering and fabrics are integral in his collections, while his use of colour is subdued and quite earthy.

His collections often cause attention to be drawn to the fabric rather than the form into which they are made. His most recent collections bear testament to this element. His knitted garments are made from unusual geometric structures and create a very modern look which was not pioneered by contemporary Irish designers and can be attributed more to the form that Eastern designers use. The illustration of Kawakubo's jumper with it's random holes (fig. 12) causes a focus on the fabric, similarly Rocha's knitted sweater draws attention to the fabric in fig. 13. Fabric is to Rocha the starting point of all his collections,

Before every collection, spend two weeks at fabric fairs, Florence, Milan, Paris. Is like building a house. Get material right and house will last.

(Harris, 24/10/93 p.12L)

Distinct silhouettes are created by Rocha's tailoring and dress. The body can be elongated or become an angular construction as shown in figs. 7,8 and 14.

Rocha's style encompasses both Eastern and Western cultures in which he has lived. The form and tailoring he uses are accountable to his roots while his use of fabrics and occasionally the shape of garments are more influenced by Ireland and the West. It is imperative to use and analyse illustrations of traditional Eastern dress and illustrations of Irish dress in order to bear testament to this point. Chapter three will provide the comparisons with traditional Irish dress. The Eastern form of design is evident in the sometimes unusual equilibrium and the imperfection or asymmetrical forms which in Eastern aesthetic create a harmonious balance. Rocha has in his 1994 collection used high waisted skirts shown in fig. 2 a and b, similar to the high waist which is a part of the structure of the kimono. Continuing in the same vein as the kimono and Eastern coats another element of Rocha's designs are the large cuffs which he has used in shirts and jackets throughout his career, as seen in fig 2a and 9.

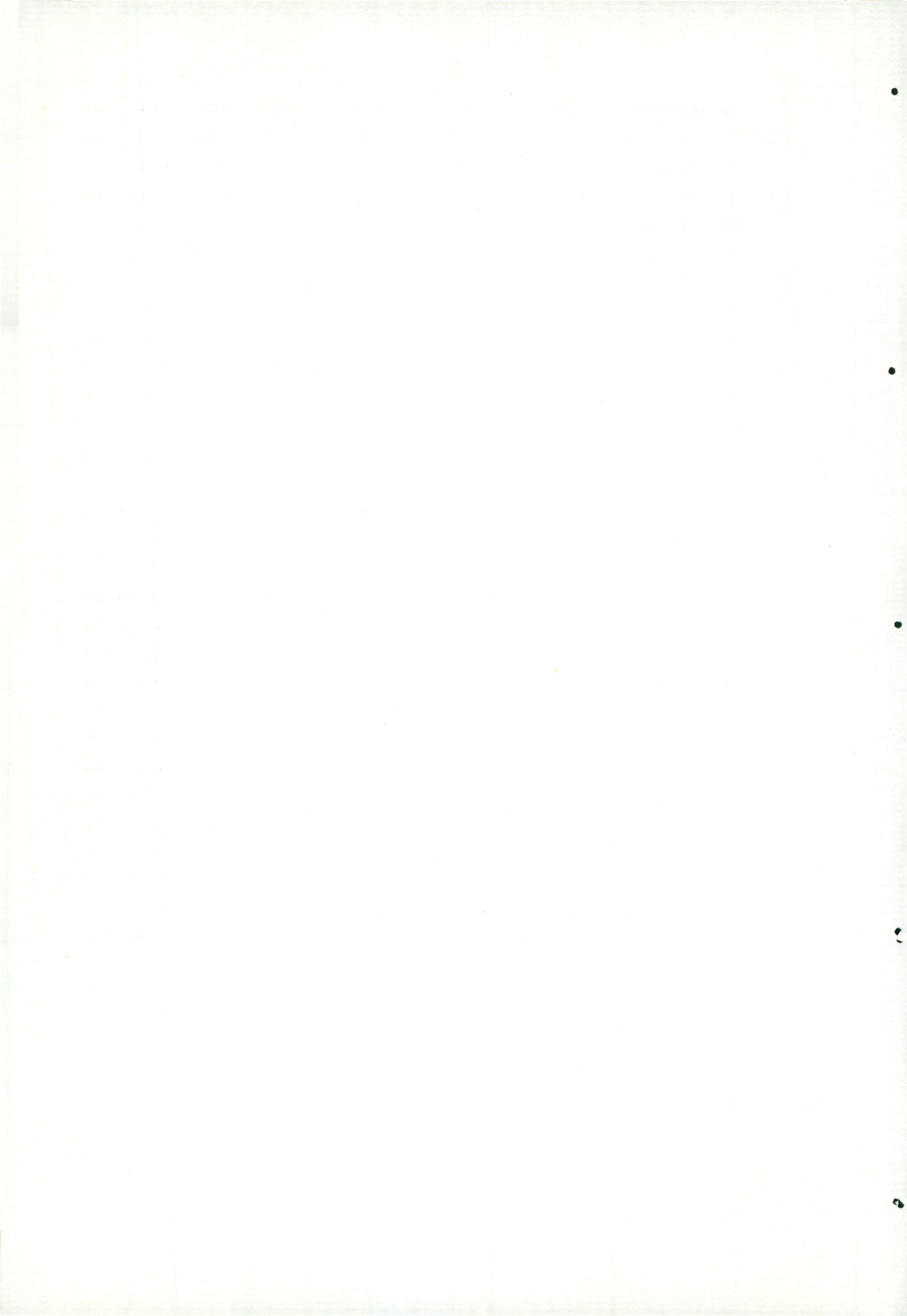
The wrapping technique used in such forms as the sari which is part of traditional Eastern dress is a recurring garment in Rocha's collections. The Eastern use of ties to close and open is also employed as a fastening technique in fig. 11 a,b and c . His trousers which are predominantly wide legged and quite baggy are like the Eastern work attire which is quite androgynous. This androgynous look is another element of Rocha's style, and is evident in fig.24

His (Rocha's) style has been characterised by distortions of the traditional shapes of menswear adopted in new and interesting ways for women.

(McQuillan, 16/03/86)

Layering has also been an element of Rocha's style and has been used in every collection. Fig 14a in 1985 and fig. 2a, c and d in 1994 nearly ten years on show that the layering of garments is a strong element of his work. The layering allows for interesting play with textures and fabrics. It also allows for the use of form and structure in tailoring to be used together in a contrasting manner. These elements are evident to a certain extent in his men's collections also, as shown in fig. 15a and b and fig.16. The layered look allows for contrasting textures and colours to be juxtaposed and this look can either create a harmonious or disjointed look. In earlier collections layering gave the garments a very Eastern feel to them much like the traditional Eastern garments such as the kimono and the Eastern trouser suits, see fig. 17a. The layering today is disjointed with contrasting fabrics such as wool, chiffon, silk, hessian and mohair all combining to give an unbalanced look to the ensemble. These provide an interesting play on textures and qualities, as seen in fig. 2c and d. Kawakubo also uses layering and when combined with textures this creates form and interest in the structure and composition of the garment as well as balancing softness with severity, as is evident in fig 18.

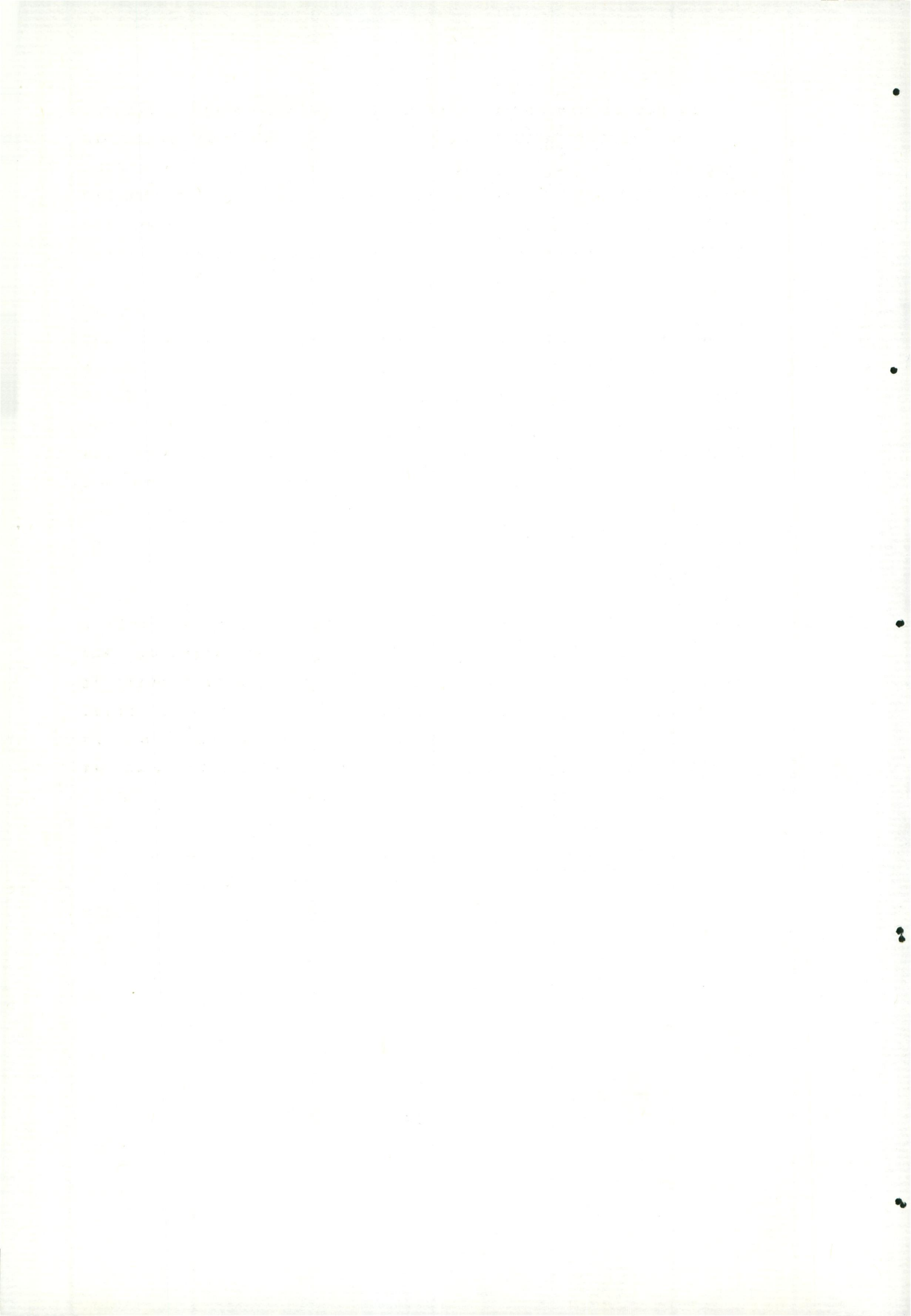
Small elements of Rocha's clothing such as buttoning and fastenings are quite unorthodox. In his early collection in 1985 the shirt with stripes has a very unusual buttoning at the top, the style of the garment is very similar to that of Kenzo's, as in fig. 19. His jacket in fig. 7 again testifies to this point, the double breasted buttoning is continued up to the neckline, the pockets are large "patch" pocket style and discard with the idea of finesse while proving more akin to imperfection. This garment has an angular feel to it which is quite masculine much like the coat in fig. 15a.



An example of his unusual use of fastenings today is evident in his "Saoirse" collection where his bias-cut skirt is wrapped around the body and tied in a fastening at the top. There is no use of buttons or zips and as a result the tie becomes a feature of the garment see fig. 11a and b. The buttoning on the crocheted jacket in fig 20a shows an affinity with Eastern styled buttoning see fig.20c.

Colour manifests itself in this balance, fashion journalist Terry Keane accounts for the Irish influence in his choice of colour, moss, grey, green cream and pale blue, but these lifeless colours are also dominant in the work uniforms of the Orient, as the limited colour palette of the Japanese was seen as a cleansing process (Keane, 03/10/93) . What is not evident in the Eastern wardrobe is the crochet, Irish lace, linen, sheepskin and leather.

The bright and fiery colours of traditional costume from China and Japan have never really formed a part of Rocha's palette. He is renowned for earthy colors. Fashion journalist Deirdre McQuillan considers colour to be one of his weaker points as a designer. (McQuillan, Interview 19/10/94) The bright vibrant colours of his Paris fashion show showing his 1995 Spring /Summer collection were not received as well as previous collections and did not represent the "real" Rocha. Instead fashion journalist Kathryn Rogers saw it as, "colourful grunge".(Rogers, 23/10/94). Even in these "grunge" garments the hallmark of Eastern designing, an immaculate finish was evident up close, this is the "polish", which is evident in the work by all Eastern designers.(Delaney 06/11/94)



A very strong similarity can be seen in fig. 1b and c between the traditional garments worn by the Oriental man and woman and the outfit designed by Rocha. Simple style tunic tops were worn by the Chinese, these garments had large patch pockets which again Rocha uses in quite a similar manner. The buttoning on the tunics and jackets are traditionally quite high, usually to the neckline and feature a small crossover detail in the collar. Both garments create a similar silhouette and are strongly linked in shape and form. It is the fabric which is different and that is where the Western influence evolves, in Rocha's use of traditional Irish fabrics, the trousers are made from tweed and the top is knitted. Kenzo's trousers suit in fig. 1a reiterates this Eastern sense of design. Tailored structures such as trousers again resemble one another the gathered trouser leg in fig. 21 echoes the tailoring of the trousers worn by the woman pedlar in Japan.

Rocha's jackets are cut with precision giving the body a strong silhouette. Buttoning details are unconventional and placed quite high-up on the jackets or else the buttoning is sparse and allows the jacket to drape from the shoulders. Jackets have also been cut in a full A-line fashion as well as the more tailored and angular masculine look, which can appear quite geometric. As,

in Eastern countries visual sensibility had been accustomed for centuries to the idea of human looks reduced and abstracted into patterns, as of they were vases and jars.

(Hollander, 1978 p.336)

This quote bears testament to the Eastern vision and attitude towards the body, contours were never considered in traditional clothing. Yet there is a strong flow evident in Rocha's work, the bias and asymmetric tailoring often give this draping quality. Bias-cut dresses such as those in his 'Dochas' collection are A-line in style and quite free flowing and are not restricted to body shape.

Fashion techniques such as bodywrapping, complex folds, bias and assymetrical tailoring are devices used in clothing which have very strong associations with the Eastern hemisphere (Steele, 1989 p.13) These techniques are evident in Rocha's work as well as an unusual use of textures and fabrics. This is evident in fig. 22 where the rough crocheted cloak in natural hessian yarn is contrasted with the long silk dress underneath. The same use of textures can be seen in the Autumn look for 1994; the mohair wool cardigans are contrasted with the silk garment underneath while the handpainting on the silk furthers this contrast in textures by depicting a rough tree bark see fig. 2c and d.

By combining elements of traditional Eastern clothing and tailoring, and altering them for today's market designers have evolved a new statement in fashion design termed by fashion journalists and designers as the modern form. It is according to Rocha,

to do with new proportions, it is nothing definite, it is not long or short , it allows for a freedom in spirit.

(Rocha, Interview 04.01.95.)

If it is "nothing definite", then how come some designers have it and some don't? It is I believe a style and characteristic akin to the Eastern sense of designing.

Western designers do not use the "modern form" they raid the past or other cultures for new ideas and sources. The Eastern designers looked to their past, to the West and the future, they combined elements from all of these sources and evolved what is called the "modern form". Issey Miyake and Yohji Yamamoto are both acclaimed for using the modern form in design. Both acknowledged the conflicting cultures in their lifetime of the East and the West. They absorbed elements from the Western popular culture and then looked to their own cultural heritage. In attempting to reconcile all of these conflicting interests the modern form evolved. (Koren, 1984, pp.22,23) A new concept in fashion, "modern form", involves a different attitude towards the body, fabric, space and form. The modern form involves sculpture and distortion. This is evident in the high waisted garments from Rocha's Autumn/Winter 1994/95, in the knitted sweater with holes by Kawakubo. It is also evident in the sculptural creations by Miyake. Rocha in using traditional fabrics and techniques in unconventional ways by way of the cropped top is using these fabrics in a modern form. There are no restrictions in shape form or length.

It is evident that a very distinct style is emerging from the Eastern designers and what is even more important is that these garments are satisfying a huge void in the market. They offer an alternative to Western designed clothing. Rocha when referring to Spring/Summer collection 1994, expressed his desire to design contemporary clothing by combining both the traditional and the new age so that a modern form of clothing would evolve. (Rocha, Interview 20/05/94).

In Paris, Lagerfeld for his new collections will inevitably sell history in the form of the classic Chanel suit, slight modifications are made, perhaps dabbling with the skirt lengths or else accessories; but the essential, core form is never altered because the suit is safe and a sure seller.

The paths that the Eastern and Western designers are treading are very different. The Eastern designers have come up with something new partly because of the fusion of cultures in their respective lifetimes. The cultural mix is one of the factors that has given these designers the edge in the highly competitive world of fashion, as Rocha endeavoured to clarify..

There are so many cultures in my head at one time, all swirling around together. I am not even a fashion person really. I have to invent myself.

(Reid, 23/10/93)

Could the "invent" possibly be the key to understanding the edge that these fashion designers have; it is a very strong possibility, when you consider the example of Lagerfeld re-hashing the Chanel suits year after year. Eastern designers not only invented a new form of fashion design they also reinvented fabrics and pushed fashion into uncharted history. While designers such as Lagerfeld, Valentino, and Lacroix move further back in time and continue to use the same standard recipe a tried and tested method.

Essentially what we are witnessing is the advent of a modern era, something that is practically entirely new in the field of fashion, architecture, in industrial design and in economic and financial fields. The East is leading the way and ushering the entire world into the new Century.

The Japanese and Oriental designers have become a force in design and

seem to share the influence of three key elements of Japanese aesthetic philosophy - irregularity, imperfection and asymmetry.

(Steele, 1991, p.186)

All three elements I believe are evident in Rocha's designs, the irregularity can be seen in his combination of contrasting fabrics, in the proportions which he employs by giving the human form a very angular form and silhouette as in fig 2,7 and 8. The imperfection is manifested in his garments such as the suit in fig. 23 in his 1994 Autumn /Winter collection where the fabric is especially treated to look crumpled, it appears worn and has a deconstructionist feel to it. Asymmetry is evident in abundance in his most recent showing of garments in Paris in his Spring/Summer 1995 show in fig 6. These elements are all part of the Eastern aesthetic, imperfection yet harmony, clothes for the body yet no sympathy to the body shape.

It is a paradox, which reflects these Eastern designers attitude to fashion.

Kenzo is today a renowned fashion designer who lives in Paris, similiar to Rocha he was born in the Orient and was trained in fashion design in the Western part of the world. Immediately East and West are intermingled, but this argues Sparke is what Japanese design is all about, these constant dualisms. (Sparke, 1987, p.9). In fig 25 Kenzo's bridal attire shows similar to Rocha's design in fig.20b and figs. 24 and 1b, there is an affinity between these garments and the traditional tailoring, shape and silhouette of the tunic and trousers worn as work attire in the East.

Other elements in Rocha's designs are reflected in those of Kenzo their androgynous styled clothes for women in 1984 and 1985 use striped fabric traditionally associated with men's clothing. The look is angular and layered these are elements of Eastern clothing as shown in fig.19. Kenzo, Sparke feels is very much inspired by his roots, and this Eastern culture offered an alternative to the Haute Couture of Paris. Paris was the established fashion capital.

