

# COLLECTING COMME

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# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Cape, shorts, socks and boots

2014 *Blood and Roses* collection, spring–summer 2015  
cotton, polyester, synthetic leather, nylon, plastic,  
elastic, rubber

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

After fifty years in fashion, Rei Kawakubo remains one of the most radical and visionary designers working today. In September 2013, she began a ten-season project that sought to, as she put it, ‘break the idea of clothes’ with increasingly abstract and inventive forms. This outfit from the *Blood and Roses* collection incorporates recurring elements in Kawakubo’s work – flowers and the colour red. The collection is symbolic of war and conflict, and its visceral palette and unorthodox volumes are expressive of Kawakubo’s pursuit of creative freedom.

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

*Blood and Roses* collection,  
spring–summer 2015

Video footage courtesy of Comme des Garçons

# ***Collecting Comme***

Rei Kawakubo (born Japan 1942), founder of Japanese fashion label Comme des Garçons, is considered one of the most visionary and influential designers working today. For nearly five decades Kawakubo has defied convention to redefine fashion. Her designs have subverted the norms of garment shape and function, reframed ideas of beauty, and proposed a new relationship between body and dress. In her endeavour to make clothes that, as she says, 'did not exist before', Kawakubo deconstructs clothing and creates it afresh.

*Collecting Comme* examines the radical concepts and design methods that have informed Kawakubo's practice since 1981, the year she first presented her garments in Paris. Key collections and recurrent themes in Kawakubo's work are explored through more than sixty-five examples. These are drawn from the NGV's significant holdings of designs by Comme des Garçons, generously gifted by Takamasa Takahashi, and supported by additional key loans from the collector's archive. The exhibition also features designs by two of Kawakubo's protégés, Junya Watanabe (born Japan 1961) and Tao Kurihara (born Japan 1973) from the NGV Collection.

*Collecting Comme* is testament to Takahashi's profound appreciation of Rei Kawakubo's work, and considers the designer's powerfully original contribution to contemporary fashion and her continuing influence.

Exhibition ebook available at [ngv.melbourne/collecting-comme](http://ngv.melbourne/collecting-comme)

# Takamasa Takahashi

Japanese-born Takamasa Takahashi became interested in fashion design as a teenager, first encountering the work of Rei Kawakubo and Comme des Garçons in the mid 1970s via the pages of influential Japanese magazine *anan*. The label's unorthodox and unstructured styles attracted Takahashi, who purchased his first Comme garment – a pair of wide, indigo blue, quilted cotton pants – in 1978. He soon started buying Kawakubo's genderless garments each season and wearing them on the streets of Tokyo.

In 1986, when the label's designs started becoming more feminine, Takahashi turned from wearing the garments to collecting them, purchasing two dresses from the *Bias Cutting* collection, spring–summer 1986, as his first collection pieces. Since then Takahashi has acquired works from many of Kawakubo's most significant collections over the past four decades.

In 2005, Takahashi became a donor to the National Gallery of Victoria's Fashion and Textiles collection and, through his steadfast generosity, has enabled the Gallery to build a collection of more than ninety works designed by Rei Kawakubo, and more than thirty-five works designed by two of her protégés, Junya Watanabe and Tao Kurihara. *Collecting Comme* aims to showcase both Rei Kawakubo's evolution as a fashion designer and Takahashi's vision as a collector.

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo

fashion house

Japan est. 1969

**Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

## Jumper, top, skirt and pouch

1982 *Holes* collection, autumn–winter 1982–83

wool, cotton, metal (fastenings), synthetic leather

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

‘I never intended to start a revolution. I only came to Paris with the intention of showing what I thought was strong and beautiful. It just so happened that my notion was different from everybody else’s.’

REI KAWAKUBO, 2005

Rei Kawakubo established Comme des Garçons in 1969 and began showing in Tokyo in 1975. She debuted in Paris in 1981 and the following year presented one of her most famous collections, *Holes*, shocking audiences with oversized and intentionally distressed black garments. Some critics called the look ‘apocalyptic’, while others admired Kawakubo’s inventiveness. The holes in this jumper were created by deliberately configuring the knitting machines to produce something that was not uniform or perfect.

# **Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## **Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

### **Coat, funnel neck top and skirt**

1982 *Holes* collection, autumn–winter 1982–83  
wool, metal, plastic (fastenings)

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Dress, gaiters and shoes

1981 *Indigo Dye and Twist* collection, spring–summer 1982  
linen, leather, rubber, cotton, cotton (laces)

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

Throughout the 1980s, Kawakubo worked with specialist Japanese textile manufacturers to produce fabrics with distinctive characteristics. She commissioned 'loom-distressed weaves' and fabrics that were repeat-dyed and then sun-bleached, crumpled or bonded. This dress is constructed from fabric woven with an indigo-dyed linen warp and unbleached linen weft, and is a traditional Japanese design commonly used for daily-wear kimonos. The dress is also asymmetrical: when laid flat it is possible to see that the left shoulder extends into an attached, short, open vest that then folds back on itself to become a second, layered bodice.



This outfit is representative of the time when Comme des Garçons fans were called 'crows'. I saw this runway show in Tokyo and remember it quite vividly. It started abrasively: a group of models in black appeared quietly on a dark stage, light hit for a split second, and then the models disappeared backstage. Suddenly a loud drum started and the show began, overflowing with mysteriously shapeless black clothes. It was an experience that I will never forget.

**TAKAMASA TAKAHASHI, 2019**

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

## Boots

1982 *Patchworks and X* collection, spring–summer 1983  
leather, rubber, metal (fastenings)

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Top and skirt

1982 *Patchworks and X* collection, spring–summer 1983  
cotton, plastic (buttons)

Presented through the NGV Foundation by Takamasa Takahashi, Fellow, 2005

2005.370.a-b

Kawakubo challenged many dominant fashion conventions by emphasising Japanese aesthetic principles in her work. Among them was wabi-sabi, a philosophy that encourages a respect for humble materials, imperfection and the patina of age. This outfit features patches dyed with different shades of black ink made from charcoal and normally used for Japanese calligraphy. For this collection, Kawakubo introduced purple-black, ink-black and green-black, which can be seen in the patchwork jacket. These shades, along with the design's exposed seams and intentionally frayed edges, typify the qualities that the international press and buyers initially found so confronting in Kawakubo's work.

