

How Has the Miyake Issey Exhibition Influenced the Cultural Landscape of Roppongi?

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Abstract:

“MIYAKE ISSEY EXHIBITION: The Work of Miyake Issey” which was on display at the National Art Center, Tokyo this year was very well received and provided insight into the huge impact that art and design have on the cultural landscape of Tokyo. The exhibition was the first full scale presentation on Miyake, showcasing his earliest works from the 1970s up to his most recent projects. It attracted approximately 140,000 visitors and among them 20,000 visitors came from outside Japan. Outline, structure and characteristics of the exhibition are explained in this article.

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Introduction: The National Art Center, Tokyo

Opened in 2007, *The National Art Center, Tokyo* (NACT, fig. 1 and 2) is the national government's fifth and newest National Museum of Art in Japan. NACT is a unique and innovative art exhibition facility: Instead of maintaining a permanent collection, it makes the most of a total of 14,000 square meters of exhibition space, one of the largest in Japan, and focuses on serving as a venue for various art exhibitions. It is the most visited art museum in Japan, receiving at least two million paid-visitors every year. NACT is situated in the centre of Tokyo and was designed by architect Kisho Kurokawa (1934-2007).



Fig. 1-2:
The National Art Center, Tokyo.

The establishment of the NACT has changed the cultural landscape of Tokyo. It is situated in Roppongi, which was originally a Japanese military district and subsequently American. It became famous for bars and night clubs after the Second World War but now is going through a rebirth as a cultural district. Together with the *Mori Art Museum* and *Mori Arts Center Gallery* (established in 2003, focusing on contemporary art, fig. 3), the *Suntory Museum of Art* (opened in 1961 and moved to Tokyo Midtown in Roppongi in 2007 which has a wonderful collection of Japanese art and crafts, designed by architect Kengo Kuma (1954-), who also designed the new Olympic stadium in Tokyo for 2020, fig. 4 and 5), and *21_21 DESIGN SIGHT* (established in 2007, also in Tokyo Midtown, focusing on Design. One of the directors is Issey Miyake and the architecture was designed by Tadao Ando (1941-) based on Miyake's concept in clothing design of "A Piece of Cloth", fig. 6).

