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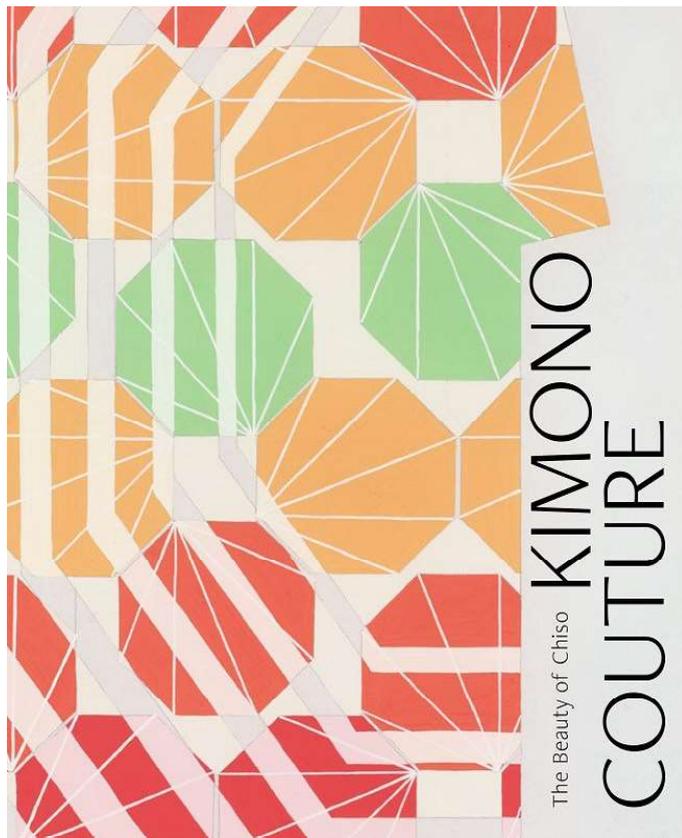
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The Journal of Dress History is the academic publication of The Association of Dress Historians (ADH) through which scholars can articulate original research in a constructive, interdisciplinary, and peer reviewed environment. The ADH supports and promotes the study and professional practice of the history of dress, textiles, and accessories of all cultures and regions of the world, from before classical antiquity to the present day. The ADH is Registered Charity #1014876 of The Charity Commission for England and Wales.

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The Editorial Board of The Journal of Dress History encourages submissions for publication consideration from students, early career researchers, independent scholars, and established professionals. If you would like to discuss an idea for an article, book review, or exhibition review, please contact Dr. Jennifer Daley at journal@dresshistorians.org.

The Journal of Dress History is designed on European standard A4 size paper (8.27 x 11.69 inches) and is intended to be read electronically, in consideration of the environment. The graphic design utilises the font, Baskerville, a serif typeface designed in 1754 by John Baskerville (1706-1775) in Birmingham, England. The logo of The Association of Dress Historians is a monogram of three letters, ADH, interwoven to represent the interdisciplinarity of our membership, committed to scholarship in dress history. The logo was designed in 2017 by Janet Mayo, longstanding ADH member.



Kimono Couture: The Beauty of Chiso, Vivian Li and Christine D. Starkman, Editors, D. Giles Limited, Lewes, East Sussex, England, 2020, Notes, Exhibition Checklist, Bibliography, Glossary, Kimono Construction, Contributors, Credits, 14 Black-and-White Illustrations, 86 Colour Illustrations, 112 pages, Hardback, £29.95.

Kimono Couture: The Beauty of Chiso, a companion to the current online exhibition of the same name curated by Worcester Art Museum in Worcester, Massachusetts, not only uniquely illuminates the kimono as a

contemporary art form with transcultural currency, but also provides the reader with a truly rare insight into a traditionally very private industry. Never before has one of Japan's oldest and most eminent kimono houses, Chiso, founded in 1555, granted westerners such access to its textile and art collection, and its methods.

Rather than providing one essay by a single author, as is common in similar publications, this compact volume is separated into three multi-authored essays. The first essay, "From the Everyday to Couture: Chiso and Contemporary Kimono" by editors Vivian Li and Christine D. Starkman, provides a refreshingly honest account of the challenges they faced trying to show the kimono as a contemporary design. This is because surprisingly Chiso's most modern looking kimono, used to inspire their current designers, is in fact one of the oldest in their collection. Currently curator of Contemporary Art at Dallas Museum of Art, Li served as associate curator of Asian Art and Global Contemporary Art at the Worcester Art Museum, 2015-2019. Starkman is an independent curator with an interest in global, transnational, and transcultural histories of modern and contemporary art between Asia, Europe, and Latin America. Li and Starkman's exploration of Chiso's history in both western and eastern cultures makes for interesting reading, ultimately leading them to conclude that "Chiso values what is beautiful above all else and as such they are always contemporary" (p. 21). Unquestionably beauty is a subjective analysis, but it would be hard to argue this is

not a point borne out in the plates showing kimonos in Chiso's collection dating as far back as the Edo period (1603–1868).