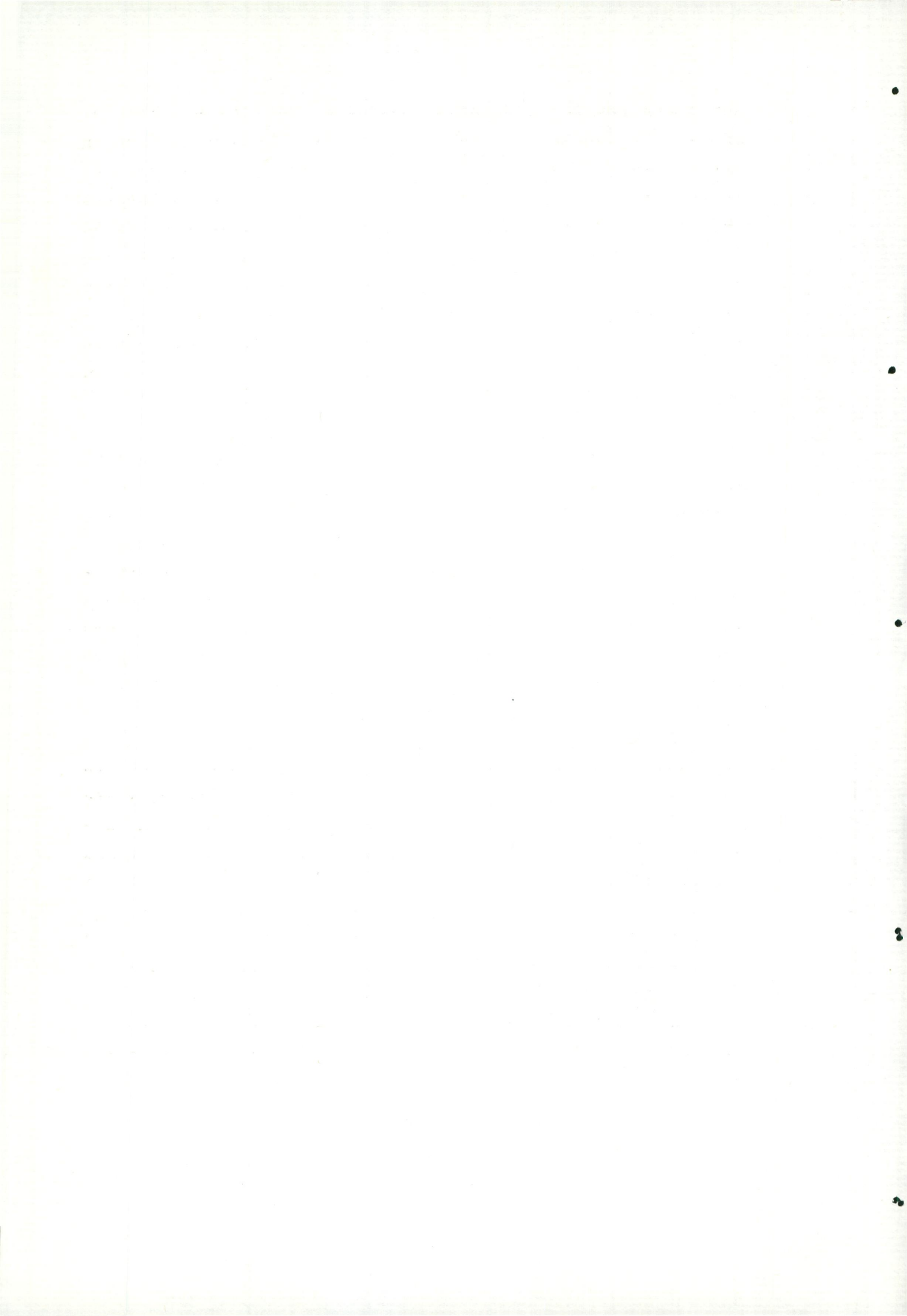
Kenzo and now Rocha have introduced one of the elements of Japanese design namely "imperfection" to the Western fashion establishment of Paris. Kenzo similar to Rocha was noted by Sparke as designing clothing which evolved from the shapes akin to the East such as the Kimono and work wear see fig. 19. (Sparke, 1987, p.112) They both championed a very geometric and angular look, which is evident in fig. 19. Kenzo also used natural fabrics and pioneered the use of these in the West. Sparke feels that the West and East became entangled in Kenzo's work, this became a movement in the 1980's. (Sparke, 1987, pp.117,8)

Both Rocha and Kenzo were born into Eastern cultures; they left the East at a young age but as their work has shown, both had absorbed their own culture, a sense of Eastern design and Western design also. Rocha like Kenzo trained in Europe and finally chose to live there. Both designers played their own part in questioning the West and the alleged supremacy which the West had in fashion design. Tokyo, Hong Kong and other Eastern capital names became strongly associated with the fashion world.

Today the East are leading the field in fabric design, Junichi Arai and the Nuno factory are producing the most up to date and futuristic fabrics in the world today. The availability of these fabrics to Eastern designers combined with "modern form", have evolved a new form of fashion, Jurgen Lehl a fashion designer summed it up :

Japanese materials have always been more sophisticated than any other country's. The Japanese have pushed the design of fabrics to a level of decadence which is quite unbelievable. They may look frightfully simple, they actually involve the greatest amount of work you can imagine.

(Koren, 1984, p.69).



The infiltration of Eastern designers began in the 1970's, Kenzo first opened his shop in Paris and called it "Jungle Jap". In the latter part of the seventies the Western industrialized nations were battling against recession, unemployment and despair. This was not the case in Japan where business was booming. Cars and electronic goods made in Japan were in huge demand. The Japanese formed an equilibrium between their own style and culture and that of the West. Japanese fashion design was pointing the way forward and proving to be a valid alternative to the traditional couturiers of Paris.

The West saw this alternative dress with a different type of appeal than that of Western clothing where clothes hinted, revealed and teased. This new dressing was full of grace and inner strength, it dictated a way to walk and a way to behave just as the Kimono had before it. Modern Eastern clothing questioned the function and aesthetic of fashion and clothing. This combination of East and West is schizophrenic. These designers from season to season vary their collections from distinctly Eastern and Western to a mix of both, they practice their mobility in accordance with forecasts.

Rocha has the ability to allow his Eastern personality to emerge in his structure and tailoring as in fig.6 and 2, where the modern form is evident in his silhouette and lengths. The other side of his personality allows for a sense of Irish identity to emerge, by using Irish fabrics and Irish historical imagery see fig.26. Eclecticism is a way of life for Eastern people. Their acceptance of Western culture and combination of their own culture allows for a unique aesthetic to evolve. The hybrid fashion which is a part of Rocha's style and that of his contemporaries allows for an absorption of cultures. This is global designing and global vision which is received today by all cultures.

Today and in the 1980's non-Western cultures were celebrated. The dominance and its negative effects which colonisation and Westernization had inflicted on other worlds and cultures was put under scrutiny pleading to a change in consciousness. Oxfam and the "Body Shop" encouraged and fostered trade links with non-Western cultures. The West began to attempt to unravel the harm which had been inflicted on these remote and previously thought of uncivilised places, a new attitude was formed,

The 80's witnessed a new attitude to ethnicity and multiculturalism and celebrated lots of non-Western cultural forms.

(Craik, 1994, p.38)

In fashion the Eastern designers offered a valid alternative to Paris and by using the modern form paved a new uncharted channel for fashion design. The "modern form" was a new dimension in fashion, it was sculptural, it embodied a different attitude towards the body, space, shape and form.

Rocha achieved this "modern form" in his design by using contemporary shapes and silhouettes and then incorporating traditional textiles. Other Eastern designers also echoed this approach. This modern form is part of Rocha's style, he wants to "mix the traditional with the new age", (McQuillan, 05/09/1993). His style also encompasses other elements from his Eastern heritage such as layering, a strong emphasis on fabrics, fastening details, asymmetric and bias tailoring.

Through combining the Eastern form and Western textiles in Rocha's clothing an equilibrium is formed. Miyake, Kawakubo and Kenzo are also designers who emerged from a time when both cultures made an impact on and modified their perception of design. From the tension of both cultures these hybrid designers emerged.

On the international stage of fashion a designer needs to be noticed. Besides the cultural mix in Rocha something further was needed to establish him in the fashion arena. Rocha's novelty was and is in his use of Irish fabric and his incorporation of elements from the Irish heritage. The next chapter focuses on this relationship between Rocha and the Irish heritage and attempts to place Rocha's interpretation of the Irish heritage in context with the historic aspect of Irish clothing.

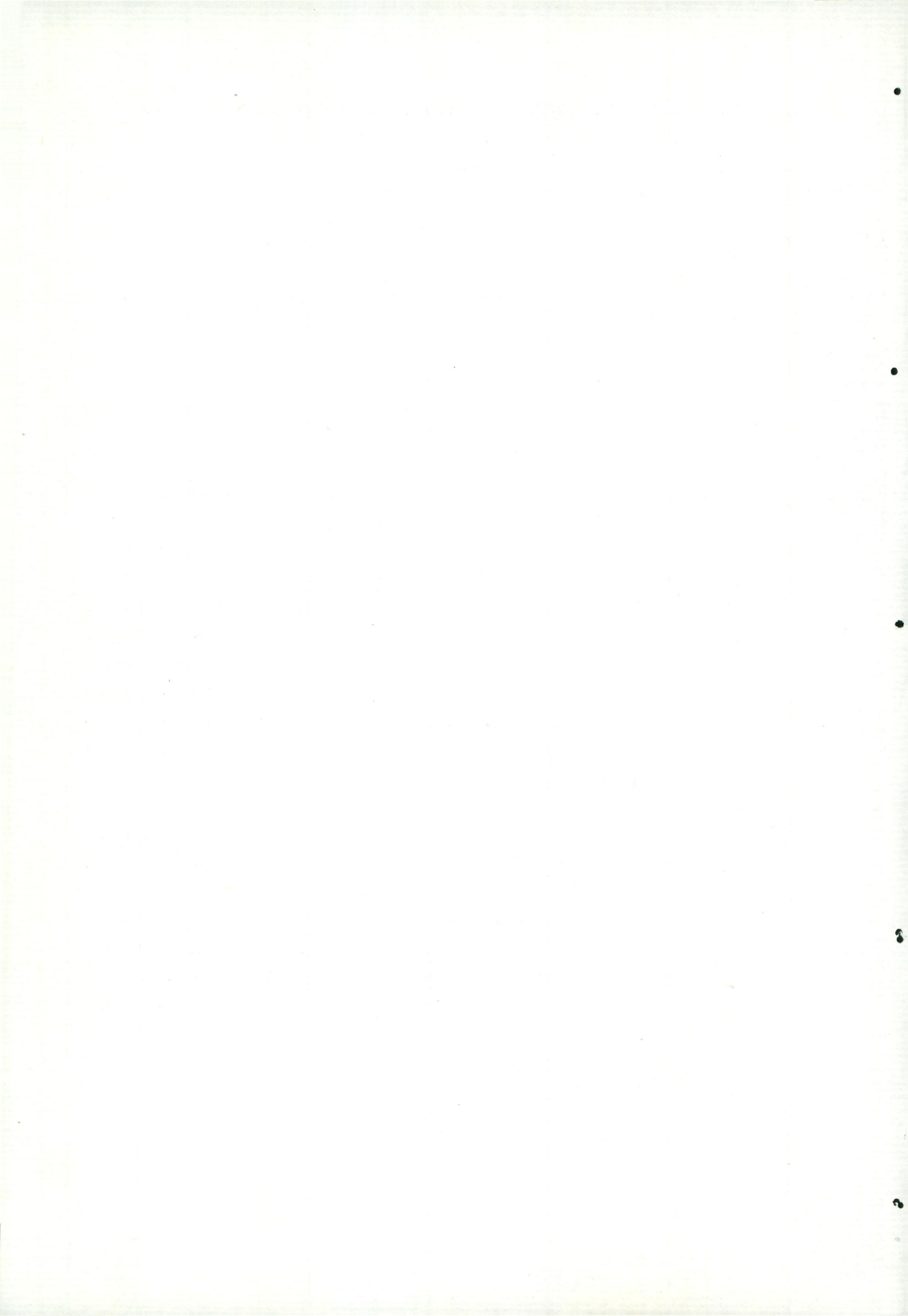
ROCHA AND THE IRISH HERITAGE

CHAPTER THREE

Rocha has become a design ambassador for Ireland. By incorporating elements from Irish history and his inherent sense of form and design he evolved a unique style of design. The look which Rocha pioneers is termed as the "Celtic" look by journalists, the international press and media. The term "Celtic" is being used very broadly in this context. It is correct to say that he uses the Irish heritage in terms of imagery, fabrics, techniques and traditions.

This chapter will discuss Rocha's relationship with Ireland, and attempt to clarify the links between his clothing and historic Irish dress. These links are made with reference to Mairead Dunleavy's book, Dress in Ireland. These associations with Irish dress have never been related to Rocha before by the media despite the fact that he has come to represent Irish fashion and it's heritage. It must also be said that Rocha has never made a conscious attempt to study Irish clothing and it's history. The influence is a combination of tradition and exposure to an eclectic mix of past and present elements of Irish clothing and style.

Rocha as an international designer received a great accolade from the British Fashion Council when he was awarded the title, "British Fashion Designer of the Year" award in 1993. This secured fame, prestige and honour for the previously unheard of Hong Kong born - Irish designer. Because of this award the garments in his "Saoirse", collection received an enormous amount of publicity and they established his style to international buyers and media.



The collection was hugely influenced by Ireland and used many traditional fabrics firmly associated with Ireland. This collection set the precedent. His collection "Saoirse", was undoubtedly Irish influenced, it incorporated the Irish Aran sweater, crochet and linen. He used velvet, lace, patchwork, sheepskin and leather. Fabrics strongly associated with the Irish heritage, in the words of British fashion journalist Paula Reid,

While the best of the British played it safe,
Rocha offered Celtic romance with an edge.

(Reid, 23/10/93)

All journalists perceived this collection as so called "Celtic", which was really only an alternative to calling them Irish. This "Celtic" image became synonymous with Rocha and his clothing.

These designs were new, they created a completely new image of traditional Irish garments. No designer had ever pulled elements from the Irish heritage and manipulated them into a new look and form as Rocha had. While there have been designers manipulating the traditional forms and design of the Aran sweater. The extremes to which Rocha developed the Aran style and traditional knitwear stitches were new, different and exciting. This is evidenced in fig.27a where Rocha modified the Aran sweater and made it into a Summer garment. This in itself is a paradox as the Aran sweater's function was to keep the individual warm and protected from the weather.

Not only does the Western influence surface in his use of textiles it is sometimes evident in his silhouette as an analysis of earlier collections shows. In his 1989 collections the garments conformed to the body shape which is what Western clothing is renowned for.

The 1990 collection featured a suit inspired by the Edwardian style see fig.3d. The Eastern concession to this suit was a wrap skirt, this is again the equilibrium at work, East meets West. The Irish influence began with his first visit to Ireland in 1977 where he was introduced to Mary Moylan. Moylan was adept at all Irish crafts, including crochet, lace, and embroidery. These crafts were not in common practice at the time and the only designer who had ever taken note of these resources at their disposal was Sybil Connolly, the prolific Irish designer who made an impact internationally in the 1950's. Moylan educated Rocha in the traditional Irish crafts. This visit and exposure to Ireland made such an impact that the Irish influence became the theme for his degree show at Croydon Art College. He used woven, knitted and crocheted garments, and Irish motifs in his collection. (Rocha, Interview, 20/05/94).

As a consequence of this collection the Irish Trade board (CTT), invited Rocha over to work in Ireland as they saw the potential through him of reviving many Irish crafts and traditional industries through his love for Irish crafts and design. The Irish textile industry was in a state of flux then as it is today, it needed credibility, Rocha through..

...his success is a breath of hope in a deeply depressed Irish clothing industry and knitwear companies in the West of Ireland such as Hackett and Turpin in Mayo, yarn manufacturers in Donegal and Northern Irish linen weavers are reaping the benefits too.

(McQuillan, 05/09/1993)

The Irish Government in 1961 commissioned a group of Scandinavian's to research Irish design. Resulting from this "Design in Ireland" was published in 1962.

The report stated that early Christian motifs had lost their appeal in modern design and reproduction. The Government's response to the report was to establish in 1963 the Kilkenny Design Workshops (KDW).

The two main aims of KDW were to,

- i. To improve the level of design awareness among the Irish public.
- ii. To give Ireland a design identity abroad.

The company was a private company backed by public finances. Independent initiatives were supported which would concentrate in the craft industry. Rocha was not directly involved in the KDW scheme but he felt that this revival of interest in the Irish heritage and the general atmosphere it created was one of encouragement (Rocha, Interview, 04/01/95) With his Irish girlfriend, Eily Doolan he set himself up in business in an old watermill in Kilkenny where he "had no shortage of brave ideas about using Irish fabrics in fashion" (Sunday Business Post, 17/10/93) Rocha could satisfy both the objectives set out by KDW, even though he was not part of the scheme he offered solutions for the Irish design problem,

...the dilemma of how to become modern and return to sources how to respect an old dormant civilisation and take part in a universal civilisation, that has confused and distorted interpretations of Irish cultural history.

(O'Laighin, 1991, p.21)

Rocha using his Eastern sense of design and structure offered universal design, appeal and innovation. By incorporating Irish designs and ornament as well as traditional Irish fabrics and crafts he showed respect for the ancient Irish heritage. The dualism of cultures solved the design dilemma.

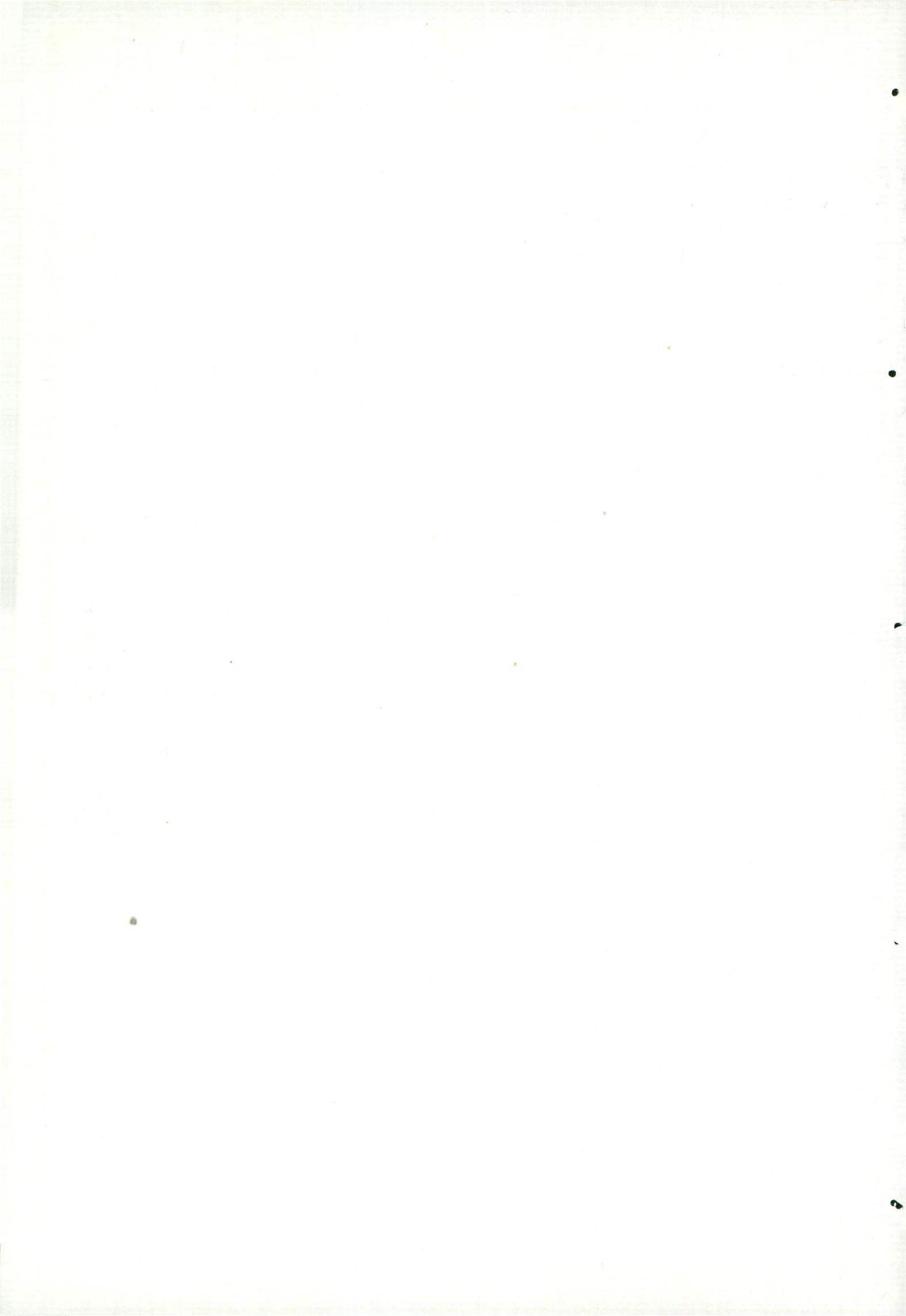
Rocha continued to use Irish linen and woven fabrics and these fabrics contributed to his selling power, in 1986 "The Guardian", featured an article on Rocha and described his clothes as "breathtaking". He became acknowledged with changing Ireland's association with fashion. Rocha became a prolific Irish designer who represented Ireland he became the definition of contemporary Irish fashion,

Nothing is more monotonous or despairing
than the search for the essence which defines
a nation, Seamus Deane-(O'Laighlin,1991,p.21)

In 1987 John Rocha and Paul Costelloe were awarded the Fil D'Or for their outstanding use of linen in their clothing. Deirdre Kelly believes that the use of linen will be a legacy of Rocha's as well as his use of Celtic design. (Kelly, Interview 17/11/94)

Rocha evolved a style of design through working with Irish fabrics, such as linen, woven fabric, knit and crochet. He combined these fabrics with his inherent Eastern design. Rocha's path to success followed the age old formula, too big, too quick and as a result, the business collapsed, this occurred in 1982 and again in 1988. In 1988 disheartened with Ireland he left to go and live in Italy. There he concentrated freely on designing while his agent Franco Brocolan took care of finance and production. Brocolan was also an agent to other designers such as Jean Paul Gaultier and Kenzo.

In Milan in 1988 Rocha was approached by Deirdre Kelly of the Irish fashion chainstore A-Wear. Kelly suggested to Rocha that he design a range for the A-Wear chain which they would produce and market both in Ireland and internationally. The timing for such a venture was right.



These clothes were designer without being outrageous or unwearable, for according to Rocha

People who understand fashion buy clothes, they don't buy labels and that's what people have to understand: when it comes down to it, you don't wear the label you wear the dress.

(Boland, Dec 1994, p62-64)

Rocha was the first designer in Ireland to pioneer the unstructured look. However many of the garments were considered too avant garde at the time. The "modern form", which Rocha introduced in Ireland was gradually accepted, just as the infiltration of Eastern designers were gradually accepted in the 1980's. The look which Rocha marketed at this point became popular for a number of reasons. In 1988 Dublin was named the European City of Culture. The Irish film industry gained international recognition and applause, with productions such as the Oscar winning film "My Left Foot", and "The Field". Theatrical productions such as Brian Friel's "Dancing at Lughasa", found fame at home and abroad. Ireland emulated an identity that had nothing to do with shamrocks and leprechauns. Ireland's image abroad was furthered by all this success and culture. Soon Ireland was classified as a "happening" place where a general buzz existed. Elle magazine featured an article on Dublin, entitled "Dublin, the hottest place on earth" (Nov. 1993). "Elle" magazine also featured a fashion shoot that month in Ireland claiming that tweed, knits and linen were all in vogue. Now was an opportune moment for Rocha to establish himself and his identity. He felt it was time to use and launch his designs with their Irish slant now that the selling power was available.