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Jacket

1982 *Patchworks and X* collection, spring–summer 1983  
cotton, plastic (buttons)

Presented through the NGV Foundation by Takamasa Takahashi, Fellow, 2005

2005.369

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Coat, top, skirt and hat

1984 *Twist, Silk + Jersey, Knits (Patchworks)* collection, autumn–winter 1984–85

wool, cotton, rayon

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

Asymmetry and layering were central to Kawakubo's design vocabulary throughout the 1980s. In addition to experimenting with pattern and form, she shunned traditional tailoring in favour of methods such as knotting and wrapping. These techniques produced forms that responded to the wearer's body. Here, twisted layers of cotton jersey pucker and gather unevenly, displacing seams, while turned-under hemlines create further irregularity.

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Top, sweater and pants

1983 *Gloves, Skirts, Quilted Big Coats* collection, autumn–winter 1983–84

wool, nylon, plastic (fastenings), leather

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

Rather than flattering the female figure, Kawakubo's clothes are often oversized and enveloping. Her exaggerated volumes reject overt sexuality and prioritise comfort and ease of wearing. They also question the purpose of fashion. Kawakubo has stated that her designs 'are for modern, working women. Women who do not need to assure their happiness by looking sexy to men, by emphasising their figures, but who attract them with their minds'.

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Jacket and skirt

1987 *Frontless, Lamé, Sequins* collection,  
spring–summer 1988

wool, rayon, nylon, polyester, metal (fastenings)

Promised gift of Takamasa Takahashi, 2019

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

## Hat and shoes

1987 *Frontless, Lamé, Sequins* collection,  
spring–summer 1988

wool, rayon, nylon, polyester, metal (fastenings), leather

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi



# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

*Patchworks and X* collection,  
spring–summer 1983

Video footage courtesy of Comme des Garçons

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

## Half jacket and shorts

2011 *Hybrid* collection,  
autumn–winter 2011–12

wool, cupro, polyester, elastic, metal (zipper), plastic (buttons)

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2015

2015.137.a-b

# **Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## **Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

## **Peter Lindbergh** photographer

German 1944–2019

## **Press catalogue**

no. 75, 5 November 1981

offset lithography

Private collection

In the mid 1970s, around the time Kawakubo showed her first womenswear collection in Tokyo, she began producing press catalogues to publicise her clothes in a way that expressed her intentions. Early issues featured arresting imagery by photographers Kazumi Kurigami, Sarah Moon and Deborah Turbeville.

In 1981, Kawakubo began a long-term collaboration with German photographer Peter Lindbergh that would help define the tone and register of later collections. Lindbergh's grainy black-and-white portraits of self-possessed women, free of artifice, projected the kind of assertive femininity that Kawakubo intended. As she once stated, 'fashion's purpose is to allow a person to be what they are'.

# **Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## **Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

## **Hans Feurer** photographer

Switzerland born 1939

## **Press catalogue**

no. 83, 5 April 1984

offset lithography

National Gallery of Victoria, Shaw Research Library  
Gift of Takamasa Takahashi  
Campbell-Pretty Fashion Research Collection

# **Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## **Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

## **Oliviero Toscani** photographer

Italy born 1942

## **Press catalogue**

no. 78, 5 November 1982

offset lithography

National Gallery of Victoria, Shaw Research Library  
Gift of Takamasa Takahashi  
Campbell-Prety Fashion Research Collection

# **Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## **Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

## **Peter Lindbergh** photographer

German 1944–2019

## **Press catalogue**

no. 79, 5 January 1983

offset lithography

National Gallery of Victoria, Shaw Research Library  
Gift of Takamasa Takahashi  
Campbell-Pretty Fashion Research Collection

# **Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## **Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

## **Peter Lindbergh** photographer

German 1944–2019

## **Press catalogue**

no. 93, 10 July 1986

offset lithography

National Gallery of Victoria, Shaw Research Library  
Gift of Takamasa Takahashi  
Campbell-Pretty Fashion Research Collection

# **Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## **Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

## **Stephen Meisel** photographer

United States born 1954

## **Press catalogue**

no. 94, 10 September 1986

offset lithography

National Gallery of Victoria, Shaw Research Library  
Gift of Takamasa Takahashi  
Campbell-Pretty Fashion Research Collection



# **Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## **Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

## **Paolo Roversi** photographer

Italy born 1947

## **Press catalogue**

no. 91, 10 January 1986

offset lithography

National Gallery of Victoria, Shaw Research Library  
Gift of Takamasa Takahashi  
Campbell-Pretty Fashion Research Collection

# **Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## **Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

## **Peter Lindbergh** photographer

German 1944–2019

## **Press catalogue**

no. 88, 10 July 1985

offset lithography

National Gallery of Victoria, Shaw Research Library  
Gift of Takamasa Takahashi  
Campbell-Pretty Fashion Research Collection

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Jacket

1981 *Pirates* collection, autumn–winter 1981–82  
wool, cotton, plastic (fastenings)

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

*Eccentric* collection,  
spring–summer 1994

Video footage courtesy of Comme des Garçons

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

## Hat

1985 *Bias Cutting* collection, spring–summer 1986  
nylon, cotton

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Dress

1985 *Bias Cutting* collection, spring–summer 1986  
nylon, polyester, cotton, polyurethane

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2019

2019.415

This dress is one of the first instances where Kawakubo created a silhouette that followed the natural lines of the female body. Much like early twentieth-century French couturier Madeleine Vionnet, who used bias cutting in a revolutionary way to recast the relationship between body and fabric, here Kawakubo uses the technique to explore ideas of irregularity and asymmetry. Ingeniously using a bias-cut length of fabric stitched along the long edges, Kawakubo's design encircles the body to fasten over the shoulder with a single strap.

This is my first collection piece and is quite different from previous Comme collections. Brazilian samba music was used for the runway show, as if manifesting Kawakubo's mood for this season. The overall impression I had from the collection was freshness and lightness. This doubled-hemmed dress inflated as the model walked. It was breathtakingly beautiful. The asymmetric hem, caused by the bias cut, is used as a feature of the design instead of adjusting it. I was immediately drawn in and ordered it at the Comme shop.

