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Wataru Tominaga's distinctive silhouettes employ varied colours and textures.

IMAGE courtesy of Wataru Tominaga

REPORT

More is More

London
5 May 2016

Wataru Tominaga’s clothing designs are brazen. They have a sense of childlike abandon — the sort of outlandish shapes a youngster might concoct when set loose with a handful of markers and a giant notepad.

But the 28-year-old Japanese designer’s work is not juvenile. In fact, his complex silhouettes and unabashed colour combinations earned him the €15,000 Première Vision Grand Prize at April’s Hyères International Festival of Fashion and Photography.

“I didn’t really expect people to like my collection, to be honest, because it’s not practical,” says Tominaga, who graduated with a BA in Fashion from Central Saint Martins in 2015. “A lot of designers really like minimal aesthetics, and this collection is not minimal. So I was just surprised and grateful.”

And it is true that Tominaga’s designs are anything but minimal. His work is infused with the brash colour palettes of the 60s, 70s, and 80s — a tie-dye of menswear and sportswear opposite distorted volumes reminiscent of early Japanese avant-garde designers like Issey Miyake and Junya Watanabe.

“In the 70s, people were trying to create styles by mixing menswear and womenswear together,” says Tominaga. “And nowadays, there are expectations of what men and women wear. Even in the fashion world, they also know what they expect. I was influenced by the older period where people were trying and experimenting more.”

Tominaga’s designs constitute a grab bag of patterns, shapes, and colours: cuffed red corduroy trousers with white finishing paired with an orange corduroy jacket embellished with floral panelling and treated with heat-pressed elastic in green and white stripes. His approach is almost painterly — the dab of an orange pocket here, a sweep of electric blue across the inner length of a sleeve, a brush of purple shirt emerging from layers of corduroy. Oversized collars are a focal point of the collection, from elongated wing collars to exaggerated ruffs concealing portions of the models’ faces. It is evident that Tominaga draws his inspiration from unexpected forms and textures.

“I try to use contradictory elements and details that may initially seem a bit weird, or combine graphical ornaments with handmade textures,” says Tominaga. “I used elastic bands to make the texture and to make different shapes and fabrics with the body as well.”

His bold aesthetic comes from a long-time interest in colour, as well as a previous education in printed textiles. He constructs his textiles using heat-pressed elastic tapes to gather and cinch the fabric at measured intervals for an accordioned effect. And Tominaga’s fusion of menswear and womenswear further bolsters his playful and distinctive style.

“It’s not only about fashion,” he says. “I think the world is becoming more fair to women — it’s not totally equal yet — but people are accepting the feminine. And I think men should be able to embrace more feminine styles. I feel that we are missing some fun and colour in men’s collections nowadays. So I just wanted to have more interesting elements, rather than just thinking about function. But I think I need to move in a more realistic direction if I continue.”

Tominaga beat nine other candidates for the prize and joins 30 previous winners including Anthony Vaccarello, who succeeded Hedi Slimane as creative director at Yves Saint Laurent in early April. Tominaga’s playful collection will be exhibited at the Première Vision shows in New York and Paris. He will also serve on the jury of the PV awards in September and produce a women’s collection with Chanel’s Métiers d’Art to be presented next year in Hyères.

His win is indicative of the fashion industry’s pivot away from the clean lines and geometric shapes of 2015, towards the likes of Vetement’s maximalist shapes and the cake-like layers of Comme Des Garçons' autumn/winter 2016-17. If he decides to continue along his bold and experimental path, he may just end up among the ranks of these designers.

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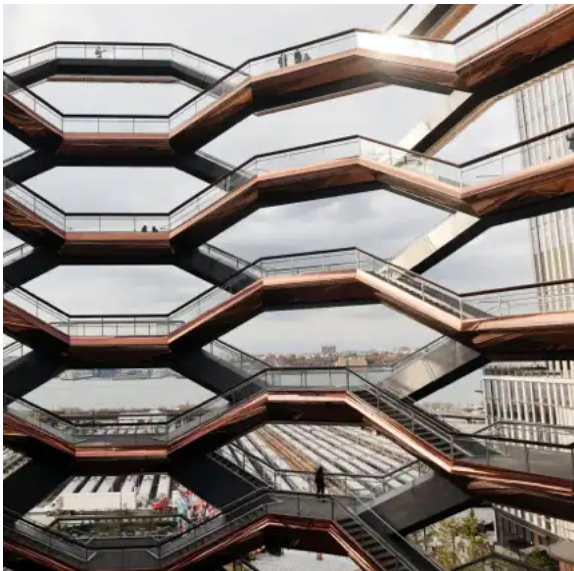
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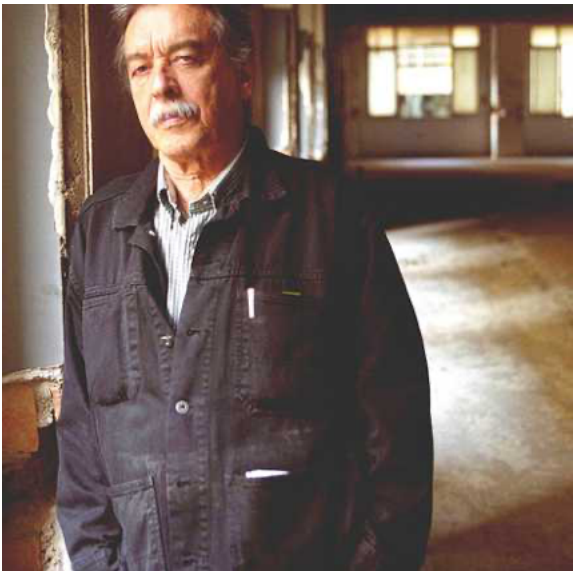
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