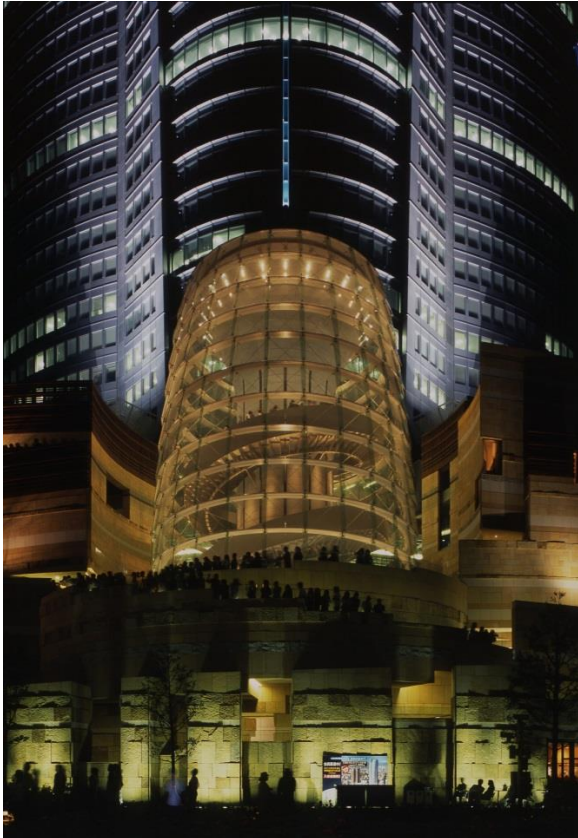


Fig. 3:
Mori Art Museum and Mori Arts Center Gallery, Tokyo

In order to promote art and culture in this area, three museums, NACT, Mori Art Museum and Suntory Museum of Art collaborated to create the "Roppongi Art Triangle" in 2007. They have even designed a logo "ATRo". The museums distribute free information about the museums and activities in the area as well as promote exhibitions held at the other two museums. They also provide discounts to tickets-holders of the other two museums. The ATRo organize a number of cultural events each year, such as the "Roppongi Art Night" which attracts over 800,000 people every year for a one night art festival. This collaboration of national and private museums has provided a very strong network to promote art and culture in Tokyo. As a result, according to a survey done by the Mori building in 2013, recognition of Roppongi as cultural district has increased dramatically over the last ten years (6.8 % in 2003, 35.9 % in 2013). (Survey on the notion of "Tokyo as a city" and "Change of Tokyo's landscape for last ten years," asked from 516 samples, men and women who live in Tokyo area whose age groups are 20s-50s. P.4 on the press release by Mori Buidling Co., Ltd, <https://www.mori.co.jp/morinow/pdf/130416.pdf>)



Fig. 4-5:
Suntory Museum of Art, Tokyo. © Keizo Kioku

Further establishing Roppongi as a cultural district, earlier this year NACT held an important cultural art and design exhibition, “Miyake Issey Exhibition: the work of Miyake Issey,” which was open between March 16 and June 14, 2016. Over the years, Issey Miyake has staged numerous exhibitions as a way to mark the turning points in his ongoing research. “Miyake Issey Exhibition: the work of Miyake Issey” is so far the most comprehensive overview of the Issey Miyake oeuvre as a whole, and, as such, it was even the first of its kind. With its vastness, depth and detail, it showcased the basic principles of Issey Miyake's design drive and the ever-evolving solutions he has developed. This was also the first solo exhibition exclusively dedicated to a world-famous-designer at NACT.



Fig. 6:
21_21 DESIGN SIGHT, Tokyo. Photo: Masaya Yoshimura

Who is Issey Miyake?

Only after the Second World War did western clothing become more generally worn than kimono in Japan. In such a social period of change, Issey Miyake, born in Hiroshima in 1938, played a major role as a pioneer in clothing design in Japan.

It all began in 1960 when Miyake, a student of graphic design at Tama Art University, sent a letter to the World Design Conference, which was being held for the first time in Japan that year. The letter took issue with the fact that clothing design was not included in the event. At that point, Miyake's notion that clothing is not merely "fashion" – i.e., something that changes with the times – but a form of design that is closely connected to our lives on a much more universal level was already apparent.

In 1965 Miyake moved to Paris. The Tokyo Olympic Games were held in the previous year and only after this event was it possible for Japanese people to travel abroad freely. He moved to Paris and studied at the famous Ecole de la Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne, then worked at the houses of Guy Laroche and Givenchy. The May Revolution in 1968 inspired him to redirect his efforts towards ready-to-wear clothing. He decided to focus on making clothing not for a limited group of rich people, but to make clothes like jeans and T-shirts that everyone knows and can be easily worn and washed. After working in New York for a while, he returned to Tokyo, where he launched the Miyake Design Studio in 1970.

Miyake has always explored the relationship between a piece of cloth and the body, and the space that is created as a result, unrestricted by any existing framework. In addition, along with his team of designers, he persistently undertakes research and development to create clothing that combines both innovation and comfort. He is a designer, first and foremost: he makes things. Issey Miyake creates wearable solutions to basic human needs. That is what clothes, far from being an expression of status, wealth or even sex appeal, represent for him.

Issey Miyake's work stems from a challenging yet elementary question: how to wrap the body, which is three dimensional, with fabric, which is two dimensional, without forgetting that the body is also alive and moving. Issey Miyake's answers raise topics such as freedom, invention, cultural cross-pollination, innovation, tradition, environmental awareness. All this is intertwined in a profoundly cohesive gamut of different creations. Issey Miyake's work is metaphorically speaking; a piece of cloth, just as much as using pieces of cloth has been his main creative challenge over the years.

MIYAKE ISSEY Exhibition: the Work of Miyake Issey

The exhibition showcased his earliest works from the 1970s up to his most recent projects, focusing on his ideas and processes of making clothes. 56 works (238 items) were exhibited in three sections: A, B and C.