Rocha pulled elements of the Irish heritage and tradition and, "focused it in a modern form ", in the global market he felt that there was a lot of talk about tradition, and this is what Rocha's designs encapsulated. What Rocha was doing was giving the Irish heritage substance in a modern context, (Rocha, Interview, 20/05/94)

The Celtic influence manifests itself in his choice of natural colours - stone, moss, green, cream, pale blue, and slate grey. See it also in the Aran cardigans and the heavy fisherman's ganseys and in the Celtic Folkloric hand printed symbols resurrected on his chiffons.

(Keane 03/10/1993)

His look became a form of tourism for the country and sold an image of what Ireland was like, his clothes as Keane stated above came to represent colours of the Irish countryside. Garments featured designs from stone high crosses and Irish megalithic tombs, as is evident in fig.26. The "British Designer of the Year Award" gave Rocha credibility and a stamp of approval to continue designing collections with an Irish flavour. One of Rocha's strongest points as a designer he believes is his use and understanding of fabrics, hand manipulation was used on basic A-line forms as in fig.26, as "the workmanship is not appreciated if structure is very complicated". (Rocha, Interview, 20/05/94)

Looking to the Irish heritage in the forms which Rocha was developing was new and unheard of. The designs with their eclectic mix of Eastern elements and use of Irish fabrics and inspiration offered a new alternative to the Irish and global market. This fresh new style was well received at the British fashion awards, which had lost credibility by awarding the title of designer of the year to Vivienne Westwood for two consecutive years. The awards to gain respect again had to find new, fresh talent.

While it is important to understand that Irish fabrics were used by Rocha throughout his entire career. It is Rocha's sense of timing that is instrumental in his success, the Irish influence is, "always in my heart, and as a designer I have to know when and how", (Rocha, Interview 20/05/94) This "Celtic"-Irish look which Rocha has evolved presents the question: has Rocha created this look or has this look created him? Rocha has created this look and this look has in turn created him, it is what he has become renowned for, his "Saoirse" collection acknowledged this fact, as have the international press and media. The Irish influence is a subliminal idea which is formed from snippets of Ireland's image, heritage and crafts. It is utilised by Rocha when the timing is right.

Rocha is constantly influenced by cultures and is a hybrid designer, this is evident from his work in Italy. There he designed garments influenced by Italian (Western) shape and form as can be seen in his 1990 collection fig.3d. On returning to Ireland in 1990 his collections again betrayed Irish associations, and eventually culminated in his "Dochas" and "Saoirse" collections.

Rocha culturally is similar to a sponge, he has absorbed the culture into which he was born; his adopted culture of Ireland and the international- European culture while he lived in Milan.

He travels for three months every year as he admits that if he designed solely for Ireland and spent the entire year living there he could not design for an international market. (Rocha, Interview, 20/05/94) He considers Ireland to be his home and would not return to Hong Kong as it is too crowded and busy, he loves the serenity of the Irish countryside. (Kerrigan, 25/02/93).

The Irish look and influence has created John Rocha. He has become an ambassador for Irish design and I believe that the Celtic/Irish design will perhaps be his legacy. Rocha disagrees with this, he feels that he is not restricted to a distinct style (Rocha, Interview 20/05/94). The reality in the fashion world is that every designer comes to represent a certain style and trademarks just as Chanel has come to epitomise the little black dress. Deirdre Kelly believes that the Celtic/Irish design will "stick with him definitely, it's his legacy". (Kelly, Interview, 17/11/94) Deirdre McQuillan however feels that it is too early to say what Rocha's design legacy will be. (McQuillan, Interview, 19/10/94)

Rocha and his image of the Irish heritage is not a textbook interpretation, but his collections do utilise elements from the Irish heritage in terms of craft, imagery and language. Rocha named two of his collections in Gaelic, the traditional language of Ireland. This shows that he has a desire to incorporate part of Ireland in his collections. His first collection entitled -"Dochas", meaning hope (Autumn/Winter 1993/4), his other collection was called -"Saoirse", meaning freedom this was his award winning collection for Spring/Summer 1994. In his "Saoirse" collection he had crocheted tops made from hessian type fabric which is rough and textured see fig.28. The crocheted dress in the collection featured an embossed Celtic cross as in fig. 26, these ancient Irish monuments dated from the eighth century and featured carved stories from the bible, such as Adam and Eve and the Resurrection of Christ. His long A-line dresses and coats featured embroidered beads and sequins in the forms of Celtic swirls which were similar to the carvings found in ancient Irish burial tombs which were constructed around 2500BC.

These are very direct representations from Irish history and the actual monuments can still be seen today. The hand beading and crocheted garments were made by Mary Moylan and her design team. Embroidery was used in his "Saoirse" collection for Spring and Summer 1994. Traditionally embroidery was used in Ireland to denote a person's status. King Conchobar Mac Neasa and Cu Chulainn both wore cloaks and tunics featuring embroidery and these men were Irish legends and have become part of the Irish heritage. (Dunleavy, 1989 p.18) Gold was a precious material in ancient Irish times, it's main use was to adorn religious objects. Rocha incorporated the gold cross in his collection for Spring and Summer 1995, which featured handpainted gold crosses as can be seen in fig.29. The cross was adapted by high and street fashion in 1993 as an essential fashion accessory and statement, this is another example of when the equilibrium due to fashion forecasts sways towards the Western ideal. In the Early Christian Period, garments were embroidered with gold thread. Rocha re-interpreted the early Christian motifs successfully fulfilling the 1963 report. It is ironic that it took a foreign designer to evolve a modern form of Irish design which could sell in Ireland and abroad.

The swirls clambering up his A-line dresses in fig. 22 are again closely linked to Ireland's heritage, the design actually originated from Romanesque architecture and was designed by Adele Hickey. The fact that the press and journalists received this design as a Celtic design, "the Celtic Folkloric hand printed symbols resurrected on his chiffons" testifies somewhat to the fact that perhaps Rocha's legacy has already been made for him. (Keane, 03/10/93)

In Medieval Ireland the draper and weaver were revered members of society, they emphasised the quality of the fabric which they used rather than the style of the garment, Rocha in a similar manner today feels that the fabric is the integral part of fashion. Rocha is adept at using leather and suede and he is credited by journalist Deirdre McQuillan for giving the sheepskin a new lease of life,

he has breathed life into that tired old relic of race meetings, the sheepskin coat and given it a strong dashing look.

(McQuillan, 16/03/86)

Early leather jackets in Ireland were fitted at the bodice with long waists, this style of jacket was a distinct Irish style in the sixteenth century, Rocha's jackets are usually fitted to the bodyshape but as mentioned before in chapter two, the buttoning, collar, pockets or other small details varied see fig. 15b. Other concessions to Western details are in the inclusion of Irish jewellery to accessorise the collections on the catwalk. The most recent being the Irish jeweller Slim Barrett's crown in fig.4.

The collection for Spring/Summer 1994 used velvet in patchwork as shown in fig. 9 and fig. 30. Patches were used in both a trousers suit and long A-line dress. This patching technique was used by the Irish for

the effect of the pull of different weights of textiles on each other.

(Dunleavy 1989, p.77)

Patches were also common on cloaks and long styled garments. Rocha used patches of velvet and lace on long A-line dress which were cut in a bias style see fig.30. The movement caused the patches to catch the light and shimmer.

The cloak, a popular garment in Ireland was called the "brat", it was often tied around the waist with twine just as Rocha has used twine around the waist of the trousers in fig.27a and the coat in fig.27b and c is also tied around the waist. In comparing Rocha's coat in fig.31 with the 17th Century Irish coat it shows strong similarities in form and tailoring, as well as buttoning at waist level.

The appeal could be because the look is entirely novel. It could be because of the international feel which Rocha has as a designer. It could also be due to the fact that no other designer has to the same extent merged cultures and emulated a culture foreign to their own. The British fashion magazine "Elle", applauded his style which incorporated folk influences into his collection. (Alford, Nov 1993 p.143) His clothes for men are loose and unstructured. Similar to his clothes for women they combine textures and fabrics. Rocha uses velvet for his menswear jackets, tweed and woven fabrics are also used as is linen. The garments for men were, "very laid back and unstructured". (Kerrigan, 22/03/92)

The menswear collection was a cross between the peasant and the poet. The rough and contrasting textures were strongly associated with a farmer type look. Garments were innovative in their use of fabric and in the freshness of their approach to tailoring. The overall feeling from the clothing was that of comfort and ease of movement.

Anne Harris fashion journalist believed that..

John Rocha for men has hit the right tone
between high fashion and what Irish men will
actually wear

(20/10/1988)

Besides timing, Rocha's success is due to the fact that his clothes are wearable which is not often the case with designer clothing. An article featuring Rocha praised him for designing clothes which real women could wear as well as supermodels, it was as Gillian Rowe termed it, his

mix of creativity and commercial sense and his ability to create pared-down simplicity in luxurious natural fibres are set to make him one of the decade's most enduring designers.

(Rowe, "You" magazine, June 19th 1994 p.41/42)

Words mentioned in conjunction with Rocha in the article were "romantic" and "traditional", these words conjure up the "Saoirse" collection where tradition permeated his work. The Irish influence in Rocha's clothing has not always been tangible and blatantly evident. In earlier years the Irish element was obvious in his choice of fabrics and how he used and manipulated them. Today the Irish element is slightly stronger, the imagery painted, embroidered and crocheted on his garments is throwing up elements from the Irish culture which had previously never been considered in the realms of fashion.

Rocha when he came to Ireland in the late 1970's saw the potential in traditional Irish crafts and fabrics for high fashion. Earlier years saw his style to be leaning slightly more towards his native Eastern sense of design. Today the influence is more diluted and through a combination of both East and West, Rocha is practising a design equilibrium.

The Celtic/Irish look may indeed be Rocha's legacy, it has created an identity for him just as he has to a certain extent created it. Through his work Rocha is establishing and selling a view of Ireland, it's heritage and image.

The "Saoirse" collection made a huge impact internationally. Rocha's perception of the Irish clothing heritage is not reproduced detail for detail. The general feeling from his clothing is more of a sympathy and an understanding for Irish fabrics. The Irish fabrics Rocha utilises allow for constant innovation. This was shown by his manipulation of the traditional Aran sweater which is normally knitted from "Bainin" wool, instead Rocha used cotton yarn cropped the sweater and made it into a Summer garment see fig.27a.

I believe that the Irish influence has become a subliminal influence in Rocha which will always form a part of his work. However his interpretation of this look does have credence in Irish history as has been illustrated by the examples of Irish clothing, techniques and crafts. Ireland has gained an identity from this eclectic mix of cultures, the interaction of East and West.

Ireland has gained credibility as a fashionable country mainly due to Rocha, and through his insistence on using Irish fabrics, manufacturing and techniques. He has given Ireland a sense of pride and proven that Ireland need not look to other countries and remain downtrodden. He attempted to explain to McQuillan that

I wanted to stress the fact that we are based in Ireland. Irish music is on the world stage, so there's no reason why we can't be important in the clothing area too.

(McQuillan, 05/09/93).

Rocha has not been designing in isolation in Ireland, other Irish designers have achieved different levels of success. But Rocha more than any other contemporary Irish designer has sold successfully an image of Ireland and it's culture.

This image is stylish and given an edge through Rocha's tailoring, form and structure. The Irish influence will be seen as Rocha's breakthrough into the international fashion scene.

ROCHA AND CONTEMPORARY IRELAND

CHAPTER FOUR

Rocha today faces a new world, he has become the most prolific designer in Ireland today. He is the first Irish designer to show his garments in Paris. He is also Ireland's only cross-cultural designer. This chapter will endeavour to explain why Rocha as a designer is set apart from contemporary Irish designers. An important reference will be made to Sybil Connolly. Connolly is really the only other Irish designer who has achieved similar recognition to Rocha both in Ireland and internationally. Each of these designers share an appreciation for traditional Irish crafts and heritage and through this secured a fashion following. Both have given Irish fabrics a high profile abroad and sold through their clothing designs an essence of Ireland.

Rocha's personality will be analysed as will the extent of which his personality plays a part in the success of his label. The mixture of cultures and what his views are concerning his cultural allegiance are also taken into account. Finally, the new direction which Rocha has chosen to pursue will be analysed with respect to the future, and the probability of the direction of his design development.

Sybil Connolly made a huge impact internationally particularly in America in the 1950's. Like Rocha she used Irish fabrics which were not considered to be in vogue at the time. Just as Rocha was elevated to a "god-like" status after becoming designer of the year Connolly became a "national heroine". Both designers caused the fashion media to take note of the talent in Ireland and elevated Irish fashion to an international standard.

Connolly was the first designer to revive traditional Irish crafts and to market them as part of a couture look. Her designs featured bairn, linen, lace and woven fabrics. All of these fabrics were previously marketed only for tourists and had never been used for couture. Connolly by using Irish textiles became a patron for the industry much like Rocha. Rocha bought fabrics from Emblem Weavers, Hackett and Turpin knitwear, he used CastleIsland tweeds and linen from John England. All fabrics were Irish made and this fact has been a proud boast of Rocha's he proudly maintains that Irish manufacturing is one of the best in the world. (Rocha, Interview, 20/05/94). There are twenty two factories in Ireland manufacturing clothes for the Rocha label. Rocha's garments from fabric to the rail are 100% Irish and this fact has not changed even now that production has tripled.

Connolly like Rocha was inspired by Irish fabrics and saw their potential for the fashion market. Just as Rocha had commissioned Mary Moylan to create unique fabrics and Irish knitters to knit his sweaters, Connolly had commissioned weavers, knitters, lacemakers and needlewomen from all over Ireland to create fabric for her,

Her most important source of inspiration and raw materials is still very much Ireland - she is still 'in love' with Donegal tweeds and Irish linen.

(Donnellan, 1985, p.9)

In 1989 Rocha when asked what Irish designer he admired and why, chose Sybil Connolly, his justification was,

I admire all her designs from the linen, lace and crochets through to the tweeds. She has made an Irish look comfortable and elegant.

(Keane 1989, Sunday Independent)

Connolly was the first designer to recognise the selling power and potential which Irish fabrics had. She pioneered the use of these in the world of high fashion. Connolly and Rocha were both a breath of fresh air for the Irish textile industry. Connolly's collections were applauded by the international media she became a design ambassador for Ireland and her garments were featured in "Time" magazine. Her personality and image also sold garments, she was a very charismatic woman who not only promoted her clothing but her own image simultaneously. Her success in America was unparalleled by any other Irish designer, a large factor of this was because she came to represent a fairy tale story; a beautiful young Irish "cailin" who singlehandedly gave credibility to Ireland and Ireland's fashion heritage. Connolly monopolised the Irish appeal in America and made "leprauchaun" hats and utilized gimmicks such as these, her garments were photographed in Irish castles and this substantiated the Americans vision of Ireland. Connolly and Rocha used traditional Irish jewellery in their collections.

These two designers looked to traditional Irish fabrics, they also considered the Celtic Irish heritage. Both designers also received the help of Eleanor Lambert who is an American fashion publicist. Lambert helped to boost Connolly's career in America. In Paris in October Lambert worked with and helped Rocha stage his first international show, she "brought the fashion world to Ireland and opened doors for Irish designers". (McQuillan, Interview 19/11/94)

Rocha and Connolly belong to different eras. Rocha is grateful that Connolly singlehandedly pushed Irish fashion into a different league. Connolly was involved in couture but today Rocha wants to bring his garments to the mass market and not to an elitist one. (Rocha, Interview, 20/05/94)

Contemporary Irish designers have made an impact in Ireland and Europe, examples being Paul Costelloe, Louise Kennedy and the knitwear designer Lainey Keogh. All three designers were born in Ireland and they all emulate the Western notion of fashion; that it is dictated by the bodyshape. Due to the difference in attitudes towards fashion, it's function and design it is impossible to draw similarities from Rocha's designs and those of the Irish designers. Occasionally due to fashion forecasts there may be a similar colour story or theme to the collection. These three designers have alongside Rocha become fashion ambassadors for Ireland. They have a distinct style of their own yet they have never reached the peak of publicity and internationalism that Rocha has, even though Costelloe designs garments for the Princess of Wales. These designers have only ever experienced one culture and one aesthetic, that of the West.

When selling garments the designers identity is also sold through the clothing, Rocha adopts a very pragmatic approach to fashion ,

At the end of the day, the garment has to be sold it doesn't matter who you are, what you're like - I hope that people buy my clothes because they like them.

(Rocha, Interview, 20/05/94)

But in the fashion business it does matter who you are, it does matter what you are like. Fashion involves prestige and power it involves labels and competition. The "hype", which is all to do with name and image, is as Deirdre Kelly remarks very important,

This business is half about hype and once the name is up there, that's it, that is how business is done.

(Kelly, Interview, 17/11/94)

Once a designer has gained recognition by the fashion media orders and demand are secured, in short a name and identity of a designer are established. This again reiterates the point that once a designer gains recognition for his work, it is usually the collections at the time which are remembered as the designer's legacy the climax or high point of their careers. Rifat Ozbek, the Turkish designer's legacy is his collection inspired by the Native American Indians. As with Rocha and the Irish influence in his work both of these cultures are not their native origins, yet both designers reached the high points in their respective careers with these collections.

One of Rocha's aims to become a household name in Irish fashion design has already been realised he is acclaimed and applauded in Ireland. He has been adopted by the Irish as one of their own and in the cut-throat world of fashion Rocha's success was greeted with genuine sincerity,

He has become more Irish in his manner, and more insistent on being recognised ...as an Irish designer. He's still quiet and pensive. He speaks a delightful brand of English....all that has changed about his distinctive looks is his clothes, and in the cut-throat, often bitchy world that the fashion business inhabits, he still hasn't a bad word to say about anybody.

(Kerrigan, Sunday Independent, 25/02/1990)

This personality in conjunction with his clothing sells clothes and an image. Deirdre Kelly's input to making Rocha a success has been recognised by the media. She is given the credit for helping him reach his peak and present his show in Paris.

Kelly recognises the success which is possible when you can successfully market a designer and his clothing together,

If you've got a designer with a personality and character of John Rocha well then you're going a long way, because he's a very genteel character, he's very modest, he's an incredible designer. So the combination of those three elements then the hype and media they (fashion press and public) just latch onto that, they adore that.

(Kelly, Interview, 17/11/94)

Rocha looks different this again is a bonus in the fashion world where looks are everything, where eccentrics thrive. Designers have a reputation for being odd and either recluses such as Yves Saint Laurent or extreme extroverts such as Jean Paul Gaultier. An article in the "Sunday Independent", by journalist Martyn Harris pointed out the fact that Rocha was really a bit of a "Joe Soap". He wasn't gay, buddhist, mad or vegetarian but instead plays football and leads a normal life. (Harris, 23/10/93) Coming from a journalist who admits his ignorance in the fashion domain, this article was an example of how Rocha's identity was and is sold. He looks different but he is normal and likeable he is a modest genuine person who ironically fits into the fashion world.

Rocha was a publicists dream, sincere, modest and talented. The eclectic mix of cultures added the icing to the cake, as did the failed attempts in business and the grit and determination which saw Rocha through to final success. An "outsider", Rocha was since the time he left Hong Kong at the age of seventeen pitched against the odds. He was in an alien country and culture, could not speak the language and at this young age has to fend for himself. Due to his independence at such a young age, Kelly believes that this was instrumental in his success, "because of where he is from he has to fight that much harder to make it". (Kelly, Interview 17/11/94).

Rocha's determination reaped it's rewards, as did his independence,

He has become quite independent at a fairly young age, he had to make it on his own in the UK, so straight away he has got one up on all of us, we're all so protected he's done it on his own.

(Kelly, Interview, 17/11/94)

Rocha did not make a forcible impact in Paris in 1994, and the "queen" of the fashion world, Suzy Menkes, the top fashion journalist who writes for American Vogue and the International Herald and Tribune did not mention his show at all which is not favorable. Fame and recognition are not instantly required and now that Rocha has taken a further step to becoming more international it will inevitably take more time. As Deirdre Kelly pointed out Rocha also has one advantage that many other designers have not he has the Eastern work ethic. Kelly believes that many designers from Europe fall down because of the Western work ethic and that there are many designers who enjoy a brief moment of fame but to sustain the fame hard work is required,

They (Eastern designers) understand that they've got to work hard to get there and to continue to work hard; which is where other Western designers fall down. When they (Western -designers) get one accolade they tend to rest on their laurels and they think everything is just going to happen for them.

(Kelly, Interview, 17/11/94)

The Eastern work ethic contributes to the edge which the Eastern designers have. Western, and particularly Irish designers such as Paul Costelloe and Louise Kennedy tend to be classic which is a trait of their culture.

This classic design practiced by Irish Designers evolves in their use of historic styled clothing and very figure hugging styles. The reason that the East is leading the world into the new century is because they are not afraid to take the risks and gamble, in the West it is safer to recycle ideas and concepts.

Rocha looks different and designs differently than his contemporaries. His forte in designing is his tailoring, it is what Rocha as a designer represents; innovative tailoring and good fabrics. Colour is not a strong point and this Kelly feels is very important. Rocha has to remember that his tailoring is like the soul of his garment, no amount of dazzling colours and patterns can compensate for tailoring just as humans are not considered human without their soul. (Kelly, Interview, 17/11/94) Eastern designers have a reputation for immaculate finish and cleverly constructed clothes with a little twist. The Eastern aesthetic also allows for imperfection and clothes that have an unbalanced look about them see fig. 2 and 6.

