

Blanket coat, "Prism Collage"  
Collection, Fall/ Winter 1997-1998,  
Size/Taille M, Made in Japan.  
Toronto Metropolitan University  
FRC2009.01.680. Photo by Tricia  
Crivellaro, 2019.



# COLLAGE THROUGH FEMINISM & TEXTILE

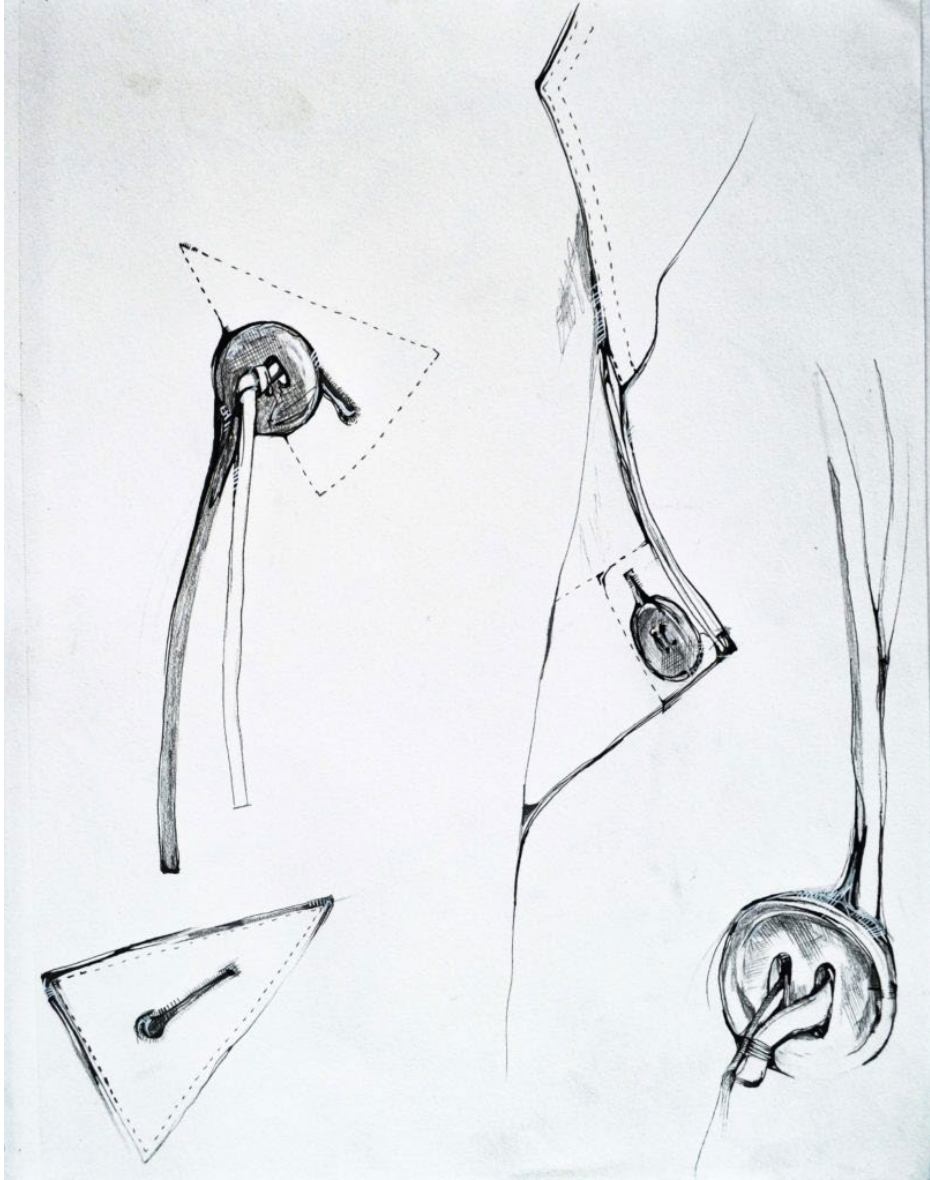
By **Tricia Crivellaro**  
MA Fashion Student

