

miyake for the powerhouse

The Powerhouse Museum has an extensive collection of dress which spans historical and contemporary periods.

Important collection areas encompass contemporary

Australian and international designer clothing, early Australian dress, work clothing, historical international dress and selected art/performance clothing.

The Museum also holds a substantial collection of dress accessories, fashion plates and photographs, archives from Australian designers and

companies, samples and swatchbooks. This material is central to the museum's collection and is used to contextualise objects within a material culture framework.

Key annual events which demonstrate the Museum's commitment to contemporary design in fashion are Fashion of the Year Award and the Student Fashion Awards. The former is an acquisitive award promoting the collection of contemporary Australian and international fashion. The Museum also acquires important examples of international designer dress and this year, acquired a spectacular Issey Miyake dress.

The name Issey Miyake is legendary. His clothing design is known and admired by those within the industry, but more significantly by many people who have little interest in fashion. In addition to high profile celebrities such as jazz musician, the late Miles Davis, we are told that Miyake is also the choice for people such as a Buddhist nun and a Sony worker who wears Miyake on the factory floor.¹ Whilst Miyake continues to stun the fashion world with his fresh creativity, his clothing is never really in or out of fashion.

Since the establishment of the Miyake Design Studio in Tokyo in 1970, it has been Miyake's aim to create clothing which transcends time and place—clothing that is independent of the wearer's age, social status and ethnicity. According to Miyake, a garment is 'unfinished' until it is brought to life by the body and soul of the wearer. It is clothing which is born out of the relationship between human beings and nature, the past and the present, technology and creativity. Miyake's designs are cleverly positioned on a trajectory that travels back into history, which respects the popular and traditional and projects into the future. His clothing resonates with allusions, which engender a sense of familiarity—yet the allusion is never fixed. It is his receptivity to ongoing dialogue between the matrix of elements which constitutes today's society that inspires Miyake and empowers his designs.

Miyake is a clothing designer, yet his 'product' is closely aligned with poetry, architecture and the arts of movement; music and dance. This is his uniqueness.



Miyake was born in Hiroshima. He was six years old when he witnessed an American B29 aeroplane drop the atom bomb on the city on 6 August 1945. He lost his mother and most of his family. One cannot help but feel that the energy, vigour, aesthetic defiance and individuality with which Miyake approaches his life and his clothing design were framed by his experience of that event; a turning point in world history. In 1990, 45 years later, Issey Miyake was awarded the First Hiroshima Art Prize.

In the catalogue for that exhibition Miyake states: "Clothing is a passionate message. This is the starting point of my designing. I am passionate in thinking about man: about his dreams and hopes, about his worries and anguish. I believe that the joy born out of such passionate experience and felt in my clothing is very real".²

In discussing his pleated clothes, which formed the basis of the Hiroshima exhibition, Miyake explains: "Pleated clothes are made of fabric with folds. Like a child, I play with design in this material. Pleats move and change form with the wearer's body movements. As the pleats move they change colours, giving an optical illusion like a kaleidoscope. Pleats contain endless fascination for me, and inspire a multitude of images.

There is also technical innovation in these pieces. Normally a fabric is first pleated and then made into clothing, but I have used the reverse method: a shape is designed first, and then put into a pleating machine. In this way the form of the clothing must be very pure. It has a simple construction of almost no design. But then, when worn on a body, the more interesting and somehow friendly shape begins to appear."³

Miyake's interest in pleats can be traced back to the early 1970s, but it was not until the appearance of the Spring 1989 collection that his 'garment pleating' was launched. Since then pleats have become synonymous with Miyake's style. The lantern-like dress which was recently acquired by the Powerhouse Museum is a fine example. It forms part of Miyake's 1995 Spring/Summer collection and was highlighted in a report for the Sydney Morning Herald by Jane de Teliga, who attended the Paris parade.⁴ According to Jane, the models "floated down the catwalk" while an orchestra seated on stage played traditional Chinese music.

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The dress acquired by the Powerhouse is made of pleated polyester fabric woven with wide vertical stripes in five colours: green, mint green, dark green, orange and grey. The nylon hoops begin at waist height and increase in size until they reach the ankle. The shape of the dress is a pure form, equally interesting for the positive space it claims and the negative space created by its silhouette. With its simple singlet style upper, the dress hangs off the wearer's frame and encases the body, much like a shell. Miyake creates a new form which plays on the dynamic relationship established between wearer and garment and activates the space between the garment and the body. When the dress is worn the hoops sway and lilt in the most seductive and evocative manner and the crisp outline once distorted becomes fluid. In this case the allusion may be to a folding paper lantern, a 19th Century European crinoline cage or a child's spinning top.

The expression of stillness and movement and the exploration of the relationship between 'one piece of cloth' and a three dimensional garment are concerns which are central to Miyake's design. The Powerhouse dress, when folded down, reduces to a flat circular form. Its transformation when extended into a voluminous three dimensional vessel is a remarkable design solution and a tribute to Miyake's masterful way of working within and between dimensions. The garment demands to be admired in its different manifestations. This was well expressed by Miles Davis who has been quoted as saying "I'd love to buy all of his stuff and put it on the wall, to look at when I am depressed".⁵

For Miyake, clothing is comprised of three pleasures: the pleasure to design, the pleasure to wear, and the pleasure to see it worn.⁶

EndNotes

1 Issey Miyake, 'Outside and In' in *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 2 October 1988, p44.

2 Issey Miyake, 'Ten Sen Men. Clothing That Communicates' in *Issey Miyake Ten Sen Men*, The First Hiroshima Art Prize, Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990, p23.

3 Ibid.

4 Jane de Teliga, 'Bustles Bows Anything Goes' in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 October 1994, p38.

5 Jay Cocks, *Time*, 27 January 1986, p68.

6 Jun I Kanai, 'Fuku (Clothing) which brings Fuku (Happiness)', in *Ten Sen Men*, op cit, p75.

Article courtesy of *Friends of Fashion*, no 5, August 1995, Trustees of the Powerhouse Museum.

Claire Roberts, Curator, Asian Decorative Arts & Design, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.



Above and facing page: Issey Miyake parade, Spring/Summer '95 collection, Paris.

Photo by Philippe Brazil, courtesy Miyake Design Studio, Tokyo.