In the early eighties Rocha considered himself an Irish designer, he was recognised internationally as such. He came to represent Irish fashion and because he used Irish fabrics his native culture was only mentioned as a lead in when he was interviewed. It became inevitable that every article began, " Hong-Kong born, Irish fashion designer John Rocha.....". Rocha's collections were never analysed with respect to Ireland or Hong Kong until the 1990's when journalists saw the outright Irish element in the garments and their fabrics.



Rocha's native country of Hong-Kong was never accounted for as an influence in his work. Journalists such as Deirdre McQuillan of the Sunday Tribune applauded the asymmetrical cut and the androgynous look, while never realising that these elements were part of his cultural heritage and the forces which had shaped him. Rocha to be placed in context needed to be analysed with fashion design which was emanating from the East. The East has been a part of Rocha's life and today he acknowledges this more than he previously had, he sees himself "Somewhere between Ireland and Hong-Kong". (Rocha, Interview 05/01/95)

Comparisons have never been made with Rocha's contemporary Kenzo who is also a cross-cultural designer. Rocha's garments were never analysed in conjunction with what Eastern designers were doing for example in terms of questioning and re-defining the body through use of fabric, layering and other devices. Eastern designers are renowned for their use and manipulation of fabric. Rocha since his final year in college focused on fabrics and every year they play an integral part of his collections either through layering, contrasting or manipulation. Kawakubo, Miyake and Kenzo focus on textiles in a similar manner.

Since infiltrating the Irish and international fashion market, elements of Rocha's style have not changed. He has for the past ten years used layering in every collection also he has utilised and manipulated Irish fabrics. Rocha has created various body proportions from his tailoring and garments while his colour is quite low-key and in conjunction with his tailoring, has come to represent an eclectic mix of cultures.

The question that now arises is what to expect next from this designer? I firmly believe that Deirdre Kelly is right and that if Rocha forsakes his tailoring then the strongest aspect of his style as a designer is gone. Handpainting will continue to be a feature of his collections, it will if developed come to represent the "John Rocha" trademark just as the interlocking "C"'s have come to represent Coco Chanel. The Irish influence will still permeate his work.

Working with fabric and textures is another forte of this designer and knitwear is seen as one of his strongest points (McQuillan, Interview 19/11/94). Combining rough and smooth textures and allowing these contrasts to work together is another aspect which will probably be continued by Rocha. He has already admitted that the future of the designer lies in the exclusive development of fabrics. (Boland, Dec 1994, pp.62,64)

The split between Rocha and the A-Wear company allegedly over A-Wear reproducing knitwear items from a year old Rocha collection and selling them at a less expensive price, has opened a new chapter for Rocha. Due to this split Rocha is now moving to a new location in Temple Bar in Dublin. This new centre will become the international headquarters for the John Rocha label. Money has been invested by his wife's bothers, Frank and John Gleeson. It is too early to say what the likely outcome of this business venture will be. The Rocha label is growing very fast but the fashion business is very fickle. Many markets have been secured since being named "Designer of the Year", once these are regular buyers the success of the label is assured.

Showing in Paris was also a daring and brave venture, it was and is a financial gamble and Rocha did not receive the coverage he needed from Ms. Menkes or from the international press and media. His garments were lacklustre and did not merit the recognition. Rocha needs to be a very consistent designer if he hopes to continue to show in Paris. Patience is a virtue when playing in the big league with the "classic" designers, as well as stamina and if Rocha can afford to show in Paris and if his clothes are consistently well designed, then success will ensue.

Greg Delaney commented on the aftermath of Paris and said that Adrian Clark, editor of "Fashion Weekly" believed that the move to show in Paris backfired and that Rocha "didn't stand up to what's in Paris". (Delaney, 06/11/94) It is infinitely harder to break into the Paris fashion scene than other European centres like Milan and London. Clarke similar to Kelly recognises the need for Rocha to retain his tailoring on the catwalk as the Paris show did not show his forte which lies in structures and tailoring. It will be possible to judge Rocha's progress internationally by his Paris shows in three or four years and by that time he should be on the way to establishing his name and designs, if he can still afford it.

Rocha has shown an affinity with Sybil Connolly in the use of Irish fabrics and crafts. Both designers gave Ireland a fashion identity, and gave hope to a dying textile industry in Ireland. They made an impact on the international fashion scene, Connolly more in America while Rocha made his impact globally. Effectively they were and are both selling an image of Ireland through their clothing. Connolly and Rocha also shared another aspect in that their personalities helped in establishing their respective labels.

The fact that Rocha had failed in business twice but refused to give up made his story of success something of a fairytale. In that way winning "Designer of the Year Award", was seen as a just reward for determination. Connolly was seen as a young colleen from Ireland who singlehandedly took on the fashion establishment.

The cultural mix which Rocha represents and each of their styles and aesthetics work together to create a solidarity of ideas. Due to his affable personality Rocha has come to represent the cream of Irish fashion. The cultural mix has created his style which encapsulates forms and structure akin to the East such as layering, unique use of fabrics and levels of imperfection. This eclecticism in design sets him apart from contemporary Irish designers who are focused, classic and who conform to a safe style.

Culturally Rocha is today somewhere between Ireland and Hong-Kong and so is his clothing. Rocha has already become noted for the Irish influence, while his tailoring plays an integral part in his success. He needs to return to bold forms and structures which were evident in Autumn /Winter 1994, but still include the mystical Irish element. This mix of cultures that have created this dichotomy of a designer are integral to the style of his clothes, and to the future of his company.

CONCLUSION

John Rocha should not be related to contemporary Irish designers but to designers who have experienced and reconciled the conflicting cultures which existed in their lifetimes. Rocha in Hong Kong emulated the Eastern way of life, his exposure to the West in the form of education again distanced him from his native culture, but yet as is evident from his design work John Rocha has embodied both aesthetics in his work. Similar to contemporary Eastern designers, he has absorbed different cultures and their aesthetics and consequently practised global design. These designers have created a design equilibrium which can sway towards either culture or else strike a balance between both. The traits of each culture may not appear obvious from a first look at the garment or collection but on a closer study the collections it is possible to account for both the Eastern and Western influence. This global designing has evolved new concepts in fashion such as a more modern form and fabric manipulation. It is apparent that Eastern designers are not only forging the way economically into the new century but culturally they are showing how it is possible to cater for an international market.

The Irish influence in Rocha has embroiled him deeper in cultural interpretation. This interpretation never becomes kitsch or manipulative by incorporating leprechauns or shamrocks. Because the Irish heritage is not Rocha's native heritage it allows for "freedom of spirit" (Rocha, Interview, 05/01/1995). This look has pulled elements from Ireland's history and brought them to the forefront of fashion, and the international market. Exposure to the Irish and Italian culture is all part of a learning experience for this designer.

Rocha is a cultural sponge and absorbs certain elements and styles while combining them with his inherent design. This interpretation of merging cultures is a forward looking avenue for fashion design, which since the 1980's threatened the fashion capital of Paris, and since then has laid siege to the dictatorial designs from Paris and Western designers. Rocha and Kenzo's paths in fashion design allow for interesting comparisons to be made between both designers. Kenzo is today embraced by the French as one of their own just as Rocha today is called an Irishman.

Ironically these designers who learned to respect and soak up other cultures, have today come to represent their adopted homes and their respective cultures. Western designers have not made this foray into the East to the same degree which Eastern designers have. Perhaps this will happen. What is certain though is that as the world becomes a smaller place due to modernisation and technology, it will become more of a community, barriers between cultures and identities will inevitably be broken, Western designers may be swamped if they do not duly note and react to this new world. Designers such as Rocha, Kenzo, Kawakubo and others will move further and further into the the future while the Western designers will be left foraging further and further into the past, in an attempt to re-live past glories.

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Sunday Independent : 20/10/85 Anne Harris
10/09/86 Lise Hand
25/09/88 Mary Kerrigan
30/07/89 Terry Keane
03/10/93 Terry Keane
24/10/93 Martyn Harris
28/11/93
23/10/94
06/11/94 Greg Delaney

Irish Times : 28/08/87 Gabrielle Williams
04/03/89 Gabrielle Williams
04/09/91 Gabrielle Williams
23/10/93 Gabrielle Williams
29/08/94 Robert O'Byrne

Irish Press : 28/08/87
22/02/89
05/09/91
26/02/92

Periodicals (Contd..)

Sunday Press : 23/09/84
25/02/90 Mary Kerrigan
22/03/92
29/08/93 Una Brankin

Sunday Business Post : 17/10/93

Sunday Tribune : 01/04/84 Deirdre Mc Quillan
30/09/84 "
24/02/85 "
16/03/86 "
06/09/87 "
10/09/89 "
26/08/90 "
05/09/93 "
24/10/93 "
14/08/94 "

U Magazine (December 1994, p.62-64), Mary Boland.

Jacques, Martin, Western culture defies the rising Eastern sun, The Sunday Times, London, 13th November 1994.

Illustrations



Fig. 1a :Suit by Kenzo



Fig 1b :Suit by Rocha which is similar to traditional Eastern dress in fig. 1c



Fig. 1c :traditional Eastern dress

YOU
IF



Fig. 2a



Fig. 2c



Fig. 2b



Fig. 2d

Fig. 2a, 2b, 2c, and 2d, are all designed by Rocha from Autumn/Winter 194/95. Note the unusual proportions in the dresses and the contrasting qualities in the fabrics

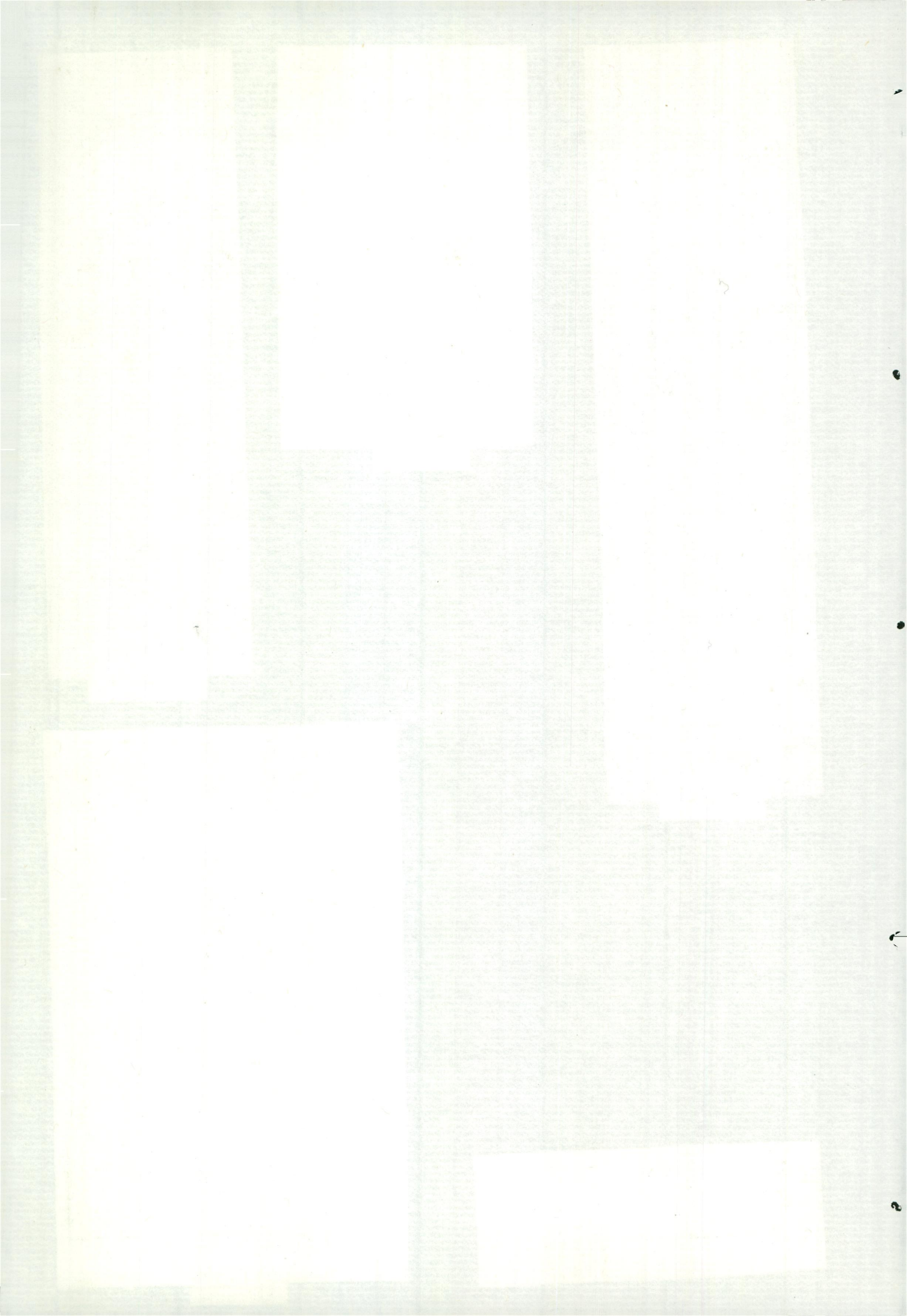




Fig. 3a :Rocha suit 1989



Fig. 3d



Fig 3b and 3c :Kenzo garments

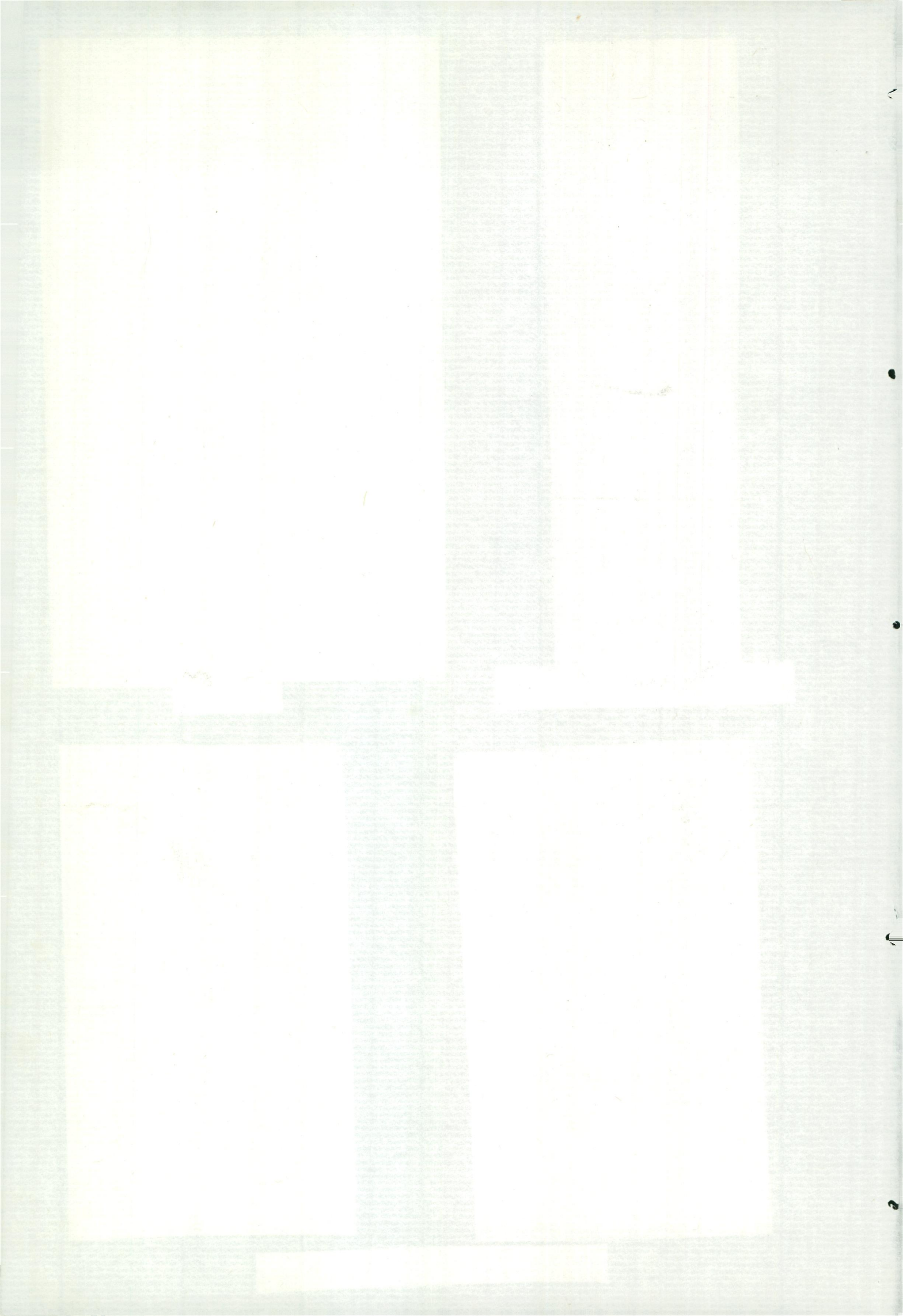
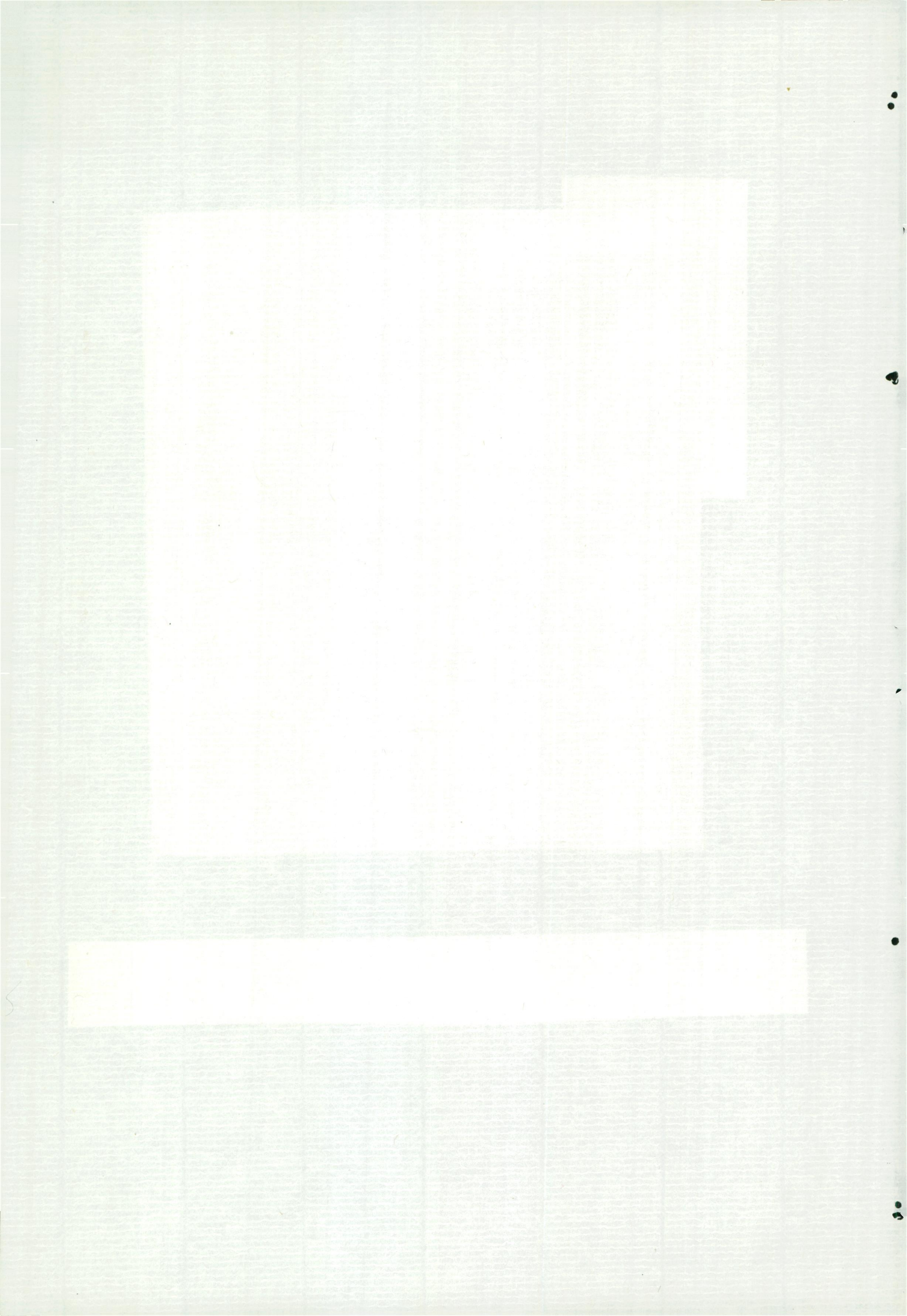




Fig. 4 : Prewar diving women wearing traditional kimonos, the silhouette of these is echoed in Rocha's interpretation in inset picture of garment from 1994/95 Autumn/Winter