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It was while reading Yuniya Kawamura's book "Fashion-ology" that the inspiration for this blog post came to me. Kawamura is questioning the personification of fashion brands and their relationship to a specific fashion designer- an only identity. The author raises that issue and claims that we too often forget that those important creative brands are part of a collaborative production with large numbers of people (Kawamura). Through an analysis of a sublime blanket coat from Toronto Metropolitan University's Fashion Research Collection that I will seek to answer the following question:

How can feminism be evoked through the analysis of a blanket coat's design presented in the "Prism Collage" Collection from Fall-Winter 1997/1998?

Through a collage methodology and in response to Kawamura, I will poetically and creatively illuminate the work of Makiko Minagawa, the textile designer of the garment, juxtaposed to my own femininity and interpretation of identity. I will not mention the name of the Japanese male designer related to the "creation" of this blanket coat. However, I will use the designer as a reference throughout the article.



Creative Component 1.  
Details. Drawing by Tricia  
Crivellaro, 2019.

### **CONTEMPLATION OF A BLANKET COAT**

At first glance, I noticed the intensity of the contrasting textured collage pattern and instantly visualized myself wrapped in this oeuvre d'art. The thick, woolly, felted material coexists alongside minimal details; the intriguing buttons with a one-of-a-kind assembly is delicate and sophisticated; the fascinating but faded buttonholes, which are sewn to a triangular tone-on-tone small piece of fabric, which amused me when I discovered their presence. Deconstructed finishes and raw-edge hems, subtle designs expressing the desire to go calmly against the current- I thought, how complex a single garment can be when you look at it profoundly. And then, there is this instant when I tried to decipher the construction of this captivating cloak, I observed its asymmetrical relaxed cut and realized the complexity of pattern that curiously reminded me of a kimono. Its ingenious structure embraces and divinely drapes the body while being slightly nonchalant. I saw the contrasting triangular openings on the sleeves and the back and realized that they provide ease of movement for the wearer. I finally imagined myself wearing this garment and feeling all of a sudden protected; the quilted and fluffy lining -that hidden interior- would make me comfortable and serene. I portrayed myself being confident by the imposing presence that this coat affords, as if to dress in this blanket-coat had the power to make you feel free.



**Fig. 1:** “Issey Miyake’s Longtime Textile Director, Makiko Minagawa, Practices Craftsmanship in Its Finest Form.” *Cultured Magazine*, 6 Aug. 2019, <https://www.culturedmag.com/makiko-minagawa/>.

### **ODE TO MAKIKO MINAGAWA**

Makiko Minagawa is the textile designer who created the fabric and likewise, the incredible abstract pattern on the coat in question. She was born in Japan, in the city of Kyoto, where textile production has been established for hundreds of years. Her grandfather, who practiced yuzen, a technical dyeing process, and her father, a kimono dyer, have both gravitated toward the textile field and have undoubtedly inspired her (Takeda 61).

The fact that Makiko Minagawa is the textile director for one of the most renowned Japanese fashion companies since the 1970s demonstrates her courage, rigor and perseverance in a political and social climate where it was certainly not easy to assert oneself as a woman; we can remember that Japan passed the Act on Securing Equal Opportunity and Treatment of Men and Women in Employment in 1985 only and enacted the Basic Act for Gender-Equal Society in 1999 (Komatsu 125) and that even though that country was “in a high economic growth in the 1970s, the notion of gender roles –which assigns women to the home and men to the workplace– remains deeply entrenched”(Komatsu 125).



Photograph by Tricia Crivellaro, 2019.

Let's now demystify how Minagawa made this captivating work of art.

It is through a unique collage process composed of "carefully chosen woven and non-woven materials with varying degrees of transparency which she layered on a wool base cloth" (Takeda 62) that she conceived this textile development. With each manipulation and intervention, she shapes fabrics with intuition and achieves a different result every time.

