



Blind Inspiration: Irving Penn and Issey Miyake's Unique Collaboration

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Over 13 years from 1987 to 1999, photographer Irving Penn and fashion designer Issey Miyake created an extraordinary collection of over 250 images.

Their relationship was unique: Miyake supplied pieces from his seasonal Paris collections to Penn to photograph, but he never attended a photo shoot, and Penn never went to one of Miyake's fashion shows. The two men never even discussed a general direction, which is how Miyake wanted it. For him, the results were not only a complete surprise, they were pure inspiration.

"I have found a strong and sure bond with Penn-san," Miyake once wrote, "and what I receive from him moves me deeply."

Many of these images, along with Penn's preliminary sketches, a short film with drawings by Michael Crawford detailing the process behind their creation, and posters by Ikko Tanaka, are displayed collectively for the first time in a captivating exhibition in Tokyo. "Irving Penn and Issey Miyake: Visual Dialogue" runs until from Sept. 16 until April 8 at 21_21 Design Sight museum.

Creatively, both Penn (1917-2009) and Miyake were seemingly more drawn to art and the avant-garde than to commercial fashion, blending East and West, primitivism and modernism, geometry and drama. Beyond his work in the pages of Vogue, Penn was best known for his striking black and white portraits, sculptural still lifes and flowers, all set with perfected lighting and the barest of backgrounds.

The red poppy flower that forms one half of the exhibition poster, mimicking a pleated piece by Miyake below it, is a Penn work. "It symbolizes blossoming thoughts and creativity," says Midori Kitamura, president of Miyake Design Studio.

The exhibition space, designed by architect Shigeru Ban, is one of elegant simplicity. Along one extended platform, the photographs are displayed as a slide show in three-meter-high format, with huge, high definition images fading in and out to reveal the exquisitely fine detail of Miyake's materials, textiles and pleating. These pictures are perfectly expressive of what Miyake referred to as his and Penn's "silent understanding" — but to visitors to the exhibition, they speak resoundingly of shared genius.

For more information, see www.2121designsight.jp.

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