



View of “Rei Kawakubo / Comme des Garçons,” 2017.
NEW YORK

Rei Kawakubo / Comme des Garçons

THE MET | METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART
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Never mind that the dress, with fluffy black feathers bursting from an electric-blue halo, looks as though a giant scrunchie swallowed an ostrich. The piece from Rei Kawakubo’s “Blue Witch” collection, spring/summer 2016, is beautiful. With its opulent folds of fabric engulfing the mannequin, the dress is at once regal, farcical, and otherworldly. The Japanese designer is famous for spoofing traditional forms and subverting the conventional functions of women’s clothing. (This dress lacks armholes, while others sprout enough sleeves for an octopus.) Ever since she launched Comme des Garçons in 1969, Kawakubo has skewered binaries—male and female, luxury and kitsch—through designs that unravel such distinctions. In her embrace of opposites and contradictions, she regularly transforms catwalks into crossroads.

This exhibition assembles a cast of characters that could inhabit a phantasmagoric world conceived by Lewis Carroll or David Cronenberg, from mutant Stepford Wives in sheaths of picnic-ready pastel gingham bulging with bizarre humps to samurai sporting leather-daddy epaulets. One arresting coat from “Ceremony of Separation,” autumn/winter 2015–16, is a funereal confection of black polyester lace. Look closely and you will find children’s dresses and bonnets embedded among the curls and furls of fabric. The garment becomes a dying organism with offspring fused to its flanks, a creature supporting life even as it decays.

Viewers see Kawakubo’s designs through doorways and windows cut in white geometric

chambers that form a futuristic labyrinth. This flashy presentation is a baffling choice for an artist whose radical imagination finds expression in three, not two, dimensions. Rarely does one get to fully circle a dress, to watch its audacious angles shift in space, and the installation drains the drama from many of the designs. Her works deserve to be scrutinized from multiple viewpoints, just as Kawakubo herself examines the world from unlikely perspectives.

—Zoë Lescaze

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