Section A

In section A (fig. 7), twelve works made in the 1970s which symbolized his concept of clothes-making were displayed. It started with the work TATTOO (1970/ SS 1971, fig. 8), which was initially introduced at his first solo show in New York in 1970. This controversial printed pattern was created by Makiko Minagawa, textile director until Miyake's last collection in 1999. The traditional tattooing techniques displayed were in homage to Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin who passed away in the same year. This kind of comfortable clothing which fits to the body like a second skin was a very new idea at that time.



Fig. 7-8:
MIYAKE ISSEY EXHIBITION: The Work of Miyake Issey. Section A. Installation at the NACT.
Photo: Masaya Yoshimura

Section B



Fig. 9:
MIYAKE ISSEY EXHIBITION: The Work of Miyake Issey. Section B. Installation at the NACT.
Photo: Masaya Yoshimura

Miyake developed the “BODY” series at the beginning of 1980s as he continued to think about the form and movement of the body. It is a series of clothing designs using material such as fiber-reinforced plastic, synthetic resins and rattan. The PLASTIC BODY were designs molded on a human form. Issey Miyake's plastic bustier, made in cooperation with a mannequin manufacturer, is the result of the Japanese designer's ongoing exploration of the relationship between clothing and the body (fig. 9). Reversing the idea that clothing clads or conceals the body, the bustier replicates the body – or at least part of one – and then exposes it in a second, plastic skin. RATTAN BODY (1981/SS1982, fig. 10) was made by a traditional craftsman, Kosuge Shochikudo. This piece was chosen as the cover of ARTFORM magazine in 1982. Together with WIRE BODY (1983/AW1983), which are assembled metal wires upon a form to produce a garment that resembled a “body bracelet” and WATERFALL BODY (1984/AW1984) which was made using a partial silicon infusion and the handcrafting techniques behind the “A Piece of Cloth”, these sculpture-like clothes are the fruits of Miyake's ever-curious mind and his efforts in support of combining East and West philosophies as well as new technologies and traditional skills.



Fig. 10:
MIYAKE ISSEY EXHIBITION: The Work of Miyake Issey. Section B. Installation at the NACT.
Photo: Masaya Yoshimura

Section C



Fig. 11:
MIYAKE ISSEY EXHIBITION: The Work of Miyake Issey. Section C. Installation at the NACT.
Photo: Masaya Yoshimura

Section C was the biggest section (fig. 11). The works between the 1980s up to the present day were on display in 5 themed areas: “MATERIALS”, “PLEATS”, “IKKO TANAKA ISSEY MIYAKE”, “A-POC”, and “132 5. ISSEY MIYAKE/ INEI”.



Fig. 12:
MIYAKE ISSEY EXHIBITION: The Work of Miyake Issey. Section C. Installation at the NACT.
Photo: Masaya Yoshimura

Seventeen works using different materials were displayed in the “Material”-themed area (fig. 12). Miyake believes that clothing can be made from any material. He has experimented with a surprisingly wide variety, from natural materials such as hand-screened Japanese paper, horsehair and raffia, to newly developed synthetic textiles. He often makes use of traditional dyeing and weaving techniques such as cotton *kumigasuri*, a weave that uses space-dyed cotton yarn, and silk batik; combining these with new synthetic textiles, computer technology and many advanced processes for making clothing. The result is a wide variety of textures that allow for new shapes. Both Miyake and his team are relentlessly curious, traveling around production areas, talking with technicians, trying out ideas, and synthesizing what they have learnt in the form of new clothing. Miyake's commitment to research and development has given birth to an extraordinary variety of clothing that is not only completely new and unique, but also address contemporary needs.



