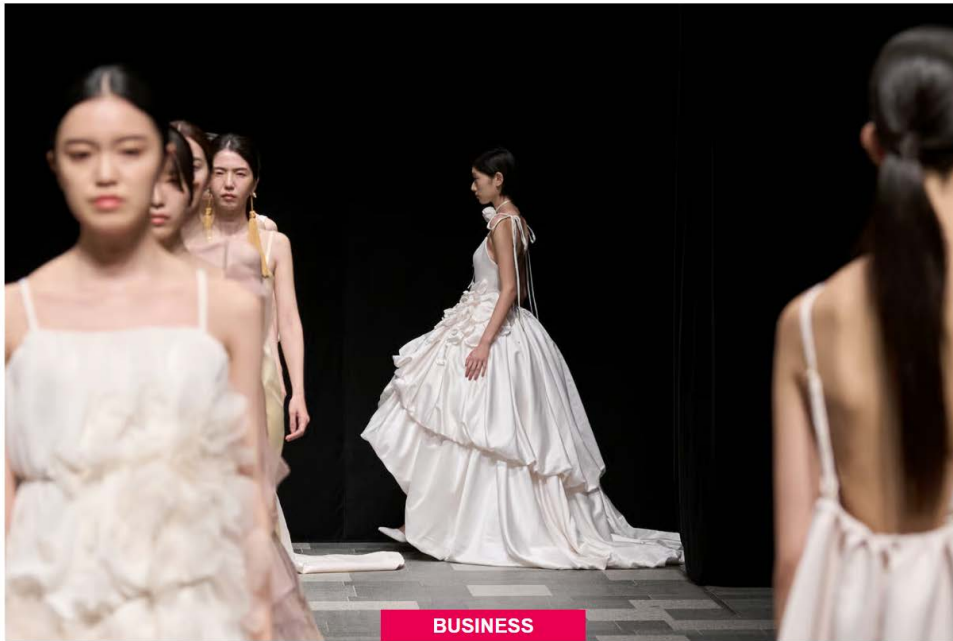


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Rakuten Fashion Week Tokyo and its growing emphasis on global inclusion



Karen Moriyama SS24, Rakuten Fashion Week Tokyo. Credits: Launchmetrics Spotlight.

By Rachel Douglass

6 Sept 2023



‘Open, Fashion Week’ was the overarching theme of Rakuten Fashion Week Tokyo’s spring/summer 2024 edition, which had been centred around the “strengthening of power to transmit globally”. Like other fashion weeks of its calibre, Tokyo has its sights set on attaining a more global reach, an element that was only enhanced after the pandemic and has also been evident in its intentional choice to run from August 28 to September 2, placing it ahead of the international show schedules.

For this season, the event, which has been sponsored by Japanese retailer Rakuten since 2019, boasted an official schedule of 50 brands, 35 of which hosted physical presentations while 15 offered up digital ones. Several were also from overseas, an expansion on the year prior and a further nod at the occasion’s attempts to adopt a more globally holistic approach. Like AW23, however, it was still clear that Rakuten’s mission to support Tokyo’s local industry, in a bid to make the region’s fashion more attractive to buyers and press, resided in its vision.

A substantial part of this lies in the desire to bring strong Japanese brands back to FWT. This has continued to be reflected in the event’s ‘By R’ project, launched in 2020 to encourage notable designers to return to their roots by supporting their fashion week endeavours. For this season it was A Bathing Ape (BAPE) that had been invited to grace Tokyoites with its presence, marking the first time the Nigo-founded brand had hosted a show in its

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marking the first time the Tokyo-founded brand had hosted a show in its homecity. Its involvement was notably two-fold, of course. While Rakuten said that it wanted to broaden the appeal of BAPE to more fans, both in and outside Japan, it was also hoping to amplify the awareness of Rakuten FWT, linking to its encompassing mission of luring in a wider audience.

Global Fashion Collective put an international spin on Tokyo's schedule



Cedim The School of Design SS24, Rakuten Fashion Week Tokyo. Credits: Launchmetrics Spotlight.

However, the desire to amplify international creatives could also be seen in the organisations participating in the event. Global Fashion Collective (GFC) was among those that secured a prominent place on the schedule, bringing with it six emerging designers from around the world to present their own perspectives through SS24 collections. The event, hosted at Omotesando, Shibuya, featured a runway show where each of the designers could exhibit their wares to an in-person audience, as well as those tuning in online via Rakuten's dedicated fashion week website.