**TAKAMASA TAKAHASHI, 2019**

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Dress

1985 *Bias Cutting* collection, spring–summer 1986  
polyester, plastic (buttons)

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2019

2019.414



# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

## Hat

1985 *Bias Cutting* collection, spring–summer 1986  
nylon, cotton

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

# **Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## **Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

### **Overdress, dress and shoes**

1993 *Eccentric* collection, spring–summer 1994

polyester, cupro, cotton (canvas), cotton (velour), rubber, metal (fastenings)

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

**Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

## Dress

1993 *Eccentric* collection, spring–summer 1994  
polyester, cupro, elastic

Promised gift of Takamasa Takahashi, 2019

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

## Shoes

1993 *Eccentric* collection, spring–summer 1994

cotton (canvas), cotton (velour), rubber, metal (fastenings)

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

**Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

## Sleeve

2011 *Hybrid* collection,  
autumn–winter 2011–12  
synthetic fabric

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian  
Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2015

2015.140

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

## Half jacket

2011 *Hybrid* collection,  
autumn–winter 2011–12  
boiled wool, nylon

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian  
Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2015

2015.136

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

**Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

## Half shorts

2011 *Hybrid* collection,  
autumn–winter 2011–12  
wool

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian  
Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2015

2015.138

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

## Overdress, dress and leggings

1998 *Fusion* collection, autumn–winter 1998–99

wool, polyester, metal

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Cultural Gifts Program, 2018

2018.853.a-b

For her 1998 *Fusion* collection, Kawakubo collaged different garment forms, fused and mismatched fabrics, turned linings into exteriors, and displaced fastenings. As much about construction as deconstruction, the collection exposed components of clothes that are normally hidden, while retaining traces of the tailoring process. The idea was to consider the value of things that are unfinished. Here, Kawakubo makes a feature of offset fastenings, stepped seams and non-functional openings.



# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Coat and pants

1986 *Bonding* collection, autumn–winter 1986–87  
wool, nylon, metal, plastic (fastenings)

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2019

2019.417.a-b

In 2016, Rei Kawakubo described her work as a career-length 'exploration of expressions of the unfinished, imbalance, fusion and elimination'. Many of her collections explore either one or several of these ideas. In this outfit, the unorthodox contours that animate the coat are the result of an experimental approach to pattern-making and innovative fabric treatments; in this case, bonded wool supplies the stiffness necessary to create both roundness and angles.

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Dress

1997 *Adult Punk* collection, autumn–winter 1997–98  
polyester, wool, cotton, metallic thread

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2017

2017.144

'My idea was to start with something perfect and  
go backwards.'

REI KAWAKUBO, 1997

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

## Shoes

1997 *Adult Punk* collection, autumn–winter 1997–98  
leather, synthetic fabric

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2017

2017.143.b-c

# **Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## **Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

### **Jacket, skirt and skirt**

1986 *Bonding* collection, autumn–winter 1986–87  
wool, plastic (fastenings)

Promised gift of Takamasa Takahashi, 2019

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

## Hat

1986 *Bonding* collection, autumn–winter 1986–87  
wool

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

# Chic punk

Rei Kawakubo's runway collections of the early 1980s introduced a revolutionary new aesthetic to fashion. In contrast to the prevailing trend of bodycon styles and high glamour, the garments designed by Kawakubo were unorthodox, oversized, purposely distressed and predominantly black. She disregarded symmetry and perfect fit, instead creating clothes that enveloped and concealed the body. By experimenting with fabrics, form, pattern-cutting and construction, Kawakubo challenged the fundamentals of fashion, seeing her work as 'expressions of [the] unfinished, imbalance, fusion and elimination'.

Kawakubo continued to push conceptual boundaries into the 1990s. Her collections challenged the codes of menswear and womenswear, questioned perceptions of beauty and ugliness, countered prescribed notions of femininity and, controversially, proposed an entirely new relationship between garment and body. Kawakubo's punk-themed collections highlight the designer's iconoclasm, but also her desire to find a way of dressing that was liberating and empowering.

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

*Metamorphosis* collection,  
autumn–winter 1994–95

*Beyond Taboo* collection,  
autumn–winter 2001–02

*Bad Taste* collection,  
autumn–winter 2008–09

Video footage courtesy of Comme des Garçons

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Top and pants

1994 *Metamorphosis* collection, autumn–winter 1994–95  
wool, nylon, cupro, metal (fastenings), plastic (buttons)

Promised gift of Takamasa Takahashi, 2019

Into the 1990s, Kawakubo's collections continued to contest definitions of beauty and taste. Experimenting with atypical fabrics and a grunge aesthetic, the *Metamorphosis* collection featured ragged, tattered and ill-fitting clothes. Making use of boiled woollens that were shrunk after construction, Kawakubo revalues the ugly and abject to disrupt traditional rules of dress.



# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Jacket and skirt

1995 *Sweeter than Sweet* collection, autumn–winter 1995–96

wool, plastic (buttons), metal (fastenings)

Promised gift of Takamasa Takahashi, 2019

Kawakubo's stated intention with this collection was to express an 'extreme sweetness', so cloying as to be 'almost overpowering'. The works challenge the restrictive nature of gendered dress codes by juxtaposing perceived feminine elements, such as flowers, frills, pastels, tulle and lace, with silhouettes that prevent any movement of the arms. This outfit, with its floral motifs, has a girlish quality that on closer inspection is offset by stiff sculptural folds and heavy, utilitarian boiled wool.

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Jacket, bodysuit, skirt, leggings and boots

1991 *Chic Punk* collection, autumn–winter 1991–92  
wool, PVC, synthetic fabric, nylon, polyurethane, plastic, leather, metal (fastenings)

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

In the early 1990s, Kawakubo began to introduce punk elements into her work. Materials such as tartan, PVC, fishnet, leather, zips and bondage straps appeared in a suite of collections that drew on the energy, spirit and style of punk. She also embraced the colour red. Kawakubo has always found strength in non-conformity. Here, the contrast between the formality of the tuxedo jacket, with its large fabric rosette, and the cheapness of the transparent PVC skirt encapsulates the visual provocation at the heart of her practice.

# **Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## **Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

## **Cape, dress and shoes**

1999 *Transformed Glamour* collection, autumn–winter  
1999–2000

wool, lurex, plastic, cotton, leather, wood, rubber

Promised gift of Takamasa Takahashi, 2019

# **Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## **Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

### **Vest, jacket, dress and shoes**

2001 *Hard and Forceful (Energy)* collection, autumn–winter 2000–01

cupro, nylon, wool, leather, metal (fastenings),  
cotton (laces)

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

## Dress and shoes

2001 *Beyond Taboo* collection, autumn–winter 2001–02  
polyester, nylon, rayon, leather, diamantes, metal  
(fastenings)

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

In this collection, women's underwear was exposed on the outside. This caught my attention, and I wondered if Kawakubo was using lingerie as a metaphor. After I bought the work, I realised it was also structurally very interesting. Kawakubo said in 2004, 'Challenging considered taboos is rewarding. People will be truly liberated when they persevere. Exposing women's underwear on the outside breaks up erotic desires and challenges taboos to gain strength'.