The collage artistic method is not something new, especially not in Japan. According to Dr. Herta Wescher, a Bauhaus avant-garde art critic, the first systemic collage attempt was composed by a Japanese woman in the early Heian period, Lady Isle; she used brushes, ink, and papers to magnify hand-written poems in her journal (Kersey 02). The essence and aesthetic of Makiko Minagawa's collages also delicately remind me of the atmosphere and energy felt by paintings of Yuki Katsura, a Japanese feminist artist who had an astonishing career from 1930 to 1991. This lady was a pioneer in the country's avant-garde art, "while her work was praised for its femininity, she was also accused of working like a man and trying to 'outdo' male artists" (Volk 05). She did not let herself be trampled by the comments and continued to claim her sensitive ideas by "expressing the detailed sense of touch that only a woman possesses" (Volk 06). I like to believe that Makiko was moved by the ideals of that previous important woman and artist.



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



**Fig. 2:** Katsura, Yuki. *Art It*, <https://www.art-it.asia/u/TakamatsuArt/3hzblinywmucz6ryspxf>.

**Fig. 3:** Katsura, Yuki. *Art Net*, <http://www.artnet.com/artists/yuki-katsura/untitled-JDbTzsQPafKx31PjzZYig2>.

**Fig. 4:** Katsura, Yuki. *Art Net*, <http://www.artnet.com/artists/yuki-katsura/abstraction-7CTTdneqn7TP5GLnysrDng2>.

Photographs by Tricia Crivellaro, 2019.

The final step in the creation of that fabric was to merge all those textile fragments juxtaposed by Minagawa's delicate and manual process and to fix them in a machine that could felt these pieces together. Composed of hundreds of needles, the various fibers, and textile components would be pierced repeatedly to unify all the layers into a single final thick and dense material (Takeda 62). Using a machine during the process to mechanize the final product is a reminder of the designer's desire to ally tradition and technology (Menkes 08).

Minagawa's abstract piece of textile is presenting different colors rather close to earth tones: black, dark brown and beige. Applied one on top of each other, the layers reveal textures, transparency, and tenderness; we can feel imperfection, gentleness, and melancholy. In the following creative component that I conceived, I wanted to pay tribute to Makiko Minagawa's layered collage method. The animated GIF expresses fun and nonchalance; two important components of a collage process; there is certainly something amusing to assembling and deconstructing pieces of textiles and fibers.



Creative Component 2. Technical Sketch inspired by Minagawa's textile process. By Tricia Crivellaro, 2019.

