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A Rei of light

Enigmatic fashion designer Rei Kawakubo's spring exhibition at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art is set to become the talk of the fashion world

In 1983, the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York hosted a glittering evening honouring the work of the iconic Yves Saint Laurent. It was the first time the revered institution had paid tribute to a living designer. And this spring marks its second. The work of Rei Kawakubo, founder of the Comme des Garçons label, is to be showcased at an exhibition that runs from May to September at The Met and, according to the organisers, it's set to be less a traditional retrospective and more a 'thematic exhibition'. "In blurring the art and fashion divide, Kawakubo asks us to think differently about clothing," says Thomas P Campbell, director and CEO of The Met.



1 & 2 *Body Meets Dress-DressMeetsBody*, Spring 1997. 3 *Not Making Clothing*, Spring 2014. 4 *Blue Witch*, Spring 2016. 5 *Ceremony of Separation*, Autumn 2015

Indeed, while the designer's highly stylised and sculptural pieces have won her legions of devoted fans around the world, her name, and that of her label, are not exactly commonly known. Interestingly, fashion historian and curator Bronwyn Cosgrave says the upcoming show could draw parallels with the Saint Laurent one because of its possibly commercial applications. She says: "At the time, [the YSL] show was incredibly controversial because it was thought that a show would heighten the commercial prospects of [the brand]. This show will substantially elevate Rei Kawakubo and Comme des Garçons, which are by no means household names around the world."

Some 120 examples of the designer's women's pieces are to be part of the exhibition, starting from her first Paris runway show in 1981 to her latest offerings. Expect to see an avant-garde approach, like having the clothes on mannequins arranged at eye level. "It's likely," says Cosgrave, "that the show will focus more on her position in Paris, being at the forefront of a new generation of revolutionary Japanese designers in the early 80s and also her later work fostering a culture of young Japanese designers at the turn of the new millennium. Expect to see the Comme des Garçons label everywhere this summer."