Stunning 17th-century Japanese garments, international haute couture and costumes from Star Wars come together in a major V&A exhibition on kimono fashion

Gallery 39 and North Court, V&A
29 February – 21 June 2020
vam.ac.uk/kimono | #KyotoToCatwalk

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On 29 February, the V&A will open Europe’s first major exhibition on kimono. The ultimate symbol of Japan, the kimono is often perceived as traditional, timeless and unchanging. *Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk* will counter this conception, presenting the garment as a dynamic and constantly evolving icon of fashion.

The exhibition will reveal the sartorial and social significance of the kimono from the 1660s to the present day, both in Japan and in the rest of the world. Rare 17th and 18th century kimono will be displayed for the first time in the UK, together with fashions by major designers and iconic film and performance costumes. The kimono’s recent reinvention on the streets of Japan will also be explored through work by an exciting new wave of contemporary designers and stylists.

Highlights of the exhibition include a kimono created by Living National Treasure Kunihiko Moriguchi, the dress designed for Björk by Alexander McQueen and worn on the album cover *Homogenic*, and original Star Wars costumes modelled on kimono by John Mollo and Trisha Biggar. Designs by Yves Saint Laurent, Rei Kawakubo and John Galliano will reveal the kimono’s role as a constant source of inspiration for fashion designers. Paintings, prints, film, dress accessories and other objects will feature throughout the exhibition, providing additional context to the fascinating story of the style, appeal and influence of the kimono.

Over 315 works will be featured, including kimono especially made for the show, half drawn from the V&A’s superlative collections and the rest generously lent by museums and private collections in Britain, Europe, America and Japan.

*Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk* begins in the mid-17th century when a vibrant fashion culture emerged in Japan. The increasingly wealthy merchant classes demanded the latest styles to express their affluence, confidence and taste, while leading actors and famous courtesans were the trend-setters of the day. The simple structure of the kimono focussed attention on the surface, allowing for the creation of sumptuous patterns using sophisticated techniques. The first section of the exhibition will explore these designs and shine a light on a fashion-conscious society not dissimilar to today’s, in which desire for the latest look was fed by a cult of celebrity and encouraged by makers, sellers and publishers.
Kimono were first exported to Europe in the mid-17th century, where they had an immediate impact on clothing styles. Foreign fabrics were also brought to Japan and incorporated into kimono. Rare survivors from this early period of cultural exchange, including garments made in Japan for the Dutch and kimono tailored from French brocade and Indian chintz, will be displayed to reveal the fluid fashion relationship between East and West that resulted from the global trade network.

The late 19th century saw a world-wide craze for Japanese art and design. Kimono bought from department stores such as Liberty & Co. in London were worn by those wishing to express their artistic flair. Japan responded by making boldly embroidered ‘kimono for foreigners’, while the domestic market was transformed by the use of European textile technology and chemical dyes. The kimono’s biggest impact on western fashion came in the early 20th century, when designers such as Paul Poiret, Mariano Fortuny and Madeleine Vionnet abandoned tightly-corseted styles in favour of loose layers of fabric that draped the body.

The final section of the exhibition will show how the kimono has continued to inspire fashion designers around the world. The potential of the garment to be translated and transformed is seen in designs by Thom Browne, Duro Olowu and Yohji Yamamoto. The kimono’s timeless, universal quality has also made it the ideal costume for film and performance. The display will include the outfit worn by Toshirō Mifune in Sanjūrō, Oscar-winning costumes from Memoirs of a Geisha, and the Jean Paul Gautier ensemble worn by Madonna in her video Nothing Really Matters. Japan itself is currently witnessing a resurgence of interest in kimono. Jōtarō Saitō designs kimono couture for the catwalk, Hiroko Takahashi seeks to bridge the divide between art and fashion, and more casual styles are created by small, independent studios such as Rumi Rock and Modern Antenna.

Anna Jackson, curator of Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk at the V&A, said: ‘From the sophisticated culture of 17th-century Kyoto to the creativity of the contemporary catwalk, the kimono is unique in its aesthetic importance and cultural impact giving it a fascinating place within the story of fashion.’

- ENDS -

Notes to Editors

- The exhibition Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk runs from 29 February – 21 June 2020. Tickets £16
- The exhibition has been curated for the V&A by Anna Jackson and Josephine Rout. It will be accompanied by a major new V&A publication.
- The V&A has been collecting Japanese art and design since it was founded in 1852 and now holds one of the world’s most significant collections, including important holdings of Japanese textiles and dress.
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For further PRESS information about *Kimono: Kyoto to Catwalk* please contact Kate Morais on k.morais@vam.ac.uk. A selection of press images is available to download free of charge from pressimages.vam.ac.uk