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Kansai Yamamoto is a Japanese designer, born on February 8, 1944 in Yokohama, Japan. Kansai studied both civil engineering and English at Nippon University. He then completed his studies at Bunka Fashion College and pursued a career in design. Kansai opened his own boutique in Tokyo in 1968. In 1971, he started his own company, Yamamoto Kansai Company Ltd, with his two partners (Journal Runway Archive, 2018).

Kansai set the foundation for Japanese fashion going mainstream in Western fashion. Kansai was the first Japanese designer to move to Europe, a decade before Rei Kawakubo and Yohji Yamamoto started showing their collections in Paris. He was at the forefront of contemporary Japanese fashion during the 1970s and 1980s. His saturated patterns and exaggerated silhouettes were influenced by the colorful art of the Momoyama period of Japanese art, 1573-1615 along with vibrant costumes of Kabuki theatre and classic manga illustrations, some of which could be seen in prints and mask motifs during Louis Vuitton's 2018 Cruise Collection. Kansai is known for his avant-gardist designs which reference Japanese art and theatre.

He is also credited with renewing interest in the traditional Kimono. David Bowie reached out to Kansai about making costumes for him after seeing one of his looks featured on the cover of Harper's and Queen. Kansai was then commissioned by David Bowie to design the costumes for his Ziggy Stardust tour. He was the first designer to create a Bowie stage costume. The costumes consisted of widely cut and printed Kimono, extravagant silhouettes and suits made out of synthetic shiny materials. Kansai has a Basara aesthetic, with his signature riot of color, texture and pattern. Japanese concept of Basara, to dress freely with stylish extravagance, the love of color, flamboyance and bold color (Park, 2018). His designs are inspired by all periods of Japanese history and cover Japanese art as a whole.

His prints and visual treatments echo the two-dimensional nature of much Asian art. The theatricality of Kansai's style was inspired by all those periods of Japanese history that preferred exaggeration over modesty, and came to be one of the major trends of the period between 1970s and 1980s. Also, he was carefree when it came to the confines of gender in fashion. He didn't design for anyone in particular, although his clothing was, and still is, generally worn by women.

Kansai has also helped shape the aesthetic of glam with his signatures of saturated color, vibrant decoration and dramatic silhouettes. A technique that he has often explored was three-dimensional qualities through folding, pleating, and twisting fabric (Fury, 2017). This was similar to traditional Japanese techniques of decorative plaiting, called Kumihimo, meaning gathered threads. Another technique Kansai used was created for the purpose of hikinuki, which is a kabuki style quick on stage change of costume (Johnson, 2016). One example of this was a famous costume he created for David Bowie. It is an iconic cloak with red and black kanji characters on it.

Kansai's clothes mark a specific breed of 1970s escapism, into outer space, to new and imaginary cultures, to the future, from the past, and shedding gender. Glam rock, which Kansai's designs for Bowie helped to fundamentally shape aesthetically, was about dreaming, offering a certain unreality as a comfort to troubled times. It was a colorful, campy distraction from terrorism, economic strife, the Yom Kippur and Vietnam Wars, and the crooked politicians of Watergate (2017). He provided a get away from troubled times during his prime.

All in all, Kansai Yamamoto's work in the '70s and '80s set the foundation of contemporary Japanese fashion and for the outbreak of brands like Comme des Garçons, Issey Miyake, and Yohji Yamamoto. (Harris, 2020). The extravagance of his clothing and shows put Japan on the map as a fashion powerhouse.

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