Fig. 13:
MIYAKE ISSEY EXHIBITION: The Work of Miyake Issey. Section C. Installation at the NACT.
Photo: Masaya Yoshimura

For many people, “Issey Miyake” might mean “PLEATS” (fig. 13), which was announced in 1988. Traditionally, pleats are permanently pressed before a garment is cut, but he did it the other way round. He cut and assembled a garment two-and-a-half to three times its proper size. Then he folded, ironed, and over-sewed the material so that the straight lines remained in place. Finally the garment was placed in a press between two sheets of paper, from which it emerged with permanent pleats. Using pleats, Miyake made a visual form comparable to a sculpture. It incorporated air between the clothes and body which created a beautiful spectacle with movement. He made the pleated costumes for William Forsyth and the Frankfurt Ballet in 1991, and it resulted in PLEATS PLEASE in 1993. While pleating is one of the most ancient methods of making clothes conform to the body, Miyake achieved a modern metamorphosis of pleats by making them both aesthetically beautiful as well as being comfortable and practical.



Fig. 14:
 MIYAKE ISSEY EXHIBITION: *The Work of Miyake Issey*. Section C. Installation at the NACT.
 Photo: Masaya Yoshimura

“A-POC” (fig. 14) was announced in 1998, following PLEATS. A-POC means “a Piece of Cloth” and is also an intentional play-on-words with “epoch.” It was developed together with Dai Fujiwara who was creative director of Issey Miyake between 2006 and 2011. All the clothes in the A-POC collection are cut from a single roll of fabric. Form, fabric, texture and the components for finished garments are created in a single process and as a result, A-POC allows apparel to be manufactured with a minimum of waste, and can be applied to both small-lot and mass production.



Fig. 15:
 MIYAKE ISSEY EXHIBITION: *The Work of Miyake Issey*. Section C. Installation at the NACT.
 Photo: Masaya Yoshimura

The Reality Lab is a research and development team inside Issey Miyake which began in 2007 under Miyake's direction, and in 2010, "132 5. ISSEY MIYAKE" was launched (fig. 15). Using a complex algorithm, a three-dimensional fabric structure was created by folding a single piece of cloth, and pressing flat. The clothing becomes three-dimensional when worn, but can be re-folded back to its flattened state when taken off. The "1" in "132 5." represents a flat piece of cloth; the "3" for the three-dimensional form of the clothing when worn; the "2" for the two-dimensional form it takes when folded back to flat; and the "5" for the sense that it takes the wearer into another dimension.

The uses of the folding designs originating from the 132 5 series have been expanded to the design of lighting fixtures, "IN-EI ISSEY MIYAKE." Its material is 100% recycled non-woven fabric made from old PET bottles.

Conclusion

No history of fashion is complete without the mention of Issey Miyake, as he has made a major contribution to the world of fashion. He has always been a pioneer in clothing design and inspired us with his new concepts and ways of creation for half a century. He has changed our attitudes on how we dress and added immeasurable comfort and pleasure to our lives. His concepts were undoubtedly original, especially when compared to the rules of fashion set by orthodox Western designers. It was Miyake who set the stage for the Japanese look in the fashion establishment. Due to the interest and popularity of Issey Miyake, the exhibition attracted 140,000 visitors in total and including 20,000 visitors from abroad, many of them saying they came to Japan to see the exhibition. Normally the percentage of foreign visitors is in the range of between 0.5-4.2% in the other exhibitions at NACT. 14.1% of the MIYAKE ISSEY Exhibition was extraordinary. It was the first time for an NACT organized exhibition in Japan to have such a high percentage of foreign visitors.

With a limited budget we were able to employ two strategies to promote the exhibition: creating an informative website in both Japanese and English and working with journalists to inform them about the exhibition. It was the first time for our press office to receive such a huge number of inquiries. The exhibition was promoted in 257 magazines and newspapers all over the world, not only Asia, North America and Europe but also Turkey and South America. The strong interest in the exhibition and high number of foreign visitors demonstrated that the exhibition can actually have the power to influence the flow of people and the cultural landscape of Tokyo.

Because of the successful Miyake exhibition, NACT has experienced increased interest and requests from around the world. The establishment of a new department at NACT, the office of communications and international affairs, is due in-part to the increased understanding that exhibits of art and culture are of interest to a global audience not just Japan. Our objective is to continue to stimulate the imagination and creativity of people through exhibitions of remarkable art and culture.