**TAKAMASA TAKAHASHI, 2019**

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

**Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

## Half coat

2011 *Hybrid* collection,  
autumn–winter 2011–12  
wool, synthetic fabric

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian  
Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2015

2015.135

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

**Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

## Top

2011 *Hybrid* collection,  
autumn–winter 2011–12

Lyocell, nylon, polyurethane, plastic zips, synthetic fabric (second-hand scarves), cotton

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2015

2015.141

The *Hybrid* collection explored the concept of hybridity to propose new clothing forms. In this collection, Kawakubo deconstructed garments by halving them and marrying the pieces to different components – right-hand sleeves tied to the left-hand sides of blazers and coats, front panels mismatched with different backs, and tailored shorts were high on one leg and draped long on the other. This top was created by draping and twisting vintage scarves across the body in an irregular fashion.



# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

## Jacket, bra, dress, hat, socks and shoes

2008 *Bad Taste* collection, autumn–winter 2008–09  
cotton, rayon, polyester, metal, nylon, leather (patent),  
rubber

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

As the name suggests, Kawakubo's *Bad Taste* collection parodied notions of 'good taste', giving the subcultural style of rockabilly a fetishistic edge. Kawakubo appropriated tawdry and kitsch materials such as polka-dot tulle, satin underwear and garter-belt frills, with the resulting effect being one of conscious disarray. These contrasts are evident in Kawakubo's use of girlish ruffles and knee-high socks in combination with the bondage-style strapping of the jacket and bra.

# **Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## **Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

### **Jacket, skirt and shoes**

2004 *Ballerina Motorbike* collection, spring–summer 2005  
nylon, polyurethane, polyester, leather (patent), metal (fastenings), rubber, elastic

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Dress and belt

2009 *Adult Delinquent* collection, spring–summer 2010  
polyester, synthetic felt, cotton (canvas), cotton (wadding)

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2015

2015.133.a-b

# **Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## **Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

### **Shoulder harness and shoes**

2009 *Adult Delinquent* collection, spring–summer 2010  
materials, leather (suede), rubber, cotton (laces)

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

*Body Meets Dress–Dress Meets Body* collection,  
spring–summer 1997

*Tomorrow's Black* collection,  
spring–summer 2009

Video footage courtesy of Comme des Garçons

# Bodies and dresses

Kawakubo's spring–summer 1997 collection, *Body Meets Dress–Dress Meets Body*, remains one of her most radical statements. Often referred to as the 'lumps and bumps' collection due to the distorted and misshapen silhouettes, *Body Meets Dress–Dress Meets Body* was criticised and lauded in equal measure by journalists. Although Kawakubo avoids providing exact explanations of any of her collections, implicit in this work is a refusal to see the physical body as a limitation. For her, clothing could be the body and the body could be clothing.

More recently, this experimentation with abstract forms has manifested in her ten-season exploration of wearable 'objects for the body'. Beginning in September 2013 with the *Not Making Clothing* collection, spring–summer 2014, Kawakubo sought to 'break the idea of clothes' by ignoring the contours of the body. In this exhibition, examples from *MONSTER*, autumn–winter 2014, and *Blood and Roses*, spring–summer 2015, are defined by illogical protuberances and oversized proportions.

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

## Playsuit and stockings

2013 *Not Making Clothing* collection, spring–summer 2014  
silk, cotton, nylon (tulle), polyester, elastic (rubber)

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program  
2019.423.a-b

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

**Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

## Shoe covers

2013 *Not Making Clothing* collection, spring–summer 2014  
leather, cotton, metal, paint

Purchased, NGV Supporters of Fashion and Textiles, 2019



# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

**Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

## Top

1996 *Body Meets Dress–Dress Meets Body* collection,  
spring–summer 1997

nylon, polyurethane

Purchased, NGV Supporters of Fashion and Textiles, 2018

2018.1311

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Skirt

1996 *Body Meets Dress–Dress Meets Body* collection,  
spring–summer 1997  
nylon, polyurethane

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2015

2015.121

Although best known for its misshapen, padded silhouettes, the *Body Meets Dress–Dress Meets Body* collection is also notable for Kawakubo's deliberate use of gingham, a fabric closely aligned with domesticity. As well as questioning the boundaries of the so-called 'fashionable body', the collection contested traditional social definitions of ideal femininity. The gingham used here is a specially woven stretch nylon designed to bulge and pucker. These qualities are enhanced by the irregular pattern-cutting.

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Top

1996 *Body Meets Dress–Dress Meets Body* collection,  
spring–summer 1997

nylon, polyurethane, cotton, down

Presented through the NGV Foundation by Takamasa Takahashi, Fellow, 2005

2005.376

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Skirt

1996 *Body Meets Dress–Dress Meets Body* collection,  
spring–summer 1997

cupro, polyester

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2017

2017.142

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

## Ballet shoes

1996 *Body Meets Dress–Dress Meets Body* collection,  
spring–summer 1997

leather, cotton, rubber (elastic)

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Cultural Gifts Program, 2018

2018.851.a-b

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Dress

1996 *Body Meets Dress–Dress Meets Body* collection,  
spring–summer 1997

cotton, polyester, nylon (tulle)

Presented through the NGV Foundation by Takamasa Takahashi 2005

2005.375

‘It is meaningless to create something predictable.’

REI KAWAKUBO, 1990

When I saw this dress at a shop, it was on a hanger, so I didn't know how it would look when worn. It was an odd-shaped dress, but it caught my attention immediately. When laid flat, it forms a circular shape with two large and two small openings. After I bought it, I was very surprised to see how it came to life on my mannequin. Inside, nylon mesh is bonded to the cotton to give the fabric stiffness, so it becomes a very sculptural dress. This is Comme. You always find surprises in Kawakubo's work.

**TAKAMASA TAKAHASHI, 2019**

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Jacket, shorts and boots

2010 *Inside Decoration* collection, autumn–winter 2010–11  
polyester, polyurethane, plastic, leather, rubber

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

The *Inside Decoration* collection confirmed Kawakubo's resolve to redraw the contours of the fashionable body with abstract garments that blurred boundaries and amplified physical proportions. This ensemble incorporates removable pillows embedded into the lining to create bulges and sculptural form. When shown on the runway, five dresses with giant incisions appeared to have burst apart, oozing whorls of dacron (a type of polyester fibre) padding.



# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Top, skirt and shoes

2008 *Tomorrow's Black* collection, spring–summer 2009  
wool, polyester, metal (fastenings), leather, rubber

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

The *Tomorrow's Black* collection explored pattern, repetition and geometric form. This ensemble has been created by using a single, pointed-oval pattern piece stitched together in different ways. The form of the outfit is created by variation in how each piece is sewn – some panels are stitched along the entire length, while others are only connected part way, leaving the end points open. The technique cleverly creates both volume and irregularity, with the armholes created by leaving gaps in the seam lines.

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Dress

1991 *Unfinished* collection, spring–summer 1992  
wool, metal (fastenings)

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program

2019.421

When not worn, this dress is a flat, circular, pattern piece with long, irregularly placed metal zippers. Free of any conventional shaping, it is difficult to imagine how it corresponds to the body at all. In this sense, the dress is unfinished – it is up to the wearer to complete the work by a process of folding and fastening. The relationship between two- and three-dimensional forms is an aspect that Kawakubo has explored in many of her collections.

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Shirt

2011 *Hybrid* collection,  
autumn–winter 2011–12

synthetic fabric, polyester, elastic, plastic (buttons)

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian  
Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2015

2015.139

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

*Hybrid* collection,  
autumn–winter 2011–12

Video footage courtesy of Comme des Garçons

# Construction and deconstruction

Throughout her career, Rei Kawakubo has continuously re-examined various fashion 'logics'. She has repositioned fastenings and openings, ignored function, up-ended tailoring traditions, and played with form and scale. From one season to the next, Kawakubo's collections have consistently introduced the unexpected. A new collection might begin with a crumpled wad of paper, an abstract phrase or the instruction to, in Kawakubo's words, 'start with something perfect and go backwards'. Unsurprisingly, such conceptual approaches have resulted in unorthodox working methods. Kawakubo's collections are always a challenge to realise for her team of pattern-makers.

In this gallery, single garments and groupings from key collections explore the relationship between ideas and processes. Whether displaying imposed design constraints or interrogating a single mode of expression, the garments show how Kawakubo has created a new and unique design lexicon.

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Dress and sleeve

2011 *Hybrid* collection, autumn–winter 2011–12  
silk, metal (fastening)

Promised gift of Takamasa Takahashi, 2019

The *Hybrid* collection explores the concept of hybridity in order to propose new clothing forms. For this collection, Kawakubo deconstructed garments by halving them and marrying the pieces to different components – right-hand sleeves tied to the left-hand sides of blazers and coats, front panels mismatched with different backs, and tailored shorts were high on one leg and draped long on the other. This dress was created by draping and twisting vintage scarves across the body in an irregular fashion without using a pattern.

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

**Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

## Dress and shoes

2001 *Ethnic Couture (White)* collection, spring–summer  
2002

leather, rubber

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

**Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

## Shoes

1988 *Red is Black* collection, autumn–winter 1988–89  
leather

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi



# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

## Coat and dress

1988 *Red is Black* collection, autumn–winter 1988–89  
wool, plastic (fastenings)

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi

‘There is always evolution, and when black no longer became new, I looked for newer things.’

REI KAWAKUBO, 2012

Kawakubo created this collection using red as the primary colour instead of black. She was concerned that black had lost its power and become ubiquitous. Previously, wearing black was unusual in Japan as it was connected with death. After the *karasu-zoku* (the crow gang) appeared on the streets of Tokyo in the early 1980s, black gradually became a colour that everyone felt comfortable with. The red colour Kawakubo uses here is vermilion. In Japan, this is the colour used at Shinto shrines and on ink pads for ivory signature seals.

**TAKAMASA TAKAHASHI, 2019**

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo *designer*

Japan born 1942

## Coat, coat, top, skirt, belt, hat and shoes

1992 *Lilith* collection, autumn–winter 1992–93

wool, cupro, metal, acrylic, polyester, nylon, leather, rubber, plastic (fastenings)

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

Kawakubo named this collection *Lilith* after Adam's first wife in the book of Genesis. Later, she said she created it 'for a woman who fights against the one who takes away her freedom and forces obedience'. Almost all the garments in the collection were black, expressing her mood for the season. From the front, the jacket itself looks very plain and comfortable ... because Kawakubo detached the side panels of this jacket from the back panel. If she hadn't, the jacket would be very tight to wear. I think she is suggesting achieving freedom from social constraints.

**TAKAMASA TAKAHASHI, 2019**

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Jacket, blouse, skirt

2005 *Broken Bride* collection, autumn–winter 2005–06  
polyester, cotton, silk, rayon, cupro (lining)

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2017

2017.148.a-c

Speaking about this wedding-themed collection, Kawakubo stated, 'There are many kinds of marriages. Typically, marriage is associated with being "tied up" and is conservative; this collection is anti-conservative, allows one to be free, and shows what marriage can be like'. To this end, her bridal gowns were a combination of traditional ivory silks, lace and tulle, enriched by trompe l'oeil photo-prints, or embellished with the black satin and trims associated with Victorian-era mourning attire.

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

## Jumper, bloomers, tights and shoes

2014 *MONSTER* collection, autumn–winter 2014–15  
wool, nylon, polyester, synthetic fabric, elastic, leather, rubber, metal (fastenings)

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

Rei Kawakubo described the *MONSTER* collection as a reaction to 'the craziness of humanity, the fear we all have, the feeling of going beyond common sense'. This sense of unease, caused by the unfamiliar, has been an intermittent presence in Kawakubo's work since the 1980s. Her drive to question contemporary aesthetic values has produced unsettling visions of beauty and the body. In this work, the monstrous form of the jumper is exaggerated by hanging tubular appendages that serve no seeming purpose or function.

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Shirt dress, dress and shoes

1993 *Synergy* collection, autumn–winter 1993–94  
rayon, cupro, wool, leather, rubber, cotton (laces)

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

In *Synergy*, a visually chaotic collection of more than ninety works, Kawakubo spliced mismatched fabrics together into the one garment. Sheer chiffons were combined with textured knits, and patterned silks with plain wools. The unusual combinations of textiles were echoed in garment forms that brought together incongruous upper and lower halves (such as bodices and sleeves). The interplay of different fabric textures and weights cause the garments to pull and pucker in unorthodox ways. Here the effect is more subtle, with patchwork panels of contrasting black fabrics worn under a floral-print shirt dress in two colourways.