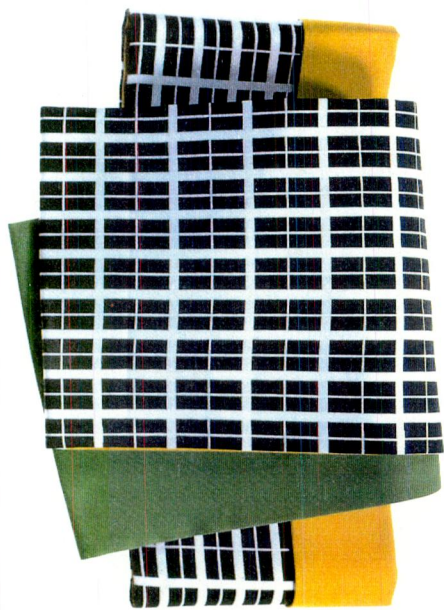
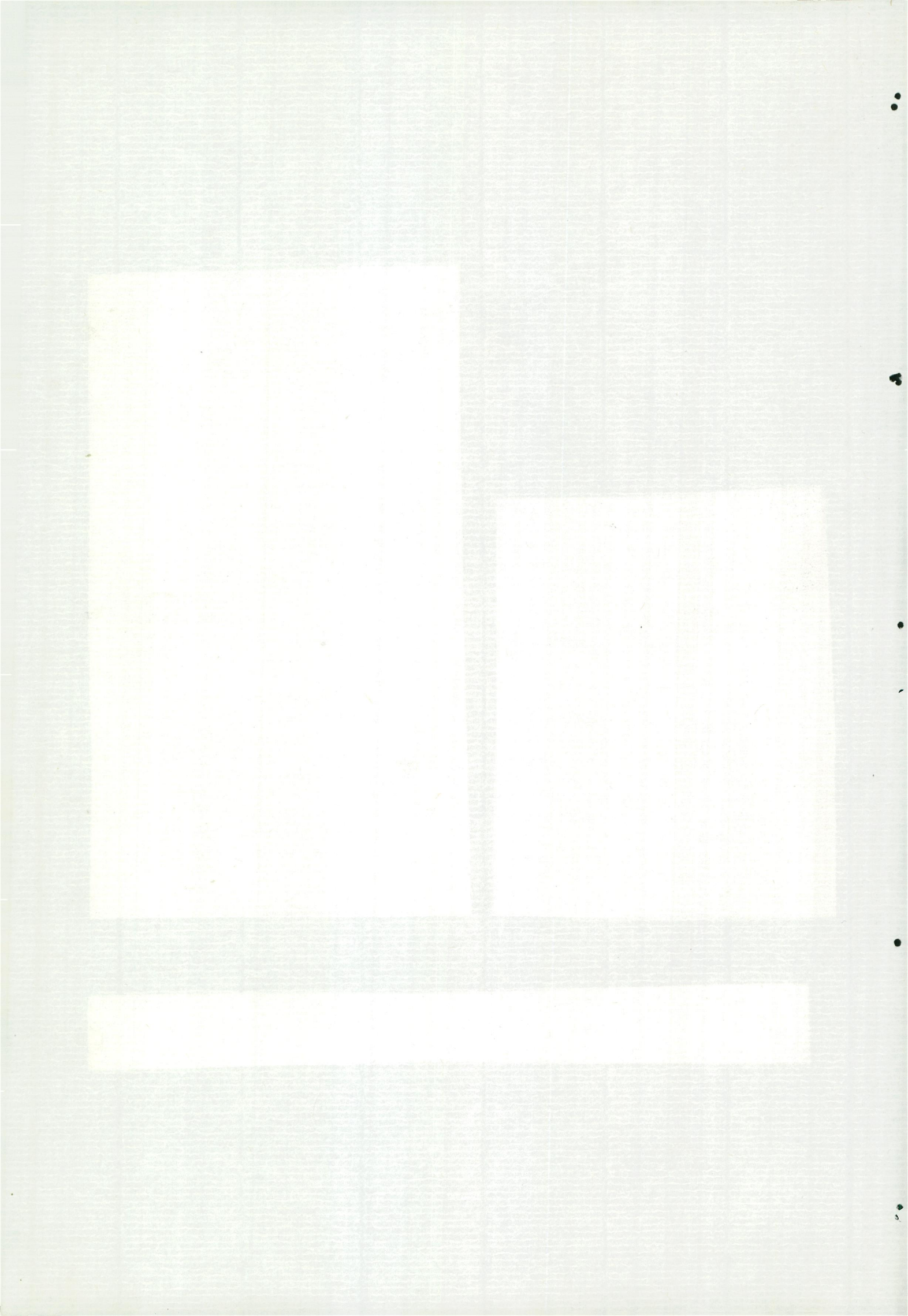


Fig. 5 : Traditional Japanese kimono displayed being worn and folded



River Goddess: Cloudy
coloured A-line top with large
natural brush-stroke prints
orn with a billowing dress
that trails off like
a babbling brook



Fig. 6 : Garments by Rocha from his Spring/Summer 1995 collection, the emphasis is on the asymmetrical cut and handpainting



Black linen jacket \$95 Stock collar
long cotton shirt with waistcoat
white linen trousers \$69
White brogues \$42

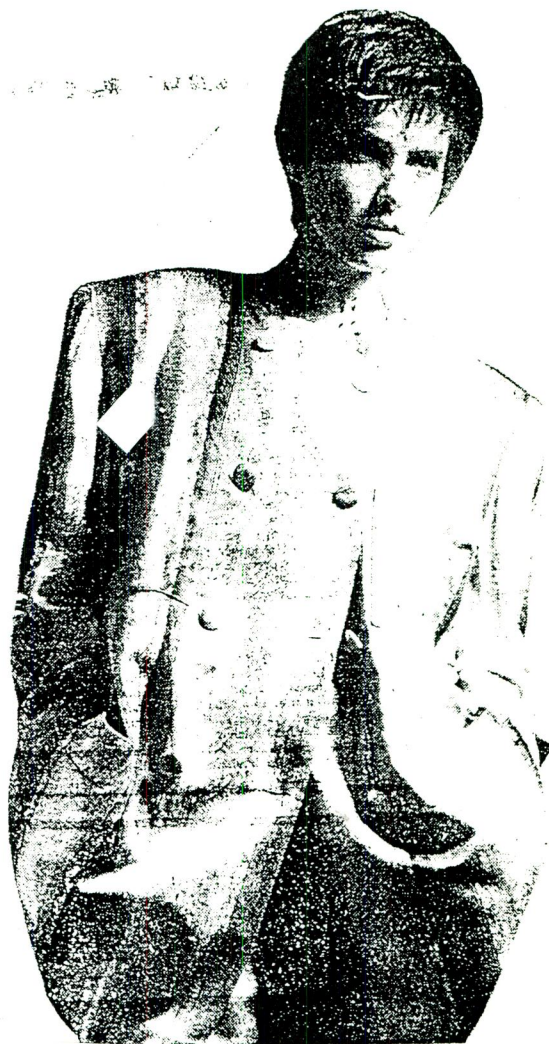
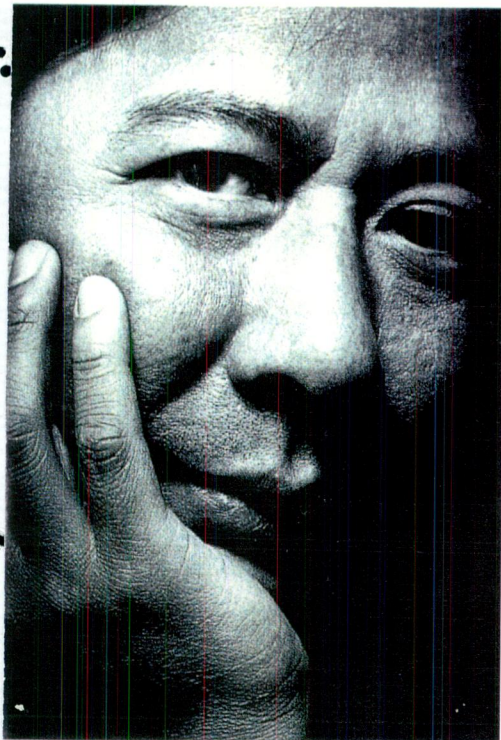


Fig. 7 : Jacket by Rocha 1984

Fig. 8 : Suit by Rocha, 1986 the style is quite masculine giving the female form a strong silhouette



FREE SPIRIT

**BRITISH FASHION HAS A NEW STAR.
LUCINDA ALFORD MET THE MAN
WHOSE NAME IS ON EVERYONE'S LIPS**

Milan, Paris, New York, London...and now Dublin? At London Fashion Week, there was one name on every buyer's lips - John Rocha. Here was a designer, they said, who could combine commerciality and wearability with brilliant design.

John Rocha has lived in Dublin for the past 14 years. He arrived there via London from Hong Kong.

In the early 70s, when the only place to be a fashion student was London, Rocha left his native Hong Kong to study fashion at Croydon Art College. Holidays in Ireland inspired his work, and encouraged by the Irish Board of Trade, Rocha moved to Dublin when he graduated. Since then, his designs have continued to have a Celtic stamp.

Rocha's clothes don't shout 'designer', yet his return to the London catwalks after an absence of five years caused a sensation. He may have funkyed up the styling - he employed ELLE fashion director Kim Hunt to oversee the image - but his clothes were a hit with both the fashion crews and buyers.

This collection includes all the 'must-haves' for autumn. There are Aran zipper cardigans and heavy rib sweaters (cropped to the midriff) worn over crisp white shirts; 'weathered' leather trousers and mohair donkey jackets; long, bias-cut skirts in a patchwork of chiffon and velvet; floor-sweeping sheepskins and velvet reefer coats - all teamed with walking boots, Aran bobble hats and matching Dr Who scarves.

He uses natural Celtic colours - stone, moss green, cream, pale blue, slate grey and pistachio - given a

flash of alchemy with metallic silver and gold leather pants. 'Free in spirit...a bit Gypsy' is how Rocha describes his style. It also sums up the current fashion mood.

Rocha is a household name in Ireland through his original Chinatown label. The name came about, he says, 'because there weren't many Chinese people in Dublin at the time'. There still aren't many. Rocha himself is an eye-catching sight - with his long, black, centre-parted hair, he looks more Nava-jo Indian than Chinese.

The Chinatown label was dropped in favour of his own name. Apparently his Japanese customers weren't too keen on the original label, and he had problems selling to a Milanese store who reported they had a Chinese restaurant of the same name opposite their shop.

Odette, Rocha's wife, who once managed his Dublin shop, is his muse and 'commercial eye'. It's a family set-up that is proving successful. Although Italy remains his biggest market, UK sales went up 300 per cent after his recent London show. Lucille Lewin, owner of Whistles, who has stocked John Rocha clothes from the start, waxes lyrical about his 'delicate, almost poetic attitude' towards design. 'You can be dressed from head-to-toe in Rocha, but

you will never look "designer dressed", she says. Although he says travelling is a necessity - Ireland, he admits, can often feel very isolated - luckily Rocha has no plans to return to Hong Kong to live: 'It's just not me now'.

At a time when many are up and leaving for Europe and New York, British fashion has a new star, and one who intends to stick around. □

Natural colours reflecting the timeless beauty of the Irish landscape are teamed with metallic silver and gold to give a dash of contemporary brilliance



The collection that has set the fashion world alight: Rocha's designs combine a strong Celtic influence with a freedom of styling that has delighted buyers and fashion crews alike



Natural colours reflecting the timeless beauty of the Irish landscape are teamed with metallic silver and gold to give a dash of contemporary brilliance



LUCINDA ALFORD IS FASHION EDITOR OF THE OBSERVER

FASHION EYE

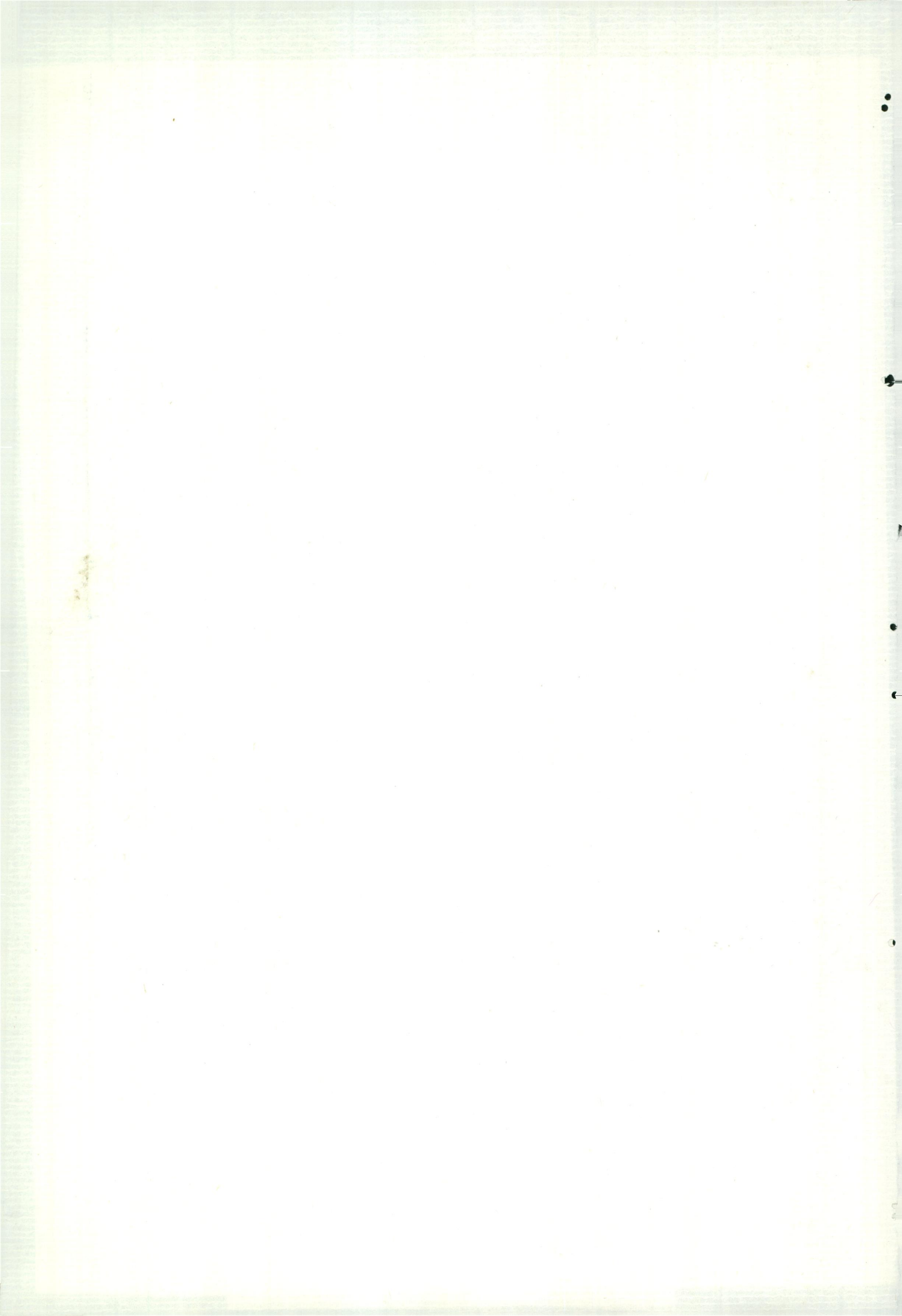
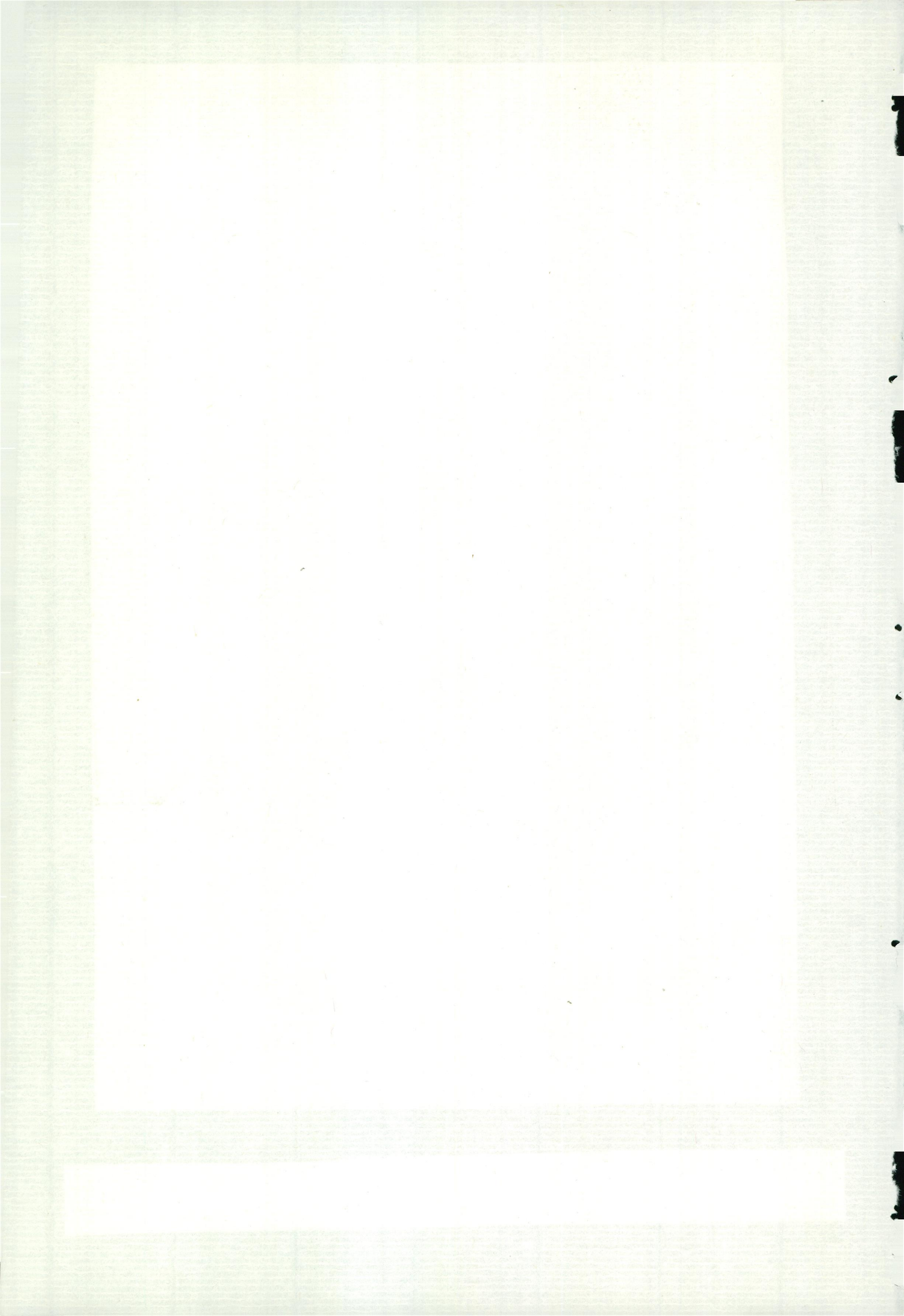




Fig. 10 : Garment designed by Kenzo, the shape is akin to the kimono style and is cut in an asymmetric style



