

urara tsuchiya is the most surreal ceramicist you'll ever have the pleasure of knowing

Spanning a number of different disciplines -- ceramics, performance, video, costume -- Urara's work reifies the absurdities of human life and nature with a unique and droll charm.





**kei ninomiya's noir is reinventing
gothic romance**

**Launching his label in 2012 at just 28,
Kei became the youngest designer to**

have ever been entrusted with a brand by Comme des Garçons. Here, he discusses his vision and creative process.

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There are currently only three brands operating under the Comme des Garçons umbrella showing during Paris Fashion Week. One is run by Rei Kawakubo, of course, Comme's charismatic and enigmatic visionary creative force. Then there's Junya Watanabe, one of Rei's many protégés and one of the most consistently unique and inventive designers working in the world today, who's been designing at his eponymous brand since 1992. Finally, there's Kei Ninomiya who – at the tender age of 28 – launched the Noir Kei Ninomiya label in 2012; the youngest designer to have ever been entrusted with a brand by Comme des Garçons.

The ruling creative passion of Kei Ninomiya lies in the brand's name: noir. His creations are luscious, gothic, romantic. "Black is a colour that I like," Kei explains. "Because it is the absence of colour, and without colour you can emphasise the form and technique and create simple and strong designs."



Kei is full of contradictions. He sports a ruffled, punk black mohican but in person is gentle and friendly. His designs are technical Baroque masterpieces, but he makes snow domes in his spare time. He studied French Literature at college in Tokyo, then changed tack completely, and moved to Antwerp to pursue a dream of fashion design because he wanted to make things with his own hands.

After graduating from Antwerp's Royal Academy, Kei took

a job at Comme des Garçons and worked for four years with Rei Kawakubo. Under her tutelage, Kei gave shape to clothes that he could not have dreamed even existed. Even now, the young designer retains a sense of awe about his time spent in close proximity with Rei. "Even if you try to create something new, there are times when you have no choice but to go with the flow, right?" he says. "But Rei absolutely does not do that. She really is someone who is living the way she says that she is."

The Noir Kei Ninomiya brand was actually Rei's idea, not Kei's. "I still do not know why she chose me." Despite his modesty, and Rei's reticence, you imagine she chose him because his talent is unmistakable. Action not words, that's Rei's attitude – Kei sensed this firsthand and internalised it.

So what has he learned from Rei? "No matter how good your work is, whatever you have done in the past is no good". He then adds, "She absolutely does not permit anything that she has seen somewhere else or anything that resembles it at all, whether it is something that she has made herself or something that was made by someone else. And that is completely unrelated to the issue of how beautiful it might be."



There's Rei Kawakubo, Junya Watanabe, and you. You are the youngest designer of the lot. Do you take pride in that?

Things have changed a lot since Rei founded the brand, but that period was so crucial to me, it's a huge influence. When I am working I'm always thinking about how the next generation will feel about what I'm making now, years down the line. I'm working in the same arena as them but the career that I've been building is completely different. My ideal, simply, is to have others think that I

am doing something interesting. Not just Rei and Junya, but also in the wider fashion industry. I can only do my best.

Do you get a lot of feedback from Rei on your designs?

No. I never show her anything while I'm working on it. She sees it for the first time during the rehearsal for the show.

Do you receive comments at that point?

There are no comments.

What guides you in your creative vision?

I want to do what cannot be done by others. I guess it is uniqueness, right? I've always made clothes in a non-traditional and idiosyncratic way – with no sewing. I want to continue that but take it to new heights.



Is this what sets Noir Kei Ninomiya apart, in your opinion?

It may well be now, but if you ask whether I'm going to do this exact thing for ever, well no. I want to constantly update things.

What is the most difficult thing in the process of creating clothes?

It is all very tough, to be honest. Even if you have an image in your head, there are cases where it is hard to

actually make it. And there's never enough time, you know?

When you make clothing, do you have an image of the woman or an image of the person in mind? The image would be dignified. But I couldn't describe the woman.

Are there designers that you like?

Rei Kawakubo, of course. I have total respect for her work.

What about when you are not working? What do you do?

I am the type of person who fills his days with work. I never go to parties or anything like that. I see my friends sometimes, if there's something going on. But I'm a workaholic. It makes me uneasy to leave work undone.



Perhaps because of your hairstyle, I had the impression that you would be extroverted?

If I spent more time on the social scene, I would not have a hairstyle like this. It has not changed in the 10 years since I joined the company.

In your previous interviews, you said that you made snow domes in your downtime. Are you still doing that?

Not recently. In that sense, I may well have changed. And

maybe my work has too? I think that in the past I had many other ideas that became clothes, and I can now explore those ideas by putting on a show or that it may be that I now feel it's enough for me to make clothes if I want to make clothes. I don't need the snow domes anymore.



















Credits

Photography Gray Sorrenti

Styling Matt Holmes

Hair Akki at Art Partner.

Make-up Kanako Takase at Streeters.

Nail technician Mei Kawajiri.

Photography assistance Javier Villegas, Jared Zagha and Johnny Vicari.

Styling assistance Andy Reiff.

Hair assistance Rei Kawauchi and Takao Hayashi.

Make-up assistance Ayana Awata.

Production Katie Fash.

Production assistance Layla Néméjanski and Steve Sutton.

All accessories (worn throughout) models own.

Models Lua Beaulieu at No Agency. Aya Brown. Brandon Hartley. Gray Sorrenti. Zora Sicher.

All clothing Noir Kei Ninomiya.

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