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

## Coat and dress

1996 *Flowering Clothes* collection,  
autumn–winter 1996–1997

polyester, cotton

Presented through the NGV Foundation by Takamasa Takahashi, Fellow, 2005

2005.374.a-b



# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

**Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

## Shoes

1996 *Flowering Clothes* collection,  
autumn–winter 1996–1997  
leather, rubber, cotton (laces)

Promised gift of Takamasa Takahashi, 2019

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Dress, stockings and shoes

1997 *Clustering Beauty* collection, spring–summer 1998  
silk, cotton, metal, leather, polyester

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Cultural Gifts Program, 2018

2018.852.a-d

In 1997 Kawakubo presented her spring–summer 1998 collection alongside Belgian designer Martin Margiela as a way of signalling their creative affinity. Whereas Margiela explored the idea of flatness, Kawakubo examined ‘clustering beauty, the beauty of piling up, gathering together, and strength through repetition’. This bodice comprises multiple layers of cream silk secured with long basting stitches, typically used to hold the fabric in place before final sewing.

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

**Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

## Coat and trousers

2012 *2 Dimensions* collection, autumn–winter 2012–13  
wool, rayon, polyester, metal (fastenings)

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

This outfit is known as the 'cut-out paper doll coat'. In 1998, the Belgian designer Martin Margiela experimented with two-dimensional garments for his spring–summer collection. In his design, flat two-dimensional garments became three-dimensional on the body. But here, Kawakubo's remain as flat as possible when worn. To retain the shape, she used a stiff polyester felt, stitching the pattern pieces together with an outline hem around the outer edges of the garment. Despite the use of stiff materials, she achieved beautiful, soft shoulder lines.

**TAKAMASA TAKAHASHI, 2019**

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

**Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

## Top and skirt

2012 *Crush* collection, spring–summer 2013

cotton, polyester, nylon

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

After seeing the runway footage for this collection, I wanted it all! Even more so when I had some of the actual pieces in my hand. It looks as if the clothes were formed on a dressmaking dummy, with pieces roughly joined upside down, layered, folded and finally stitched together to create what appears to be unfinished, sculptural clothes. It seems to me it's a metaphor. Kawakubo is crushing all the existing concepts of clothes and suggesting a new start. In my opinion, it is one of her most prominent collections.

**TAKAMASA TAKAHASHI, 2019**

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

## Vest and dress

2012 *Crush* collection, spring–summer 2013

linen, nylon, cotton, polyester, wool

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

Garments in Kawakubo's *Crush* collection were constructed by laying stiff, bonded cotton flat on a table and then folding the fabric back on itself in every possible direction before oversewing it. This group of four outfits shows the design variation achieved by this technique, and the sculptural effect, which is heightened by the monochrome palette. A celebration of the individual over the mass-produced, the *Crush* collection proposed that design could be open-ended.

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

**Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

## Dress

2012 *Crush* collection, spring–summer 2013  
cotton, polyester

Promised gift of Takamasa Takahashi, 2019



# **Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## **Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

### **Half dress and shorts**

2012 *Crush* collection, spring–summer 2013

linen, cotton, wool, polyester

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Cultural Gifts Program, 2015

2015.142.a-b

# **Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## **Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

### **Jacket, bow and skirt**

1998 *Movement* collection, spring–summer 1989  
wool, polyester, triacetate, plastic (fastenings)

Promised gift of Takamasa Takahashi, 2019

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Dress and vest

1989 *Refresh the Spirits* collection, spring–summer 1990  
wool, plastic, metal (fastenings)

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

‘This time, particularly, I tried to refresh my mind by using vivid colours and unique materials.’

REI KAWAKUBO, 1990

I spotted a picture of this dress in a Japanese fashion magazine in 1990, a year after I came to Australia. It immediately caught my attention. Who could imagine Kawakubo would use plastic mirror plates in a collection? I saw it as another attempt to create something new and I fell in love with it. I was so frustrated as I didn't know where to find this dress in Sydney, where I was living at that time, and eventually gave up. After thirty years of waiting, I finally found it.

**TAKAMASA TAKAHASHI, 2019**

# **Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## **Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

### **Jacket, skirt and shoes**

2009 *Wonderland* collection, autumn–winter 2009–10  
cotton, nylon, plastic, metal (fastenings)

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

# **Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## **Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

### **Coat, top, pants, socks and shoes**

2007 *Cacophony* collection, spring–summer 2008

polyester, cotton, leather, wood, rubber, metal (buckles)

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2019

2019.432.a-g

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Jacket and dress

2010 *No Theme (Multiple Personalities, Psychological Fear)* collection, spring–summer 2011  
cotton, plastic, metal

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2017

2017.145.a-c

In 2012, Kawakubo said in an interview, 'You might wonder what design is. To me, designing is not all about designing. "Not designing" is also designing to me'.

I think this jacket is one of the best examples of the meaning of these words. Three plain tailored jackets are joined together at the back-centre seam and by using different sleeve options the wearer creates a totally new jacket. This concept was new to me. It looks like three different personalities reside in this jacket.

**TAKAMASA TAKAHASHI, 2019**



# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Blazer, vest and trousers

2004 *Dark Romance, Witch* collection,  
autumn–winter 2004–05

wool, polyester, nylon, cotton, cupro, plastic, metal

Promised gift of Takamasa Takahashi, 2019

Many of Kawakubo's collections interrogate the social codes of gender by challenging the conventions that separate dressmaking from tailoring. This work fuses 'feminine' decoration and garment forms with 'masculine' suiting to create a new hybrid proposition. Explosions of tulle erupt from the sleeves and an asymmetrical skirt is grafted onto baggy men's trousers.

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

**Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

## Shoes

2004 *Dark Romance, Witch* collection,  
autumn–winter 2004–05  
suede, rubber, cotton (laces)

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

## Jacket, vest and shorts

2013 *The Infinity of Tailoring* collection, autumn–winter 2013–14

polyester, plastic (fastenings)

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Jacket and trousers

2003 *Square* collection, autumn–winter 2003–04  
cotton, elastic, metal

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2017

2017.147.a-b

'If you have total freedom to design, you won't get anything interesting. So I give myself restraint in order to kind of push myself through; to create something new. It's the torture that I give myself; the pain and the struggle that I go through ... Like, I'd make my whole collection with just one square of fabric. I wouldn't do anything else; everything had to be made from one square.'