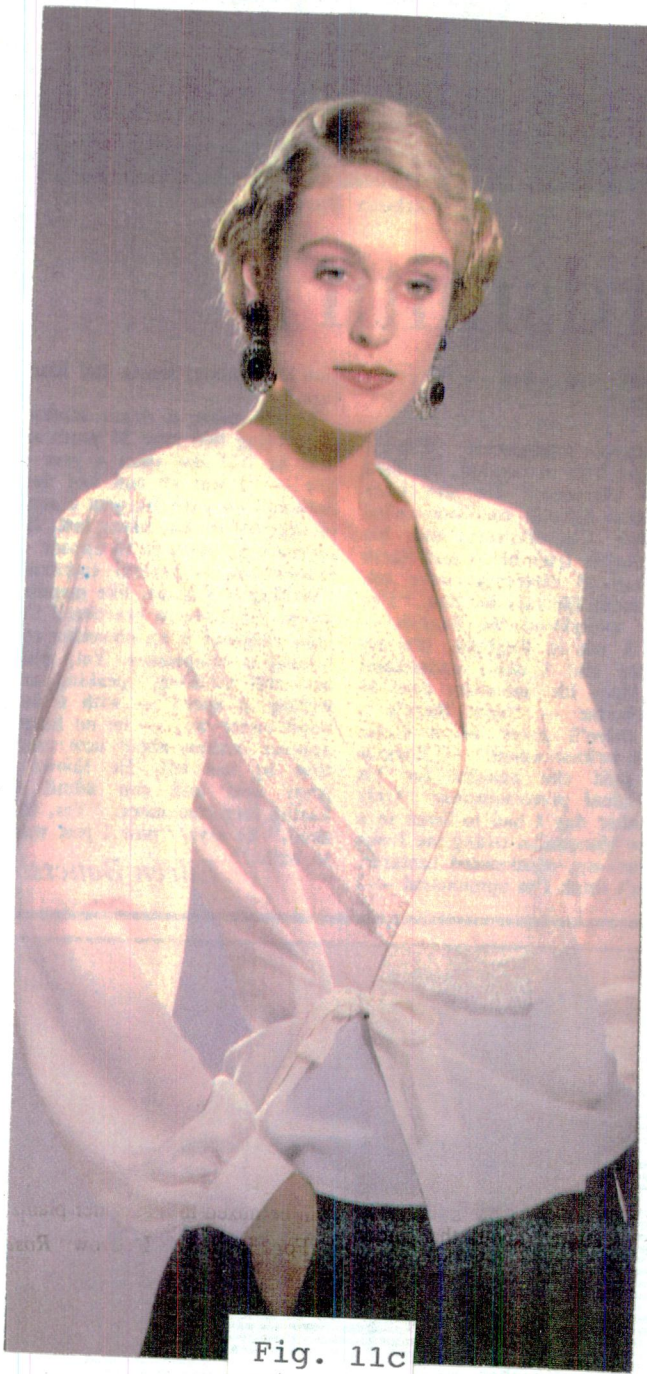


Fig. 11c

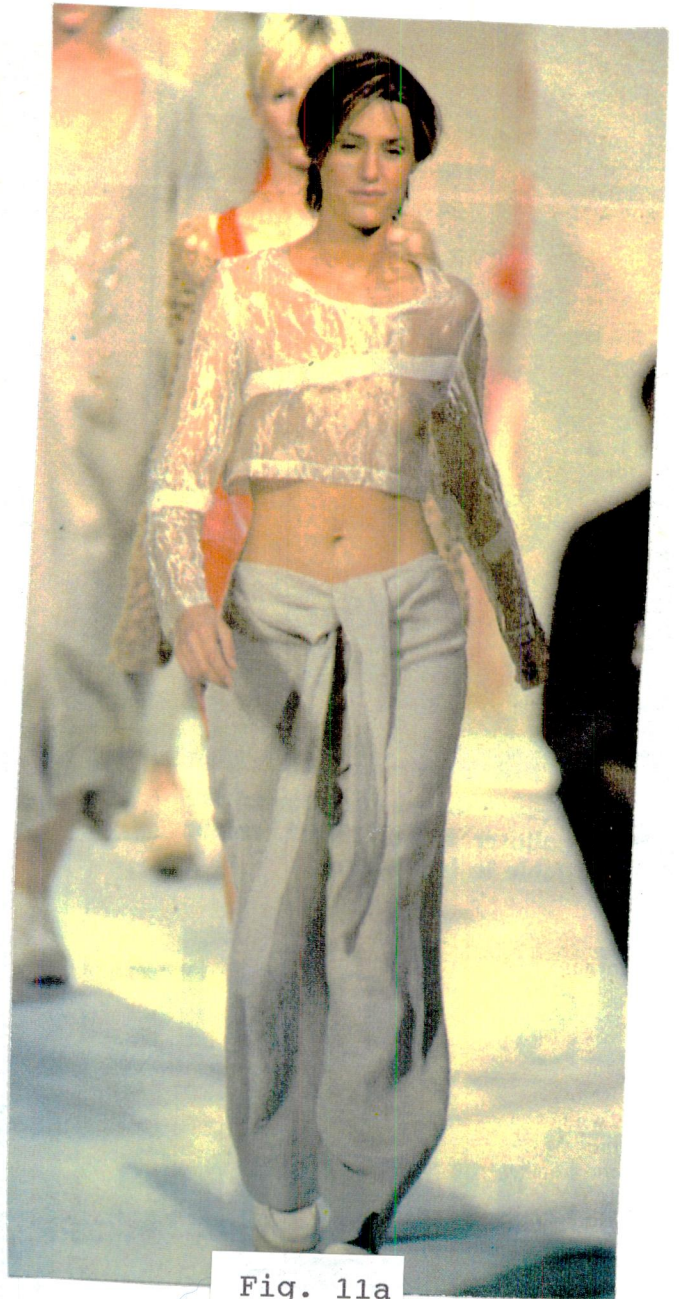


Fig. 11a

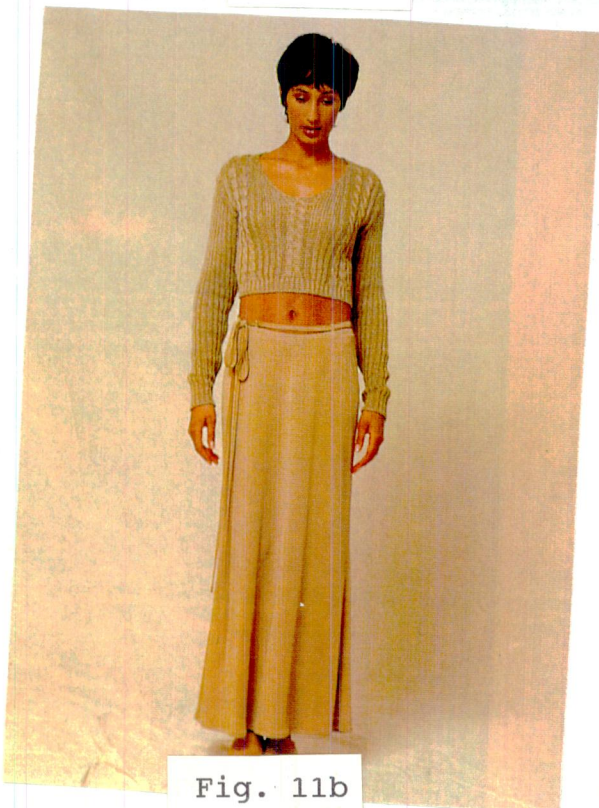


Fig. 11b

Fig. 11a, 11b and fig. 11c all use ties to fasten and open the garments this tie becomes a feature of the tailoring and a focus of the garment

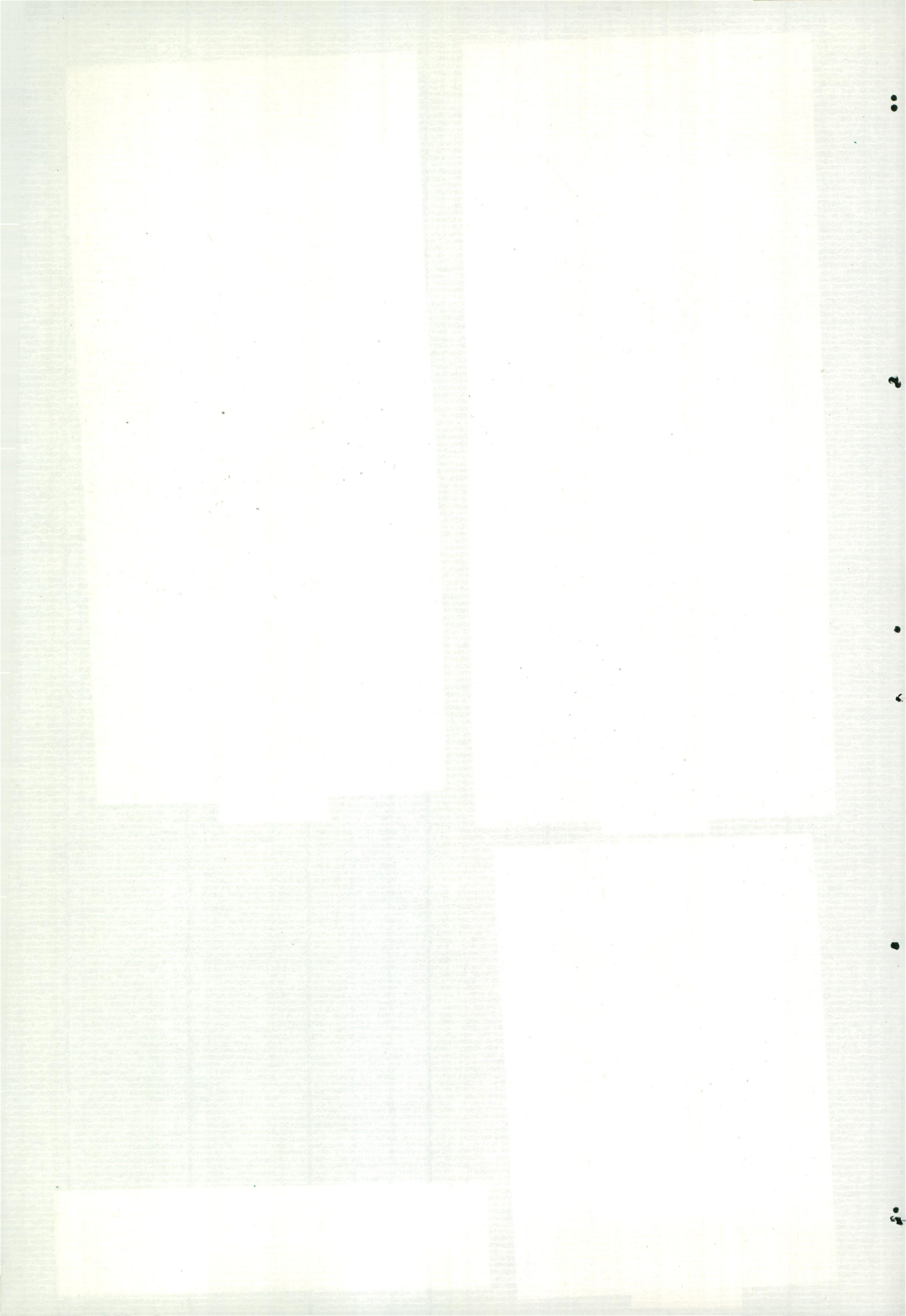




Fig. 12 : sweater by Japanese designer Kawakubo, with deliberate holes in order to achieve a lace effect



Fig. 13 : sweater by Rocha 1992, the knit alternates in a dense stitch and long floats of wool, which create different surfaces

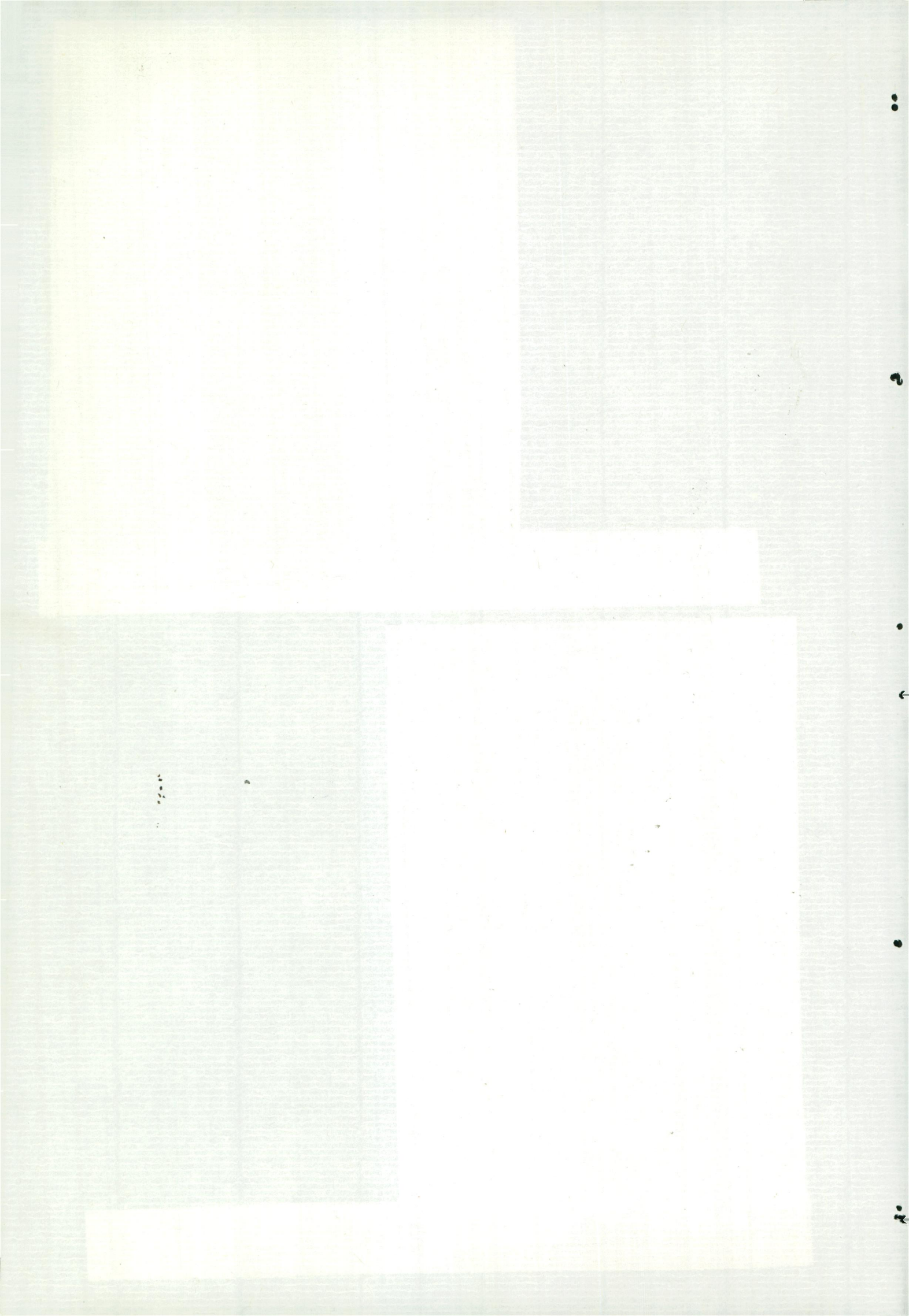




Fig. 14b : Skirt and jacket by Rocha
1989



Fig. 14a : Trousers suit by Rocha
1986

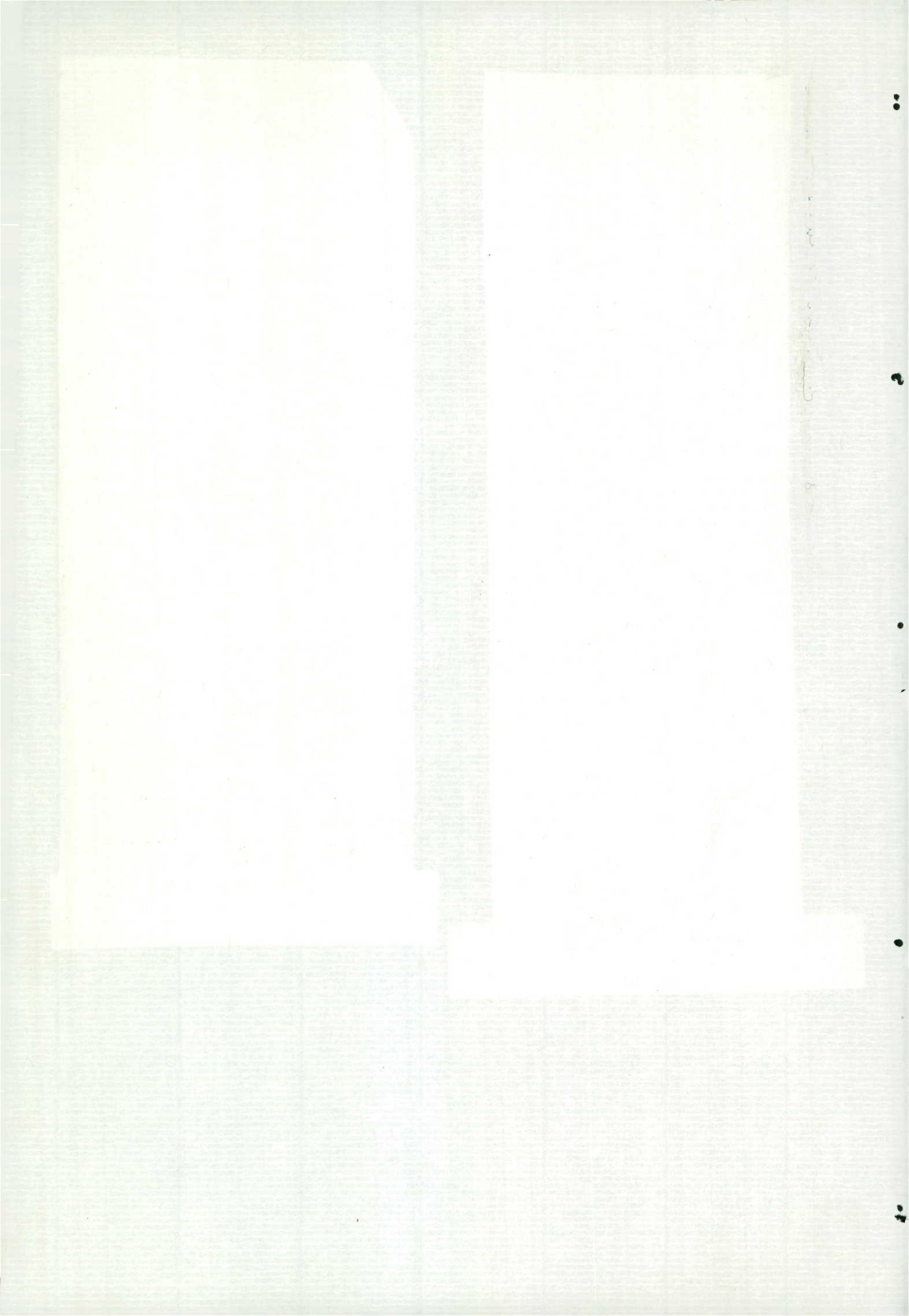




Fig. 15b



Fig. 15a



Fig. 15c

- Fig. 15a : Rocha menswear 1994
Fig. 15b : Rocha menswear 1992
Fig. 15c : mens knitwear by Rocha

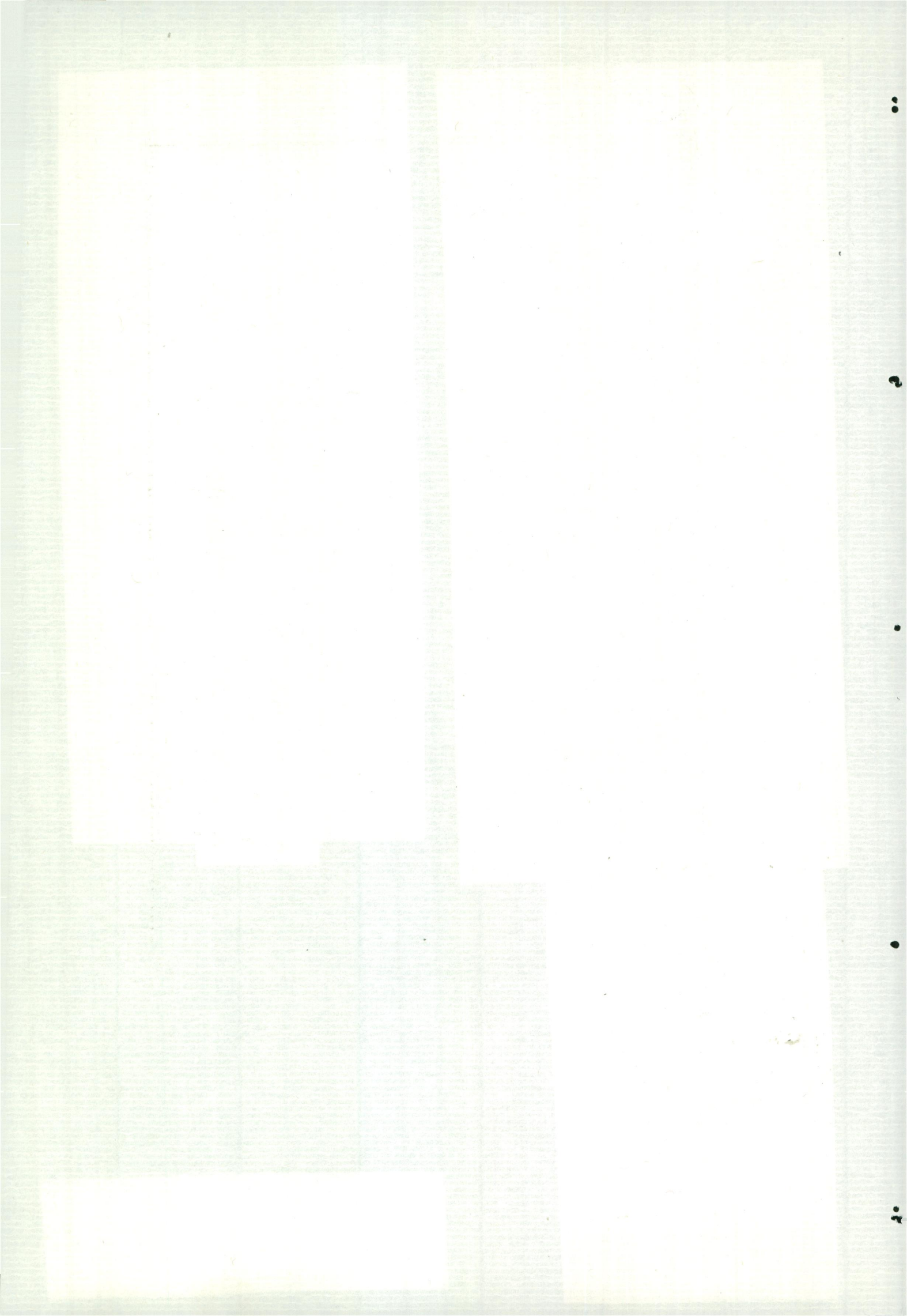




Fig. 16a contrasting textures and layering used by Rocha for men,
inset 16b menswear with layers of leather and knit

