

IFFTI EXCHANGE INITIATIVE

REPORT BY
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Hosting Institution "Bunka Gakuen University"
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank IFFTI for allowing me to conduct this teaching exchange at Bunka Gakuen University. I also thank Professor Yoko Takagi and Claudia Lucia Arana for their warm hospitality and for organizing every detail of my visit. I thank as well AMFI, Roger Gerards, and Jose Teunissen for their support and for fostering collaboration across institutions.



PURPOSE OF THE VISIT

My visit to Bunka Gakuen University primarily aimed to engage with students and faculty through discussions and workshops that highlighted the designer's role as a catalyst for change within broader societal contexts. The key topics I proposed were:

1. Visual Storytelling Workshop:

Drawing on my extensive experience in visual research and concept development for brands such as Daily Paper, I designed a workshop to help students effectively utilize tools and narrative techniques to visualize their research. The goal was to empower them to communicate their academic work in ways that are both impactful and accessible.

2. Critical Examination of Design Politics:

Inspired by Tony Fry's assertion that "Every design either serves or subverts the status quo," I planned a three-hour lecture and a workshop discussion. The session encouraged students to analyze the political dimensions of design critically, unpack the inherent messages within their work, and reflect on how these messages align with or challenge existing systems.

Through this exchange program, my primary goal was to broaden students' awareness of fashion design's cultural and political dimensions. Additionally, I aimed to develop a practical research framework that integrates cultural narratives into design politics, enriching the fashion curriculum. Building connections with the staff and fostering knowledge exchange between AMFI and Bunka Gakuen University.

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DAY 1

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On my first day in Tokyo, I was welcomed by Professor Yoko Takagi and Claudia Arana at Bunka Gakuen University. They introduced me to the campus and gave me a tour of the facilities. We discussed the structure of the two workshops I would lead and a brief overview of the students' ongoing projects. We delved into the importance of visual culture and its profound influence on students' research processes, setting the tone for the days ahead. Following this, Claudia guided me through the university library and various other installations, providing valuable insights into the resources and environment available to the students.



REPORT

IFFTI EXCHANGE

02



DAY 2

The day began with an introduction to the Master Concentration students, where I shared a broad overview of how visual culture and the creation of images have significantly shaped my professional and educational journey. I emphasized the importance of creatives showcasing their process and presenting it to the world, as designers often focus too much on the final product while overlooking the narrative behind it. To illustrate this point, I shared examples of work from AMFI students in the minor Hypercraft, where they collaborate to create a book that integrates research and product in an inspirational and visually compelling way. Following this introduction, I learned that many students planned to create a publication or poster related to their projects. This presented a perfect opportunity to explore graphic outcomes in more depth. I initiated an active workshop on designing a "cover" for their project books, encouraging them to think critically about the tone of voice and visual language that

best represents their work.

As preparation, students were asked to bring a publication that resonated with their design vision. They began crafting their covers using these references and additional resources I provided. During the session, I engaged individually with each student, offering guidance on selecting the correct elements—such as typography, imagery, and layout—that would effectively communicate the mood and tone of their projects. It was a highly interactive, hands-on session where students received valuable information and were encouraged to dive into the creative process.

This exercise proved a great way to get to know the core of their projects and how they were connected to the current zeitgeist. Additionally, we explored ideas for leveraging digital

DAY 3

To deepen my understanding of textiles, I went on a day excursion to Kyoto, where I visited the Nishijin Textile Centre. This visit offered an in-depth exploration of kimono craftsmanship through historical archives and a comprehensive look at the production process—from thread to garment. I also had the privilege of watching live demonstrations of traditional crafting techniques, which provided a fascinating insight into the meticulous artistry behind these iconic textiles.