REI KAWAKUBO, 2016

This mysterious-looking outfit is made of several pieces of square cloth. Each garment takes form through a simple process of tying and wrapping. From a Japanese perspective, I feel a sense of emotion and nostalgia when I look at this dress. When I was a child, door-to-door salesmen carried *furoshiki* bags on their backs or over the shoulder, as is shown with this outfit.

I think this is the ultimate simple dress, with well-calculated pattern-making from a simple square and witty ideas. Comme is not always complicated.

**TAKAMASA TAKAHASHI, 2019**

# **Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## **Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

### **Vest, dress, skirt and boots**

2003 *Square* collection, autumn–winter 2003–04

cotton, rubber, leather, metal, paint, synthetic fabric

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Dress

2007 reissue from *Extreme Embellishment (Adornment)* collection, spring–summer 2003  
cotton, plastic (fastenings), metal (fastenings)

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2015

2015.124

Kawakubo's collections often begin with a conceptual idea that also presents a technical challenge. For this collection, she sought to create garments without the use of applied embellishments. Pattern pieces are extended into lengths that are knotted, plaited or bunched into rosettes to create form and texture. The knots in this dress have been tied and then stitched down, making it impossible to see the complexity of the original pattern.

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

## Sandals

2002 *Extreme Embellishment (Adornment)* collection,  
spring–summer 2003

leather, rubber, metal (fastening)

Promised gift of Takamasa Takahashi, 2019



# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

**Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

## Dress

2005 *Lost Empire* collection, spring–summer 2006

synthetic fabric

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2019

2019.431

# **Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## **Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

### **Jacket, skirt and shoes**

2005 *Lost Empire* collection, spring–summer 2006  
cotton, wool, metal (fastenings), cotton (canvas),  
cotton (laces)

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

*MONSTER* collection,  
autumn–winter 2014–15

Video footage courtesy of Comme des Garçons

At first glance, this dress looks like a dress with no special features. In fact, it's constructed using very complex techniques. The entire dress is made from two layers of fabric and is shaped by ruching and tucking. It's not obvious – you only notice the construction when you look at it carefully.

**TAKAMASA TAKAHASHI, 2019**

# **Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## **Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

### **Jacket, skirt and boots**

2006 *Cubisme* collection, spring–summer 2007  
wool, nylon, metal (fastenings)

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Jacket and shorts

2006 *Cubisme* collection, spring–summer 2007

silk and wool satin, nylon, rayon, polyester chiffon, metal, plastic buttons

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2015

2015.132.a-c

Fragmentation and deconstructed garment forms define the *Cubisme* collection. Grafting solid panels onto sheer underlays, or combining the two, Kawakubo shows how seemingly incompatible forms can coexist. The collection also makes use of the Japanese flag's red circle on a white background. In 2006, Kawakubo stated, 'the circle is the purest form of design in existence'. In this outfit, the circle is half-obscured as the tulle is fused to the inside of the jacket.

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

## Boots

2006 *Cubisme* collection, spring–summer 2007  
leather, metal, wood, rubber

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2015

2017.151.a-b

# **Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## **Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

### **Dress and shoes**

2006 *Cubisme* collection, spring–summer 2007  
wool, nylon, metal (fastenings)

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi



# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## Rei Kawakubo designer

Japan born 1942

### Top and skirt

2003 *Abstract Excellence* collection, spring–summer 2004  
cotton, polyester, cupro (ground), cotton (pile), triacetate

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2015

2015.126.a-b

In October 2003 Kawakubo focused on a singular garment form: the skirt, reconfiguring it in thirty-four different ways. Using a stiff, bonded fabric, she varied the seam placements in order to create abstract and unlikely shapes that curved away from the body. Here, the contrasting band of black binding highlights the irregularity of the form.

# **Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1969

## **Rei Kawakubo** designer

Japan born 1942

### **Jacket, top and skirt**

2009 *Adult Delinquent* collection, spring–summer 2010  
wool, cotton, polyester, acrylic, nylon, cupro

Collection of Takamasa Takahashi

This outfit was created like a collage work, with the shoulder areas of various jackets found in the atelier disassembled and cut up, then reassembled. When I bought the piece, what attracted me at first was the interesting use of apparent Japanese kimono and *obi* (a sash worn with a kimono) fabrics. On closer inspection, I noticed the interesting construction. Different sections of a dress and jacket were combined in unexpected ways like patchwork.

**TAKAMASA TAKAHASHI, 2019**

# Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

*Abstract Excellence* collection,  
spring–summer 2004

*Cubisme* collection,  
spring–summer 2007

Video footage courtesy of Comme des Garçons

# Junya Watanabe and Tao Kurihara

Kawakubo's design legacy can be seen in the work of many conceptual fashion designers today, but the designer's influence is especially present in the work of two of her Japanese protégés, Junya Watanabe and Tao Kurihara. Encouraged to start their own labels under the umbrella of Comme des Garçons in 1992 and 2005 respectively, both possess an inherited conceptual sensibility immediately visible in their collections.

Junya Watanabe joined Comme des Garçons as a pattern-cutter after graduating from the Bunka Fashion College, Tokyo, in 1984. He launched his own label in 1992 and made his runway debut in Paris the following year. Today, Watanabe's designs are celebrated for their exceptional tailoring and innovative fabric treatments, and for thematic connections to fashion history, streetwear and uniforms.

Tao Kurihara joined Comme des Garçons in 1998 after studying at Central Saint Martins, London. Under the mentorship of Kawakubo, she launched her own label in 2005, debuting in Paris in March that year and presenting annually until 2010. Kurihara, like Kawakubo, often relied on intuition or chose to work within self-imposed design limitations. Various collections started with found fabrics or took up a single idea and explored it to a poetic end. Kurihara's designs also display a highly decorative aesthetic, pushed to the extreme to recalibrate traditional notions of femininity.