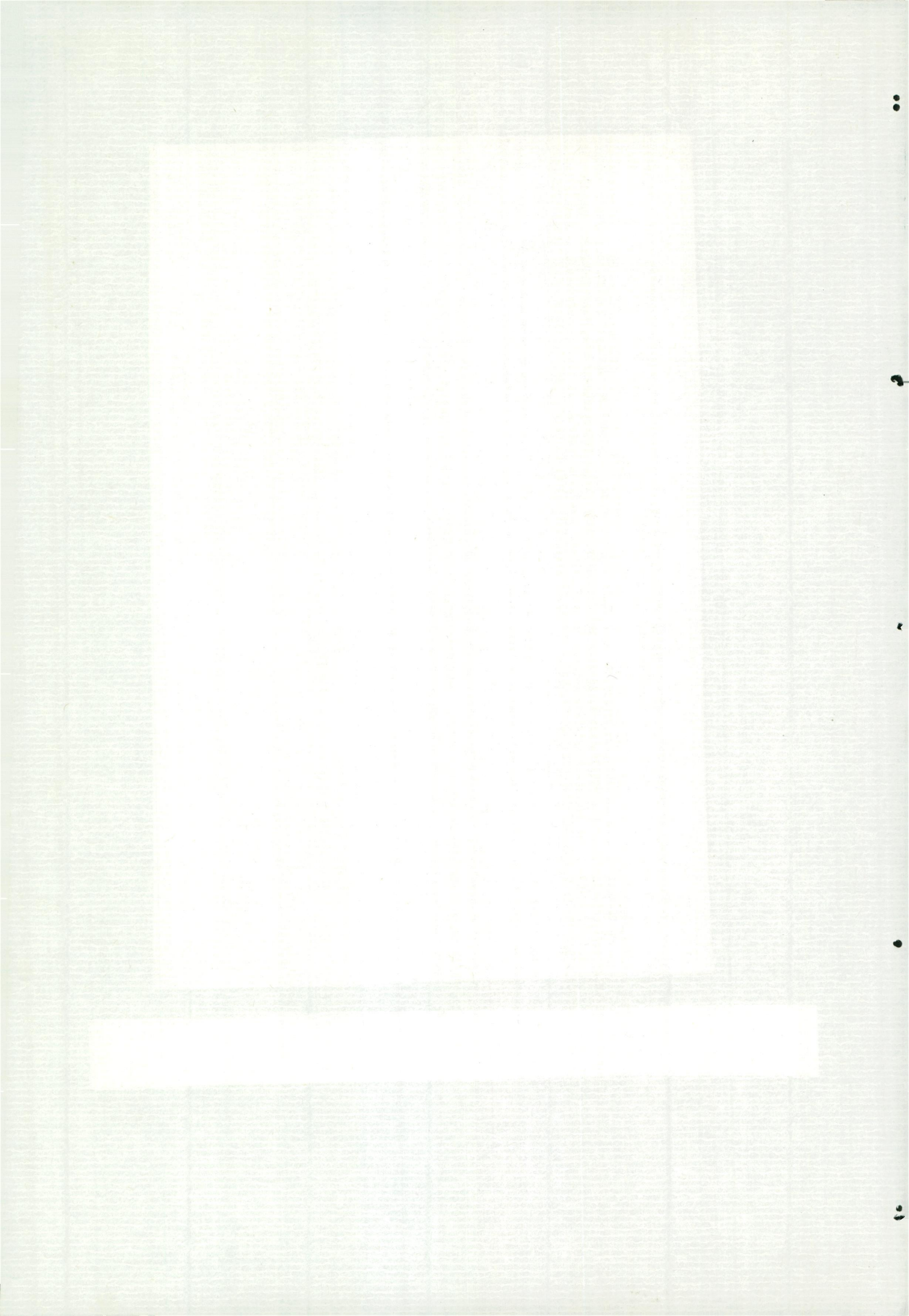
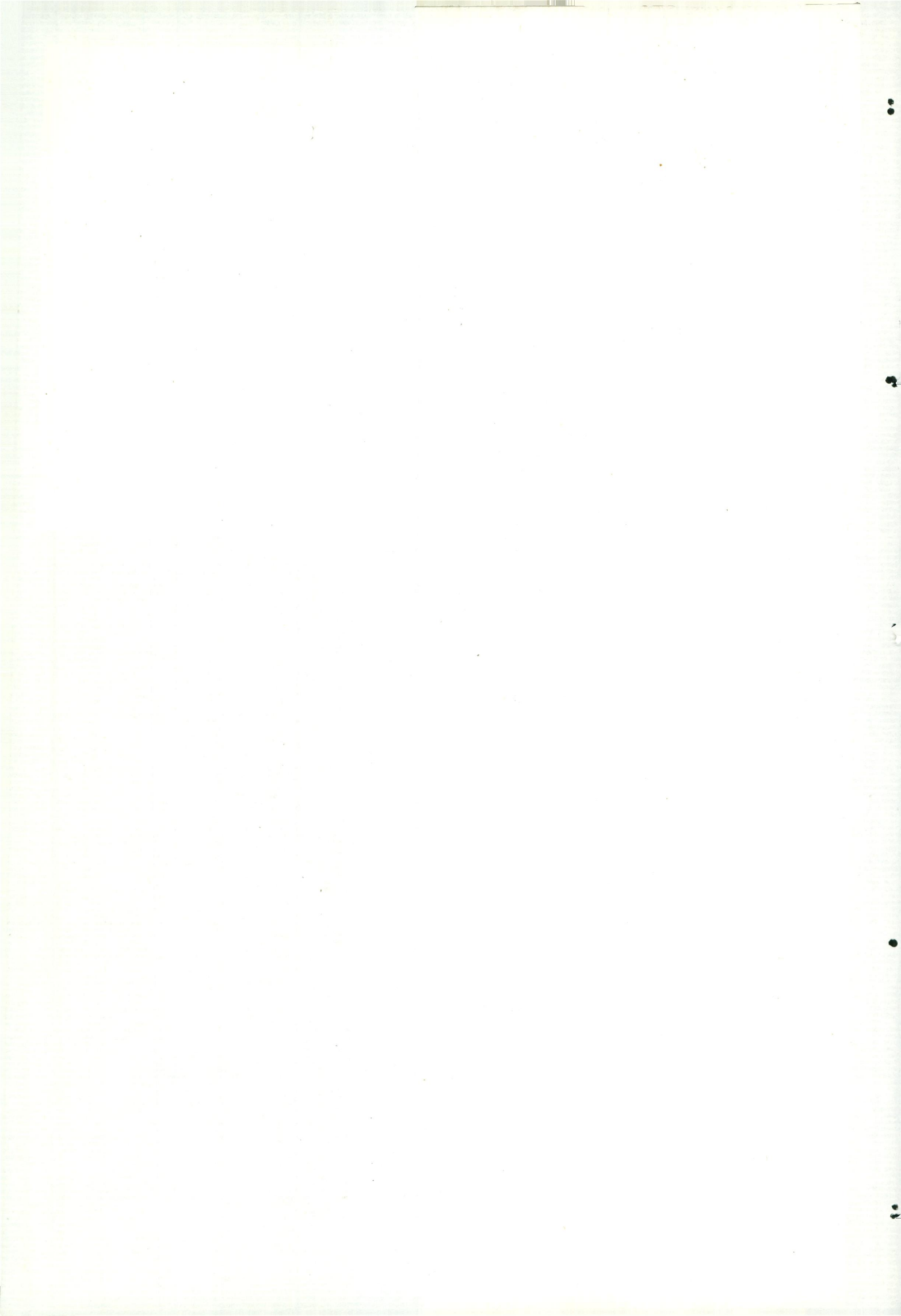




Fig. 18 : garments by Kawakubo using layering and various fabrics



Fig. 17 : Rocha 1986 suit





Black linen jacket
long cotton shirt
attached \$69 w
white linen trousers
White brogue

Fig. 19 : 19a by Rocha 1985, smaller ones are from Kenzo's collection in 1995 shown in 1994

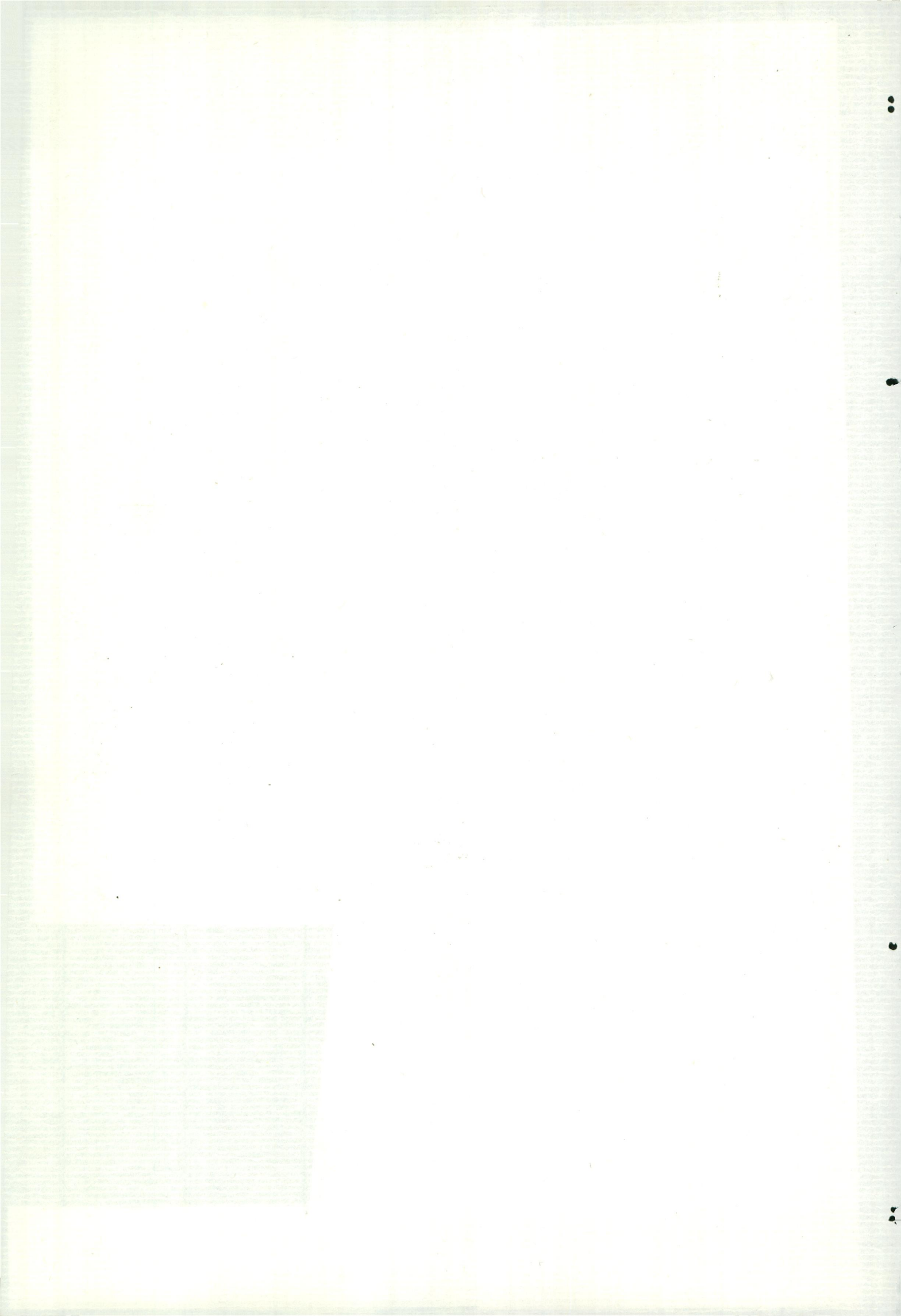




Fig. 20a



Fig. 20b

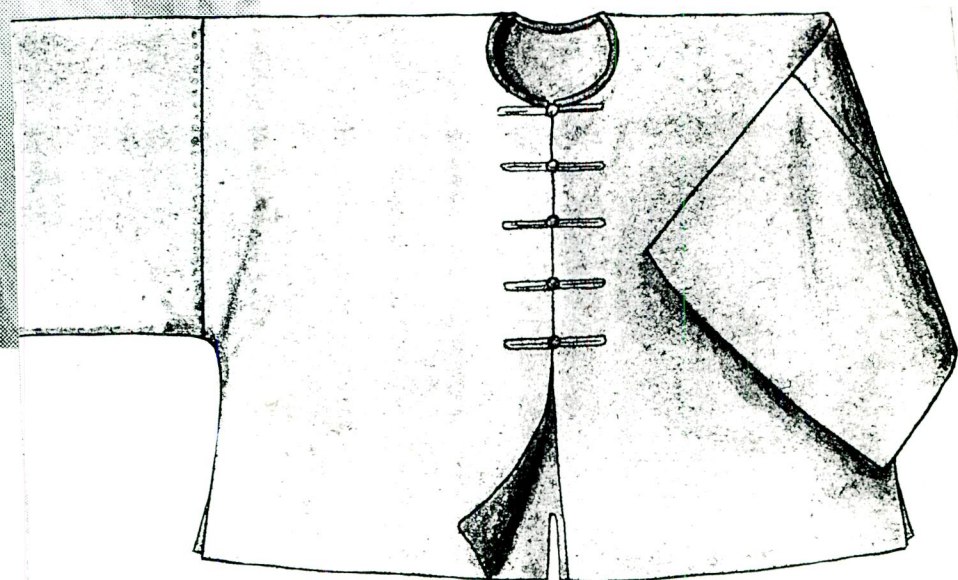


Fig. 20c

Fig. 20 : 20a Rocha
20b Rocha 1994
20c shows traditional
Eastern style buttoning
on jacket similar to 20a