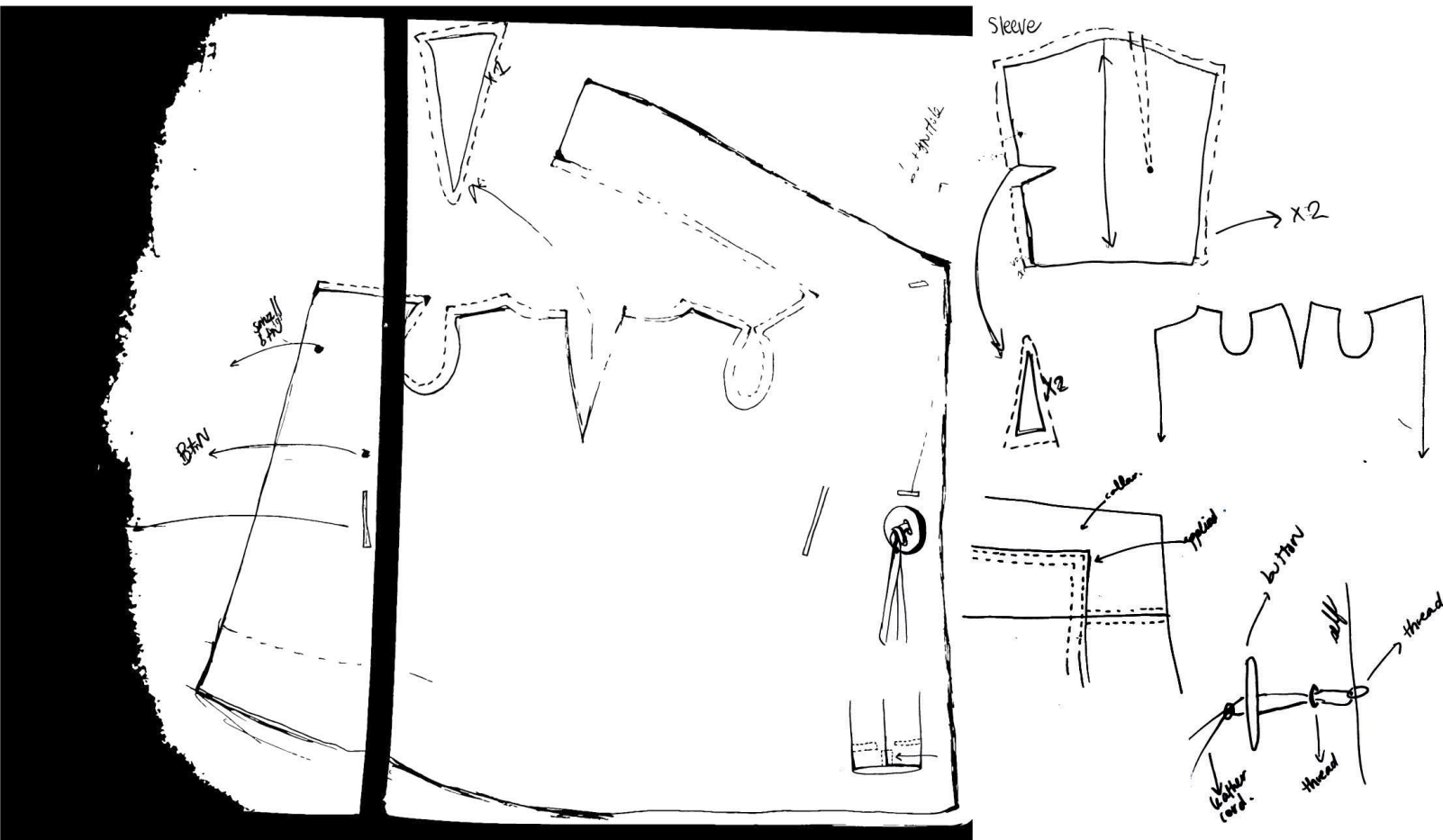


Creative Component 3. Sketches and Collage inspired by Minagawa's textile process. By Tricia Crivellaro, 2019.



**Fig. 5:** 'Szucs, Agnes. "Colors from the '90s." Colors from the '90s, 27 May. 2011, <http://iiiinspired.blogspot.com/2011/05/colors-from-90s.html>.

For 'Prism Collage" Collection /Fall-Winter 1997/1998, Makiko Minagawa presented three different color propositions for that specific blanket coat using her intuitive method. Here is an example of a more colorful version:



Sketches, patterns and process work by Tricia Crivellaro, 2019.

In conclusion, this poetic analysis of the blanket coat's design illuminates the creative personality of one of the co-creators of the garment; I wanted to demonstrate the ingenuity of Minagawa's textile process instead of the designer's work as we are accustomed to do. I presented in the previous paragraphs a collage of some courageous and inspiring women, I connected them to share their visions. Another example of an ambitious woman is Mrs. Kathleen Kubas, who was the past owner of the magnificent item. She was fascinated by avant-garde designer garments, collected a lot of intriguing clothes and hats and was looking to express herself with wearable art pieces (DeHaas).

I believe that Makiko Minagawa and the designer Issey Miyake's collaborative blanket coat was a unique chef-d'oeuvre which was intangibly elevating Kathleen Kubas as a woman, as an artist, as a teacher, and as a human being.



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