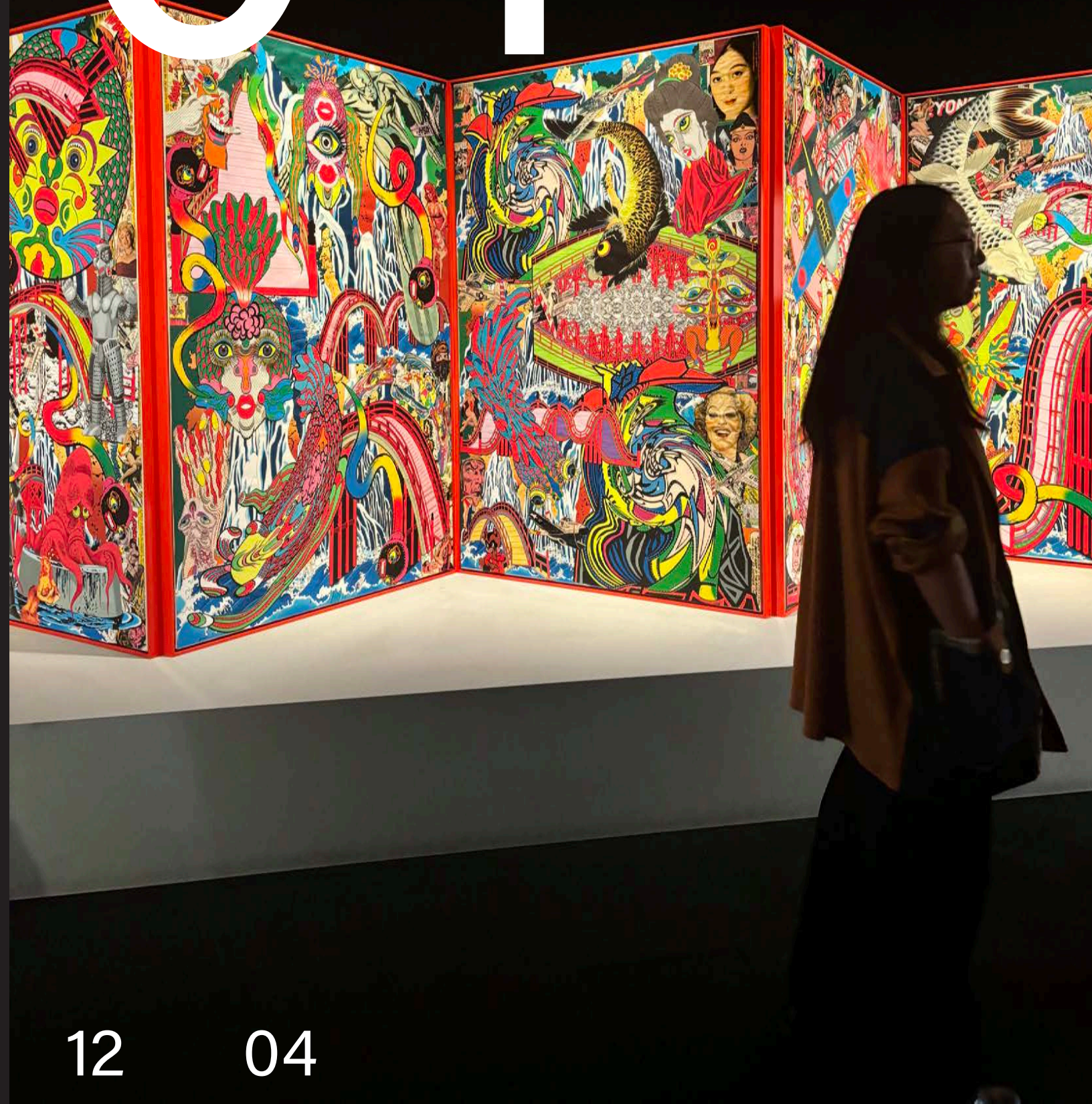
REPORT



Afterwards, I visited the “LOVE FASHION: In Search of Myself” exhibition at the National Museum of Modern Art in Kyoto. This exhibition presented clothing and other fashion items from the 18th century to the present alongside art that delved into fundamental human emotions and instincts. The exhibits invited reflection on the different expressions of “Love” seen through fashion and design. One of the key themes explored was our relationship with beauty, a topic that resonated deeply with me as I’ve been developing the Design Research Line at AMFI.