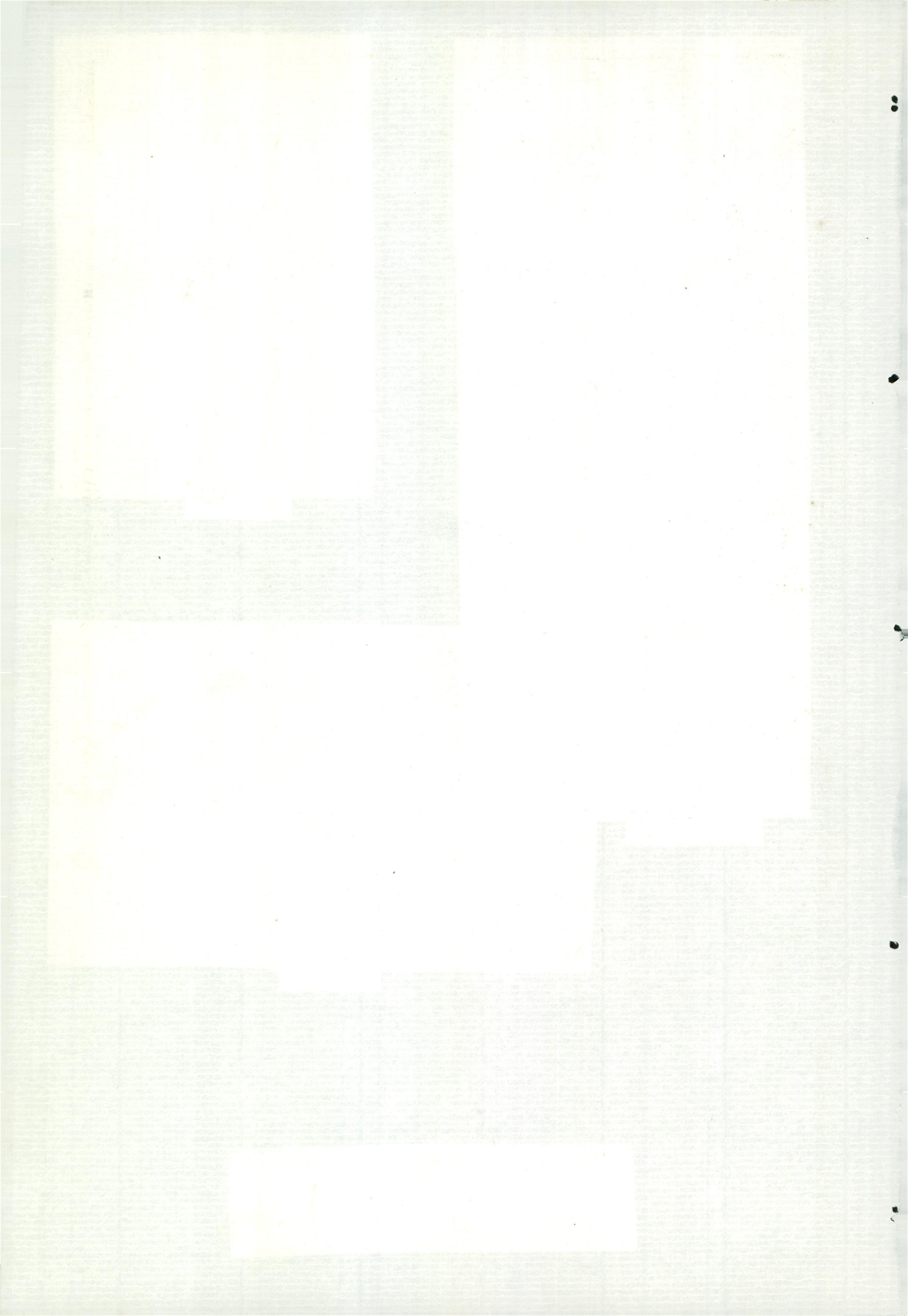




Fig 21b : Japanese pedlar woman



Fig. 21a : Rocha



Fig. 22 : Rocha Spring/Summer 1994, crocheted cloak and handpainted dress

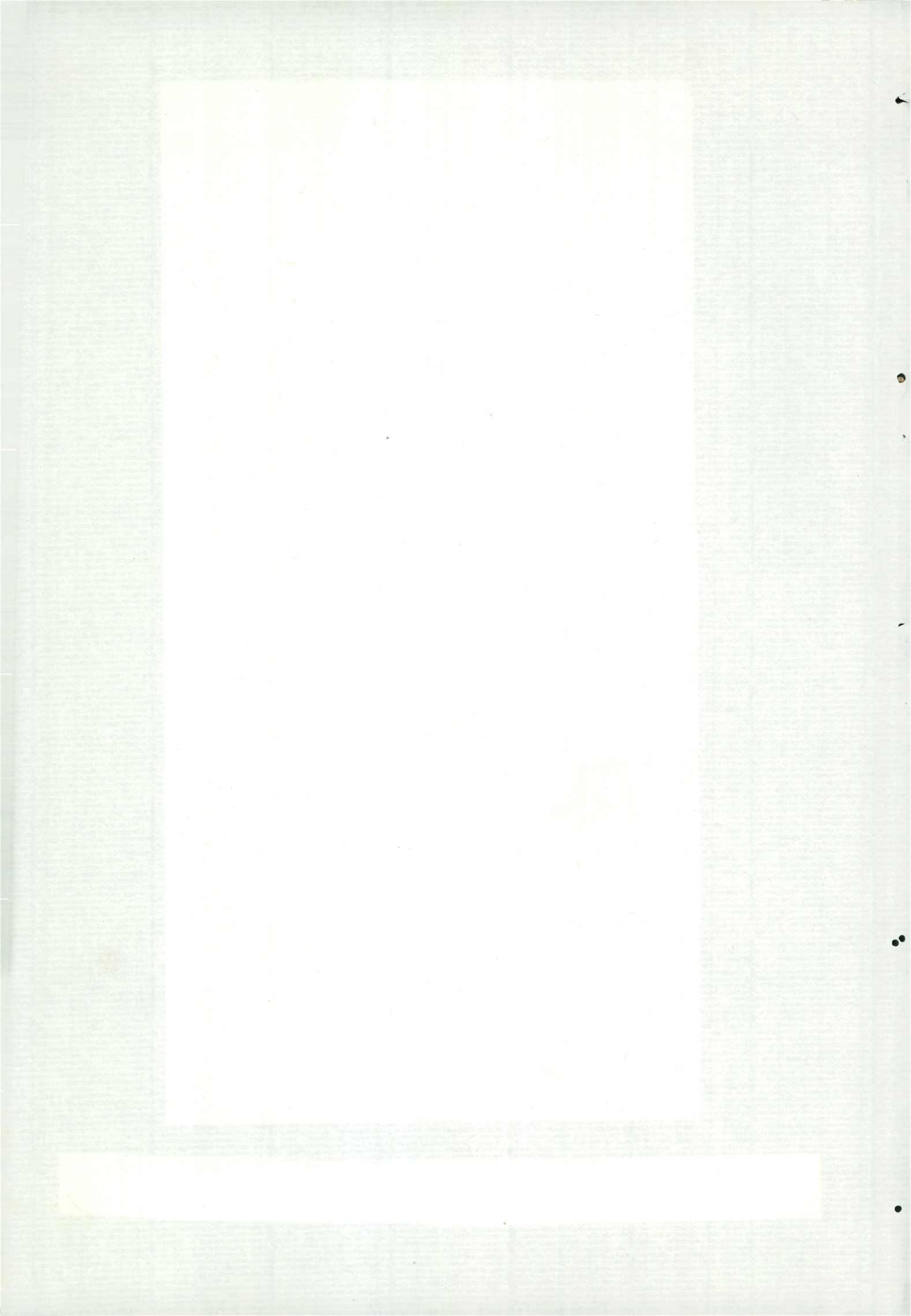




Fig. 23b

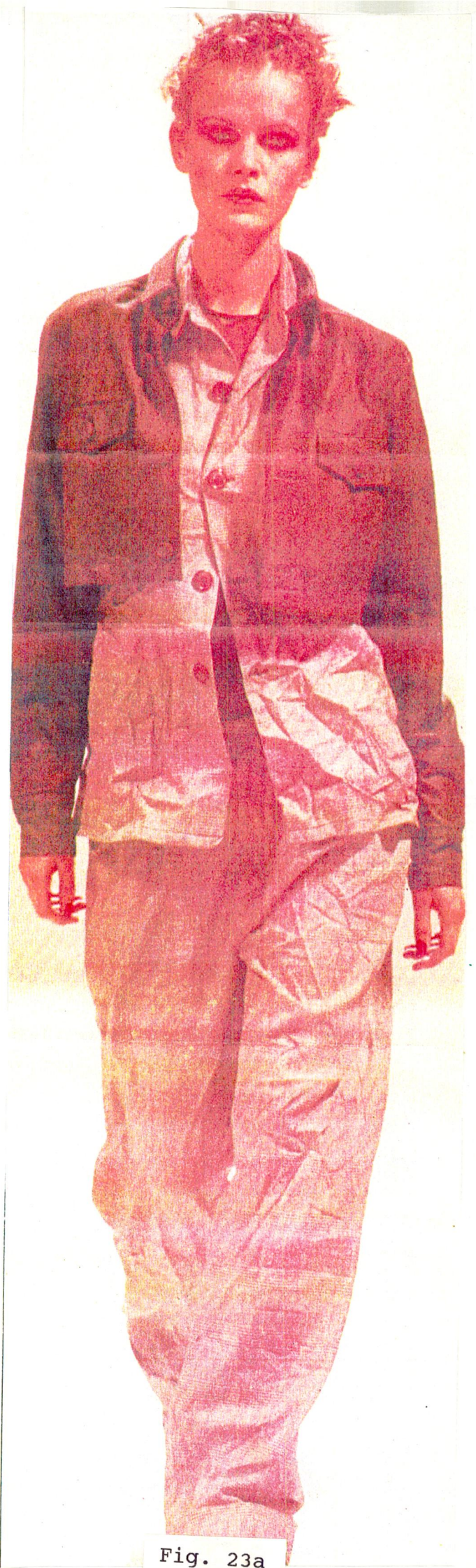


Fig. 23a

Fig. 23 : 23a Rocha
Autumn/Winter 1994/95

23b, Rocha same season
as above

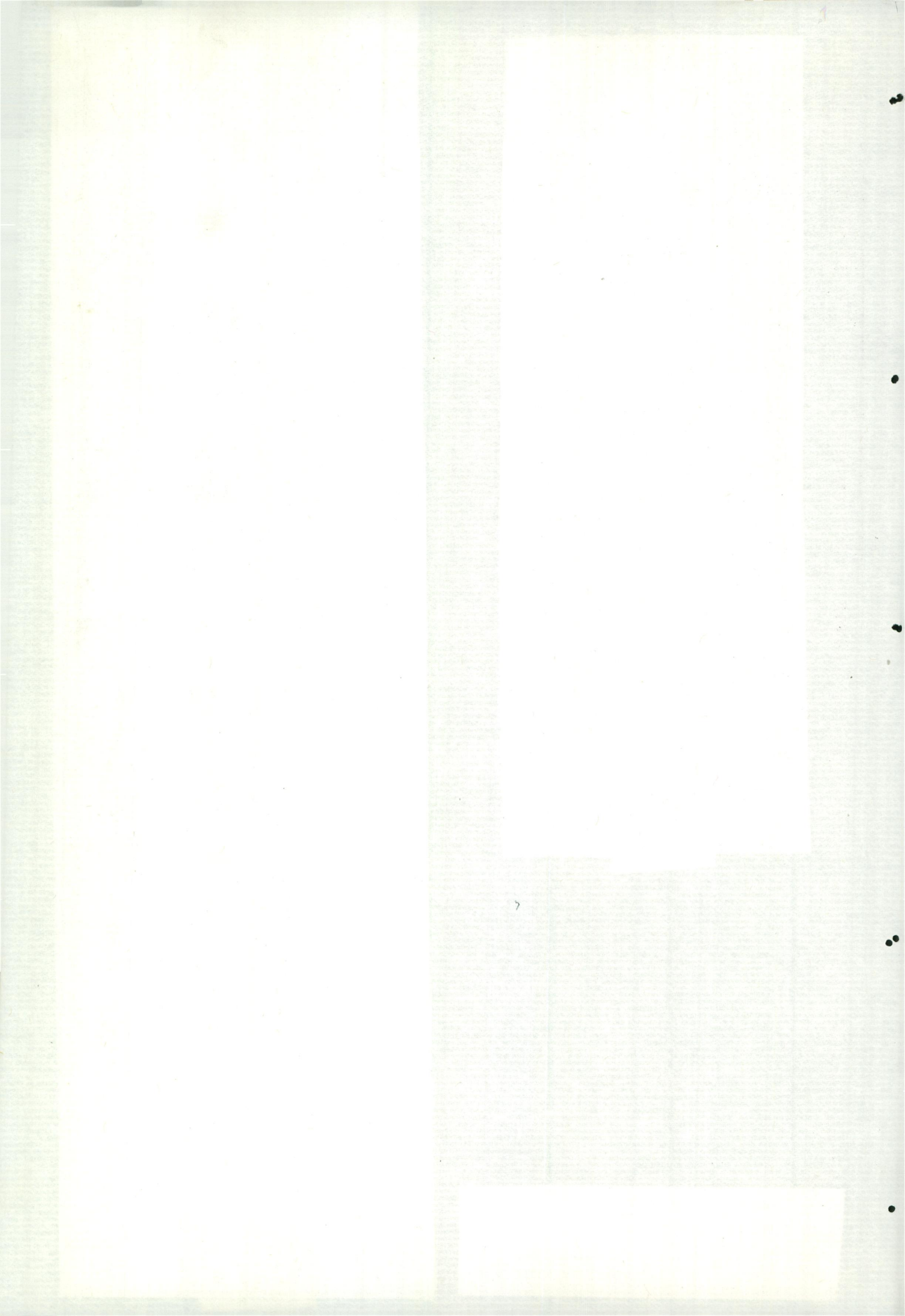




Fig. 24a

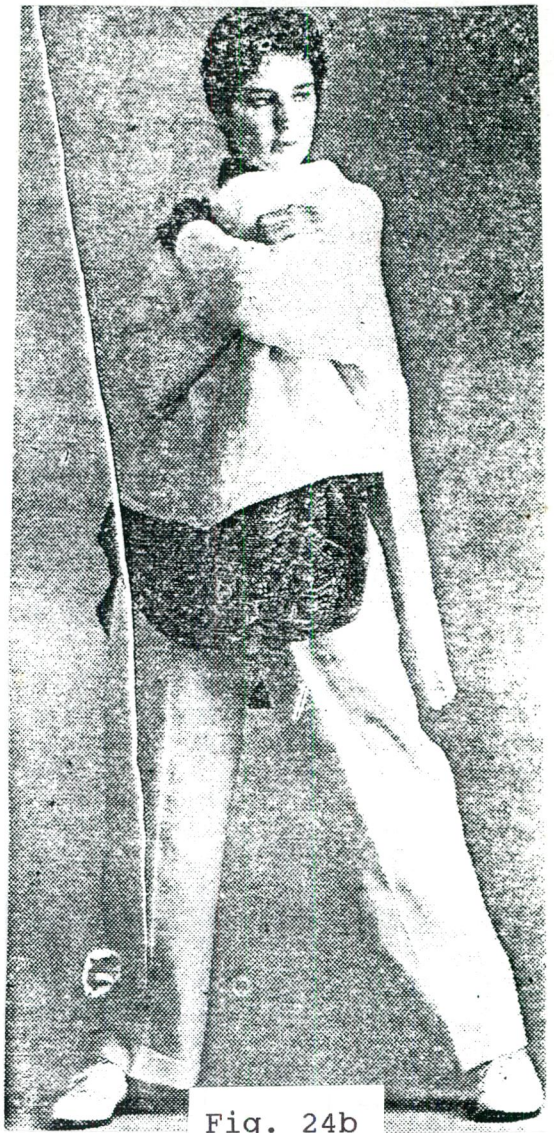


Fig. 24b



Fig. 24e

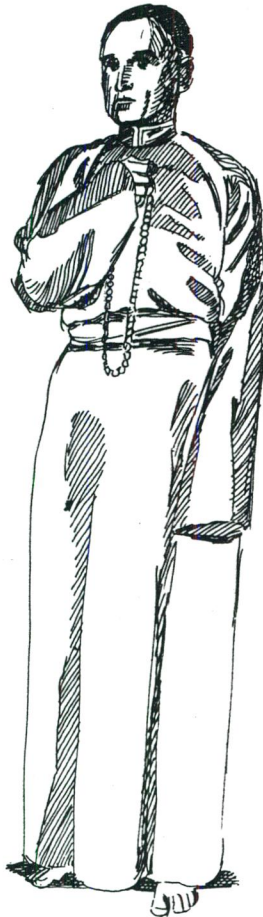


Fig. 24c



Fig. 24d

Fig. 24: 24a, 24b, Rocha , 24c, 24d and 24e are all examples of Eastern clothing using similar shapes to that of Rocha

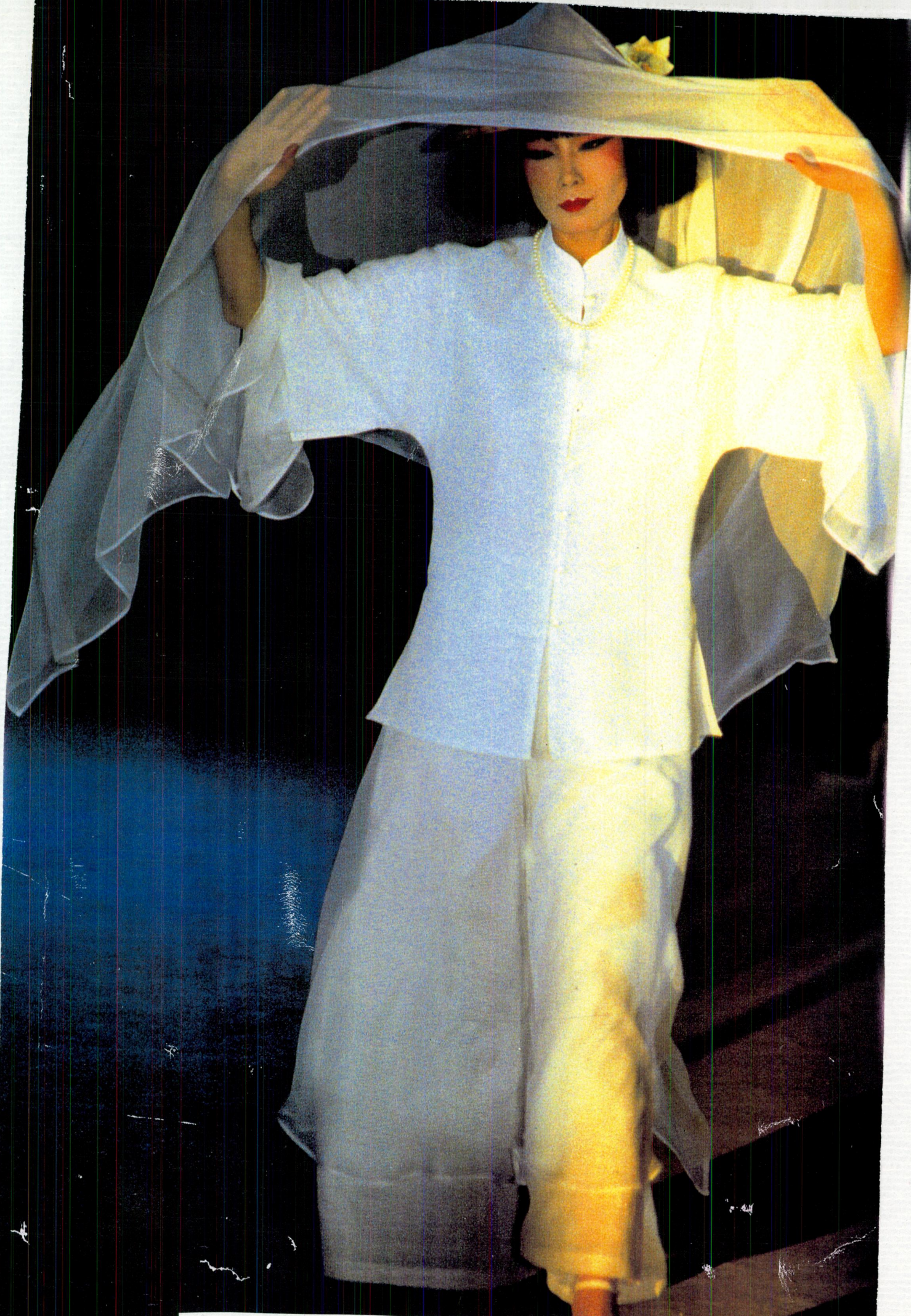


Fig. 25 : Bridal garment designed by Kenzo

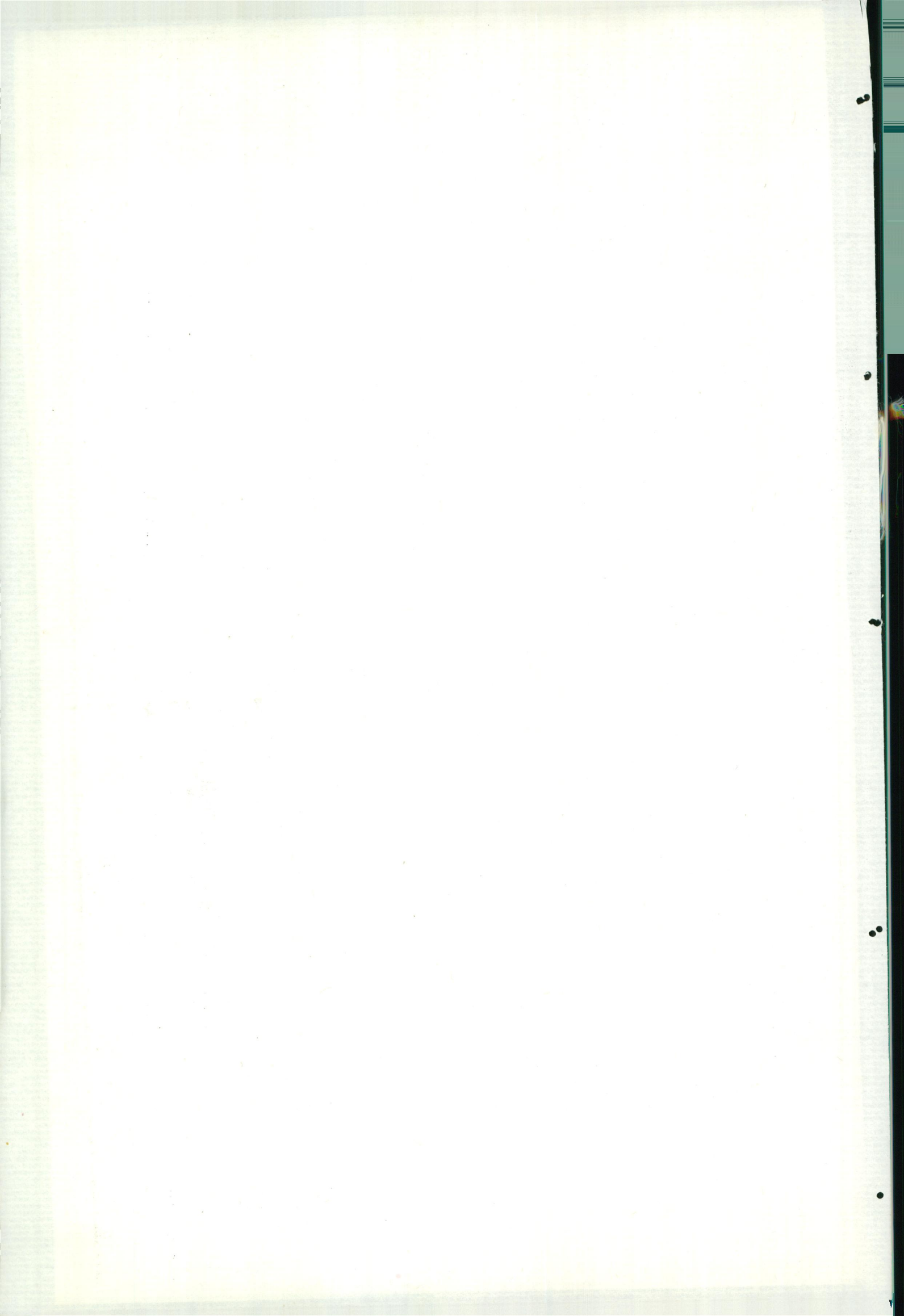




Fig. 26a



Fig. 26c



Fig. 26b



Fig. 26d

Fig. 26 : 26a, 26b, 26c and 26d are all by Rocha. They all use Irish motifs and traditional Irish techniques



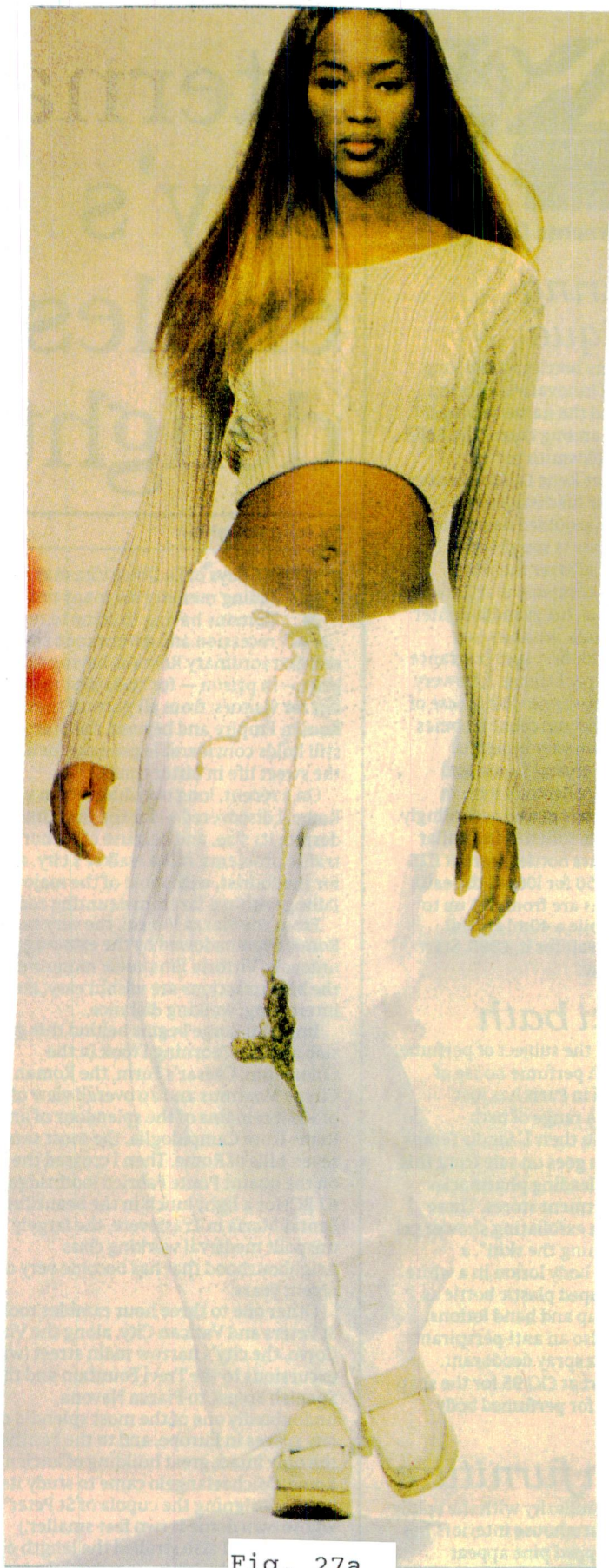


Fig. 27a



Fig. 27c

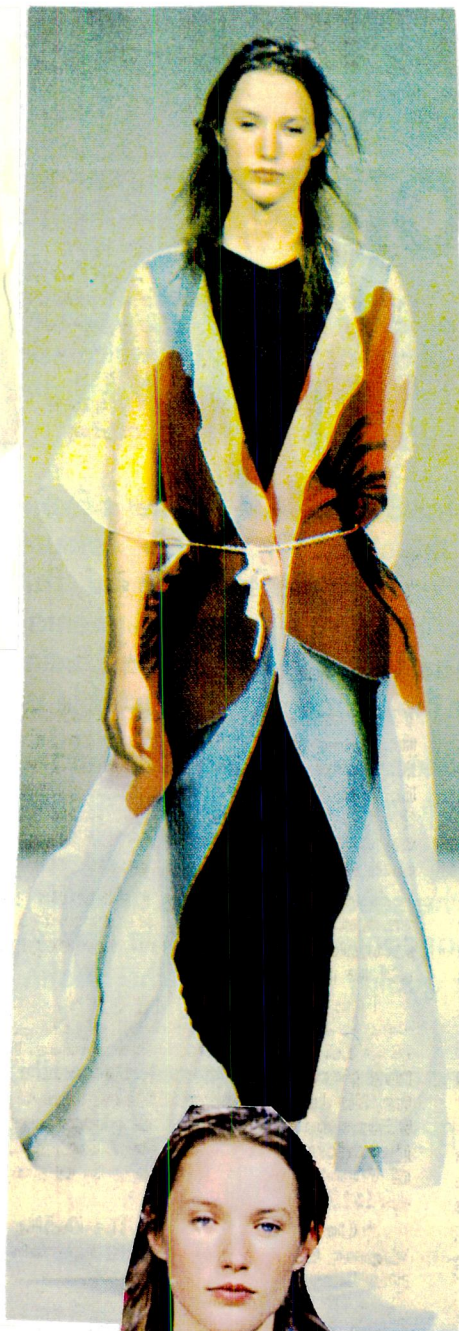


Fig. 27b



Fig. 27 : 27a, 27b, 27c, are all by Rocha and use a belt technique to close



Fig. 28 : Crocheted top made from hessian by Rocha from his 1994 Spring/Summer 1994 collection



Fig. 29 : Rocha Spring/Summer 1995 collection





Fig. 30 : Rocha Spring/Summer 1994



Fig. 31b



Fig. 31a

Fig. 31 : 31a, Rocha 1992
31b, historic example of Irish coat