# **Junya Watanabe Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1992

## **Junya Watanabe** designer

Japan born 1961

### **Jacket and dress**

2007 *Romantic in Black* collection,  
autumn–winter 2007–08

polyester, cotton, wool, rayon, cupro, plastic (buttons),  
metal (hardware)

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2016

2016.369.a-c

# **Junya Watanabe Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1992

## **Junya Watanabe** designer

Japan born 1961

### **Dress**

2003 *Body Conscious* collection, spring–summer 2004

lycra, polyester

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2016

2016.364

# **Junya Watanabe Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1992

## **Junya Watanabe** designer

Japan born 1961

### **Jacket, top and skirt**

2009 *Elegant Down* collection, autumn–winter 2009–10  
polyester (crepe), nylon, polyester, metal

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2016

2016.373.a-c

Typical of Watanabe's work is the exploration of a single material across an entire collection. In this case, he turned quilted black nylon into puffer dresses, jackets and skirts. The effect of lightness created by the material is exaggerated by the use of gilt-gold chains, which create the impression of restraint. The combination of quilting and chains is a reference to the designs of Coco Chanel, showing Watanabe's engagement with fashion history.



**Junya Watanabe Comme des Garçons,  
Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1992

**Junya Watanabe** designer

Japan born 1961

**Dress and underdress**

2011 spring–summer 2012

nylon, rayon, polyester

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2016

2016.374.a-b

# **Junya Watanabe Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1992

## **Junya Watanabe** designer

Japan born 1961

### **Jacket**

2011 spring–summer 2012

nylon, cotton, leather, metal (fastenings)

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2019

2019.438

# **Junya Watanabe Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1992

## **Junya Watanabe** designer

Japan born 1961

### **Coat, jumper, leggings and boots**

2006 *Anti, Anarchy and Army* collection,  
autumn–winter 2006–07

cotton, wool, nylon, acrylic, leather, metal  
(embellishments)

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2019

2019.437.a-e

# **Junya Watanabe Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1992

## **Junya Watanabe** designer

Japan born 1961

### **Dress and boots**

2010 *Military Uniform* collection, autumn–winter 2010–11  
polyester, leather, cotton (canvas), rubber, plastic

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Cultural Gifts Program, 2018

2018.865.a-c

# Junya Watanabe Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

*Future/Colour* collection, spring–summer 1996

Video footage courtesy of Comme des Garçons

# **Tao Comme des Garçons, Tokyo**

manufacturer

Japan 2005–11

**Tao Kurihara** designer

Japan born 1973

## **Dress, top and boots**

2009 spring–summer 2010

cotton, silk, leather, rubber (elastic), rubber, metal (studs)

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2018

2018.867.a-d

For her second-last runway show in late 2009, Kurihara presented a condensed collection of dresses that were constructed by knotting and twisting only. Handcrafted, but with a punk aesthetic, this dress is created from torn strips of diaphanous floral fabric woven in the manner of macramé. The delicacy of the material in this dress is in contrast with the rough nature of its assembly and ragged appearance.

# Tao Comme des Garçons, Tokyo

manufacturer

Japan 2005–11

**Tao Kurihara** designer

Japan born 1973

## Top, overskirt, skirt, skirt and shoes

2009 *Decoration Accident* collection,  
autumn–winter 2009–10

polyester, rayon, cotton, wool, mohair, nylon

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2017

2017.156.a-f

Kurihara's ultra-feminine aesthetic is evident in many of her collections, which have employed materials such as lace, tulle, paper and ribbon. Here, the emphasis is on ornamentation and volume, with frothy layers of skirts complemented by smocking, ribbon work and bows. Quoted in a Japanese fashion magazine in 2009, Kurihara described this design as 'one big decoration'.

# **Tao Comme des Garçons, Tokyo**

manufacturer

Japan 2005–11

**Tao Kurihara** designer

Japan born 1973

## **Dress and top**

2010 autumn–winter 2010–11

wool (jersey), cotton, silk, polyester

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2017

2017.157.a-b



# Junya Watanabe Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

*Future/Colour* collection, spring–summer 1996

Video footage courtesy of Comme des Garçons

# Junya Watanabe Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1992

## Junya Watanabe designer

Japan born 1961

### Dress

1995 *Future/Colour* collection, spring–summer 1996  
synthetic fabric, polyester

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2017

2017.152

Junya Watanabe is known for his experimentation with unusual materials and innovative construction techniques. This dress highlights his excellent cutting skills: acid-bright bands of contrasting pink fabrics encircle the body in asymmetrical layers. The interplay between solid and sheer is heightened by the qualities of the transparent synthetic, which causes the bands to pucker and distort.

# **Junya Watanabe Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1992

## **Junya Watanabe** designer

Japan born 1961

### **Dress**

1995 *Future/Colour* collection, spring–summer 1996  
synthetic fabric, polyester

Promised gift of Takamasa Takahashi, 2019

**Junya Watanabe Comme des Garçons,  
Japan** fashion house

Japan est. 1992

**Junya Watanabe** designer

Japan born 1961

**Jumper, skirt and hat**

2003 *Classic* collection, autumn–winter 2003–04  
wool, mohair, nylon, cupro (lining), cotton, metal

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2016

2016.363.a-c

# **Junya Watanabe Comme des Garçons, Japan** fashion house

Japan est. 1992

## **Junya Watanabe** designer

Japan born 1961

### **Shirt**

2003 *Classic* collection, autumn–winter 2003–04  
cotton

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2016

2016.363.b

# Junya Watanabe Comme des Garçons, Tokyo fashion house

Japan est. 1992

## Junya Watanabe designer

Japan born 1961

### Dress

2002 *Object* collection, spring–summer 2003

cotton, metal (fastening), plastic (fastenings), elastic,  
rubber

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2017

2017.154

The print on this dress resembles a *toile de Jouy*, a type of printed fabric popular in France in the late eighteenth century that depicted idyllic or pastoral scenes based on engravings. In keeping with this imagery, the dress is light and pretty, but Watanabe's use of webbing to secure a parachute-style backpack to the dress and to draw up the front gives it contemporary context.

**Junya Watanabe Comme des Garçons,  
Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1992

**Junya Watanabe** designer

Japan born 1961

**Top and pants**

2012 *Sports* collection, spring–summer 2013

polyester

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2016

2016.375.a-b

# **Junya Watanabe Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1992

## **Junya Watanabe** designer

Japan born 1961

### **Top**

2008 *Africa* collection, spring–summer 2009  
polyester

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2016

2018.864



# **Junya Watanabe Comme des Garçons, Tokyo** fashion house

Japan est. 1992

## **Junya Watanabe** designer

Japan born 1961

### **Skirt**

2008 *Africa* collection, spring–summer 2009

cotton (denim), cotton, wool, polyurethane, metal

Gift of Takamasa Takahashi through the Australian Government's  
Cultural Gifts Program, 2016

2016.372.b