Through their research, Li and Starkman became increasingly aware that there was no better way of crystalizing the modern kimono than to commission one, and spearheaded Worcester Art Museum's order for a wedding kimono from Chiso for display. The piece, titled, *Worcester Wedding Kimono* (2020), is the first kimono assigned by an American art museum for its collection. Arguably, by presenting the kimono as an art piece, Li and Starkman subtly herald in a new type of reader, i.e., those who relate more instinctively to objets d'art than textiles and fashion. Indeed, in the section, titled, "Kimono Construction," it is stated that the kimono has not changed its basic form since the 1600s, thus kimono fashion "references not the cut but the art on the kimono" (p. 110). However, the more puritanical members amongst us need not fear, for Chiso's underlying ethos is that these sectors are not mutually exclusive. This is borne out in the interview article, titled, *Inside Chiso: A Conversation with Kimono Designer Imai Atsuhiko* by Monica Bethe (director of the Medieval Japanese Studies Institute in Kyoto), Li and Starkman. Atsuhiko, who has been with Chiso since 1998, says that when designing a kimono, "I always have two aspects in mind: the kimono's beauty as an art piece and the beauty born when worn by women" (p. 49). Indeed, Li and Starkman's spotlight on the artisan industry that supports Chiso, such as experts in coloured flour paste-resist dyeing and barrel tie-dyeing, unique to Chiso, reinforces the inherent fact that the kimono is a textile.

The second essay, titled, "The Kimono as Japan's "Cultural Property" by Kikuchi Riyo (a senior researcher who specialises in textile techniques, in the Department of Intangible Cultural Heritage at the Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties), steps away from Chiso. However, as a concise well-constructed overview of the history of the kimono in Japanese society from the 1600s to the present day, it answers the questions that start to organically arise from Li and Starkman's piece and so creates a logical flow. The reader is provided with a greater understanding of the kimono's history in Japan and consequently the cultural context within which Chiso adapted and survived.

The final essay, "The Turning Point: Kishi Chikudō's Ōtsu and Karasaki Screens" by Yukio Lippit, professor of the History of Art and Architecture at Harvard University, reveals a different aspect of Chiso, i.e., its standing as an art collector. Lippit focuses exclusively on the pair of eight-panelled folding screens painted by the artist Kishi Chikudō (1826–1897) owned by Chiso, which marked the artist's transition from the traditional Kishi painting lineage to painter, designer and instructor in the Meiji period (1868–1912). Chiso first came into contact with

Chikudō when he was originally employed as an art teacher in 1873 by Nishimura Sōzaemon XII (1855–1935), the twelfth-generation head of the kimono house, who then persuaded Chikudō to make designs for Chiso. Lippit provides a studious account of Chikudō's life and work, and one wonders what would have been lost to the world of Japanese art without Chiso's patronage which catalysed Chikudō's career.

An invaluable insight into Chiso's machinations today can be found in the interview with its head designer Atsuhiro (see above). Through the thought-provoking questions of Bethe, Li and Starkman, Atsuhiro explains the ethos behind Chiso's design for the Worcester Wedding Kimono, providing a definitive link with Chikudō's move away from traditional poetry-based frameworks in favour of the reality of nature, as demonstrated in *Ōtsu and Karasaki*. Atsuhiro also describes how the kimono house interacts with its network of artisans (which number approximately 600 in total), and his hopes for the kimono's reception in America. Access to such first-hand sources is rare and instrumental to one's understanding and appreciation of how the kimono comes to fruition.

Uncharacteristically in books of this genre, illustrations are integrated with the text—an appealing factor which seems to amplify the book's modern perception of the kimono. A note to the reader unfamiliar with Japanese syntax and a helpful glossary of Japanese terms also demonstrate an empathic approach towards the book's western readership.

In summary, Li and Starkman have initiated a somewhat novel practice of buying a kimono as an art piece, and it is certainly a different approach to stimulate demand for the kimono, which reached its pinnacle in terms of sales during the 1970s. Whether this will be adopted by other western art institutions, however, is yet to be seen. Nevertheless, this book provides a very informative and enlightening insight into the modern kimono industry, and through their endeavour, Li and Starkman reveal the kimono to be a multifaceted item. *Kimono Couture: The Beauty of Chiso* is an excellent purchase for anyone interested in the kimono, whether as a piece of art, a textile, or a fashion item.

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Samantha Browne is a member of The Association of Dress Historians, with an avid interest in fashion history. Before relocating to London, she regularly contributed to the online contemporary art magazines *Art in Liverpool* and *this is tomorrow*, writing reviews on fashion and art exhibitions based in northwest England.