One-year-old brand Jusma, for example, took to the runway to show the collection 'Multiple Impact', where sporty designs took on a more elevated form, and contrasting material selections held centre stage. Versatile design choices were also present in the collection of Belgian designer Maxime Edward, who similarly opted to present a line that brought a sense of classicism to urban, sporty staples. Others on GFC's agenda were that of Aline Arnoux, who presented her label Couleurs D'Afrique, and the France-based brand Alça, both drawing on their personal roots to inform designs. While Arnoux's Franco-Cameroonian upbringing was reflected in her use of wax patterns and embroidered Ghanaian scriptures, at Alça, the collection 'Late Bloomer' was infused with African design details in pieces that told the story of a self-paced woman – a further reference to the brand's slow fashion values.



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Alsa Sama SS24, Rakuten Fashion Week Tokyo. Credits: Launchmetrics Spotlight.

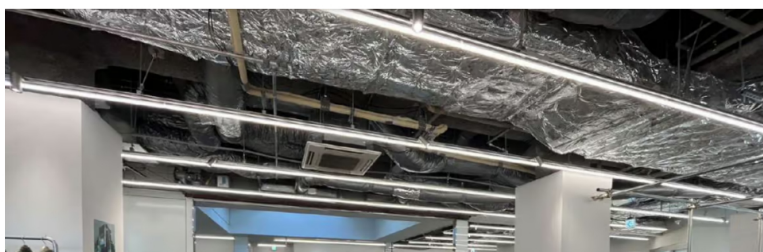
Heritage and culture were also an intrinsic part of the collections from Mexico's CEDIM School of Design, which brought seven emerging designers from its Unfold collective to honour the institute's legacy. Each of the participants offered up takes on the pivotal moments that shaped their identity, formulating a retrospective homage to their past. Meanwhile, Karen Moriyama also joined GFC's line up in what was one of the Japanese creative's first ventures into the fashion space. Typically an illustrator, Moriyama recently shifted her focus towards textiles, with her SS24 collection 'Tsubomi' an extension of this move. Here, silky silhouettes and flowing materials were adorned with hand-drawn imagery and dyed in a traditional Japanese painting-style.



Karen Moriyama SS24, Rakuten Fashion Week Tokyo. Credits: Launchmetrics Spotlight.

Showrooms further boost global brand presence

Yet, while the collections were seemingly welcomed by onlookers and fashion industry insiders alike, it is clear there are still challenges present for those hoping to make a mark on the Japanese fashion scene. It is these barriers that showrooms like And are trying to tackle as part of their inclusion on the Rakuten FWT schedule. Over the course of three days, hosted in Tokyu Plaza, And Showroom exhibited its array of local and international brands to attendees and buyers stopping by. Led by founder Akira Kudo, the showroom aims to aid its brands in getting a foothold in the Japanese retail market, something that Kudo himself is avidly aware poses some hurdles.



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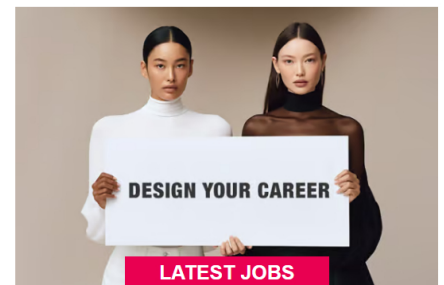
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And Showroom, Rakuten Fashion Week Tokyo SS24. Credits: And Showroom.

When it comes to selecting the brands, Kudo appears to take a more personal approach, basing the lineup on both the brand's newness and whether or not it "cherishes [his] sensibilities". Those that have seemingly passed these requirements include Italian footwear label Fracap, Japan's Ivxlcdm, UK brand Universal Works and Hungarian apparel brand Zsigmond. This roster also hopes to appeal to the major Japanese buyers, department stores and media that the showroom is targeting. However, while this may be the case, Kudo highlighted that there had been a decrease in local buyers following the pandemic, yet a "little by little" increase in those from overseas.

And's participation in FWT was another that was reflective of the event's renewed focus on driving international participation, with Kudo noting that he too wanted to make a small contribution to the fashion week – even if it came slightly too late in the buying season. The showroom's experience with handling both Japanese and international brands has given Kudo a good overview of what challenges one can face when dealing with contrasting markets.

While noting that there was still a need to cater to domestic demand in order to strengthen the local contemporary and premium markets, he added: "Japanese brands are now going out into the world to actively work overseas. This is very good. However, the Japanese apparel industry operates differently from wholesalers around the world. I think the biggest problem is the price difference between domestic and foreign countries that arises because of this."



And Showroom, Rakuten Fashion Week Tokyo SS24. Credits: And Showroom.

For And and Kudo, the future lies not just in business dealings and expansions, but also in acting in an intentional and thoughtful way. When asked about his own vision for the showroom and the industry as a whole, Kudo concluded: “Next year, I want [And] to be known by more people and have a positive influence. I think fashion has many meanings. The best thing is not just to make money, but to be able to live a peaceful and humane life. It has become a keyword in the fashion industry in recent years, but it is also important to act in a truly sustainable and continuous manner that can give back to the earth and the future.”

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