

Tosa combines art and tech at New York Fashion Week

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A kimono featuring “Sound of Ikebana” is worn at New York Fashion Week. (Provided by Naoko Tosa, a program-specific professor at Kyoto University)



Although the name might lead one to expect a floral pattern, “Sound of Ikebana” takes a different approach.

Tosa started making these video art pieces about 10 years ago by using a high-speed camera to capture colored paint and other sticky liquids being mixed and splattered by sound vibrations at 2,000 frames per second, creating unique colors and shapes in the process.

The “Sound of Ikebana” videos achieved high acclaim in Japan and abroad for capturing the beauty in asymmetrical fluid movements. This type of elegance discovered in natural phenomena is seen as a core factor in traditional ikebana flower arrangements.

Tosa got the chance to participate in New York Fashion Week after her work caught the eye of a company involved with the event. The company praised her unique perspective and felt that her technique and artistry conveyed traditional Japan.

Tosa decided to use the mythological story of Amaterasu, the Japanese sun goddess who plunged heaven and Earth into darkness for a time by hiding in a cave, as the unifying theme for her fashion collection.

The garments were also specially designed to be wearable by anyone, regardless of gender or age.

Patterns from her “Sound of Ikebana” video works were printed onto the clothing in a joint project between Tosa’s industry-academia art innovation research unit at Kyoto University and Seiko Epson Corp., headquartered in Suwa, Nagano Prefecture.

The technology, known as digital textile printing, uses inkjet equipment to reproduce designs directly onto the cloth, allowing for subtle shifts in color gradations and hue.

Glamorous garments featuring prints of audio-visual art by a Japanese scientist and creator wowed the crowd at New York Fashion Week, one of the four top fashion events in the world.

“I saw great potential in ‘attire deriving from sounds,’” said Naoko Tosa, a media artist and professor at Kyoto University’s Disaster Prevention Research Institute.

“Clothes are a familiar part of our everyday lives, and they provide energy to people. My hope is to convey lively energy through artistic clothing,” she said.

A total of 24 kimono, dresses, suits and other items from Tosa’s collection were sported down the catwalk on Sept. 11 last year--all featuring imagery from her mesmerizing video artworks known as “Sound of Ikebana.”

In October, some of her high-fashion creations were put on display at a boutique in Manhattan as well.

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The process is eco-friendly as well since the printing technology is compact, and it produces only as much material as is needed in areas and close to where the material will be used, rather than mass-producing products that must be transported long distances.

Following New York Fashion Week, Tosa was flooded with messages from visitors who described her style as “futuristic” and “full of vital energy.”

Tosa’s works are already scheduled to appear again at a New York Fashion Week event in February, according to her accounts.

In the meantime, she continues with various projects at Kyoto University’s Disaster Prevention Research Institute, applying art, science and technology to help people and communities become more resistant to natural disasters.

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