IFFTI EXCHANGE

04



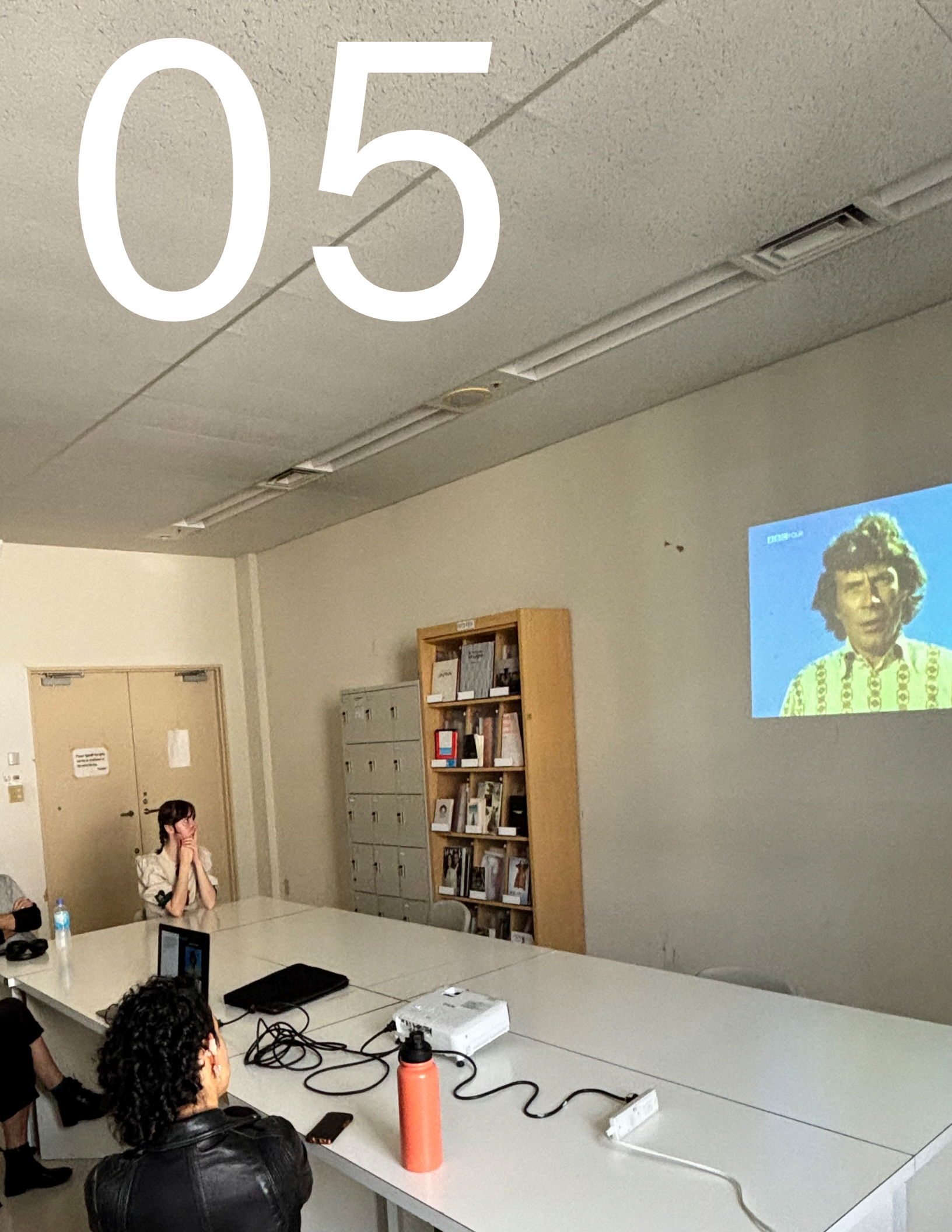
DAY 4

Following a recommendation from Professor Yoko Takagi, I visited the Adventures in Memory exhibition at the National Art Centre in Tokyo. This exhibition showcased the work of internationally acclaimed artist Keiichi Tanaami (b. 1936). He is renowned for his vivid, colour-drenched works, which reflect his childhood memories of World War II and the impact of American pop culture he encountered post-war.

The exhibition presented a remarkable collection of works, including archival materials, paintings, collages, and experimental pieces, all organised around the theme of "memory." What stood out to me was Tanaami's use of collaging and his ability to layer images to construct new narratives. His mastery of blending personal memories, cultural symbols, and historical references created various works.

This approach deeply resonated with my practice, as collaging and working with images to create meaning is a fundamental part of my creative process. Moreover, it aligns with how I guide my students' design development. I encourage them to explore how layering imagery and recontextualising visual elements can communicate complex ideas and emotions. Seeing Tanaami's work in different media, like sculpture, animation and installations, reaffirmed the importance of this technique. It provided fresh inspiration to bring into my teaching, offering students new perspectives on the power of collaging for storytelling.

05



DAY 5

On the fifth day, I conducted a workshop on design politics, beginning with an introduction to Ruben Pater's *The Politics of Design*. The book explores how cultural contexts shape visual communication, emphasizing that symbols, colors, and typefaces carry culturally specific meanings. Designers, therefore, are responsible for creating work that avoids stereotypes and fosters mutual understanding.

We then delved into the differences in Japanese visual culture between Saskia Thoelen and Claudia Aguilar and students and faculty members. Together, we explored how symbols and visual narratives are presented differently in Japan compared to the West. This discussion led to an exercise on the "male gaze" and "female gaze" across cultures, referencing John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972). While Western art often reinforces patriarchal narratives, Japanese depictions of masculinity and femininity challenge Western conventions, offering fresh perspectives on gender representation.

The session provided students with valuable insights into the cultural nuances of design and how visual storytelling varies across global contexts, encouraging them to approach their work with a more critical and informed lens.

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After the session, I visited the Bunka Library, which provided valuable insights into historical costumes and the renowned Bunka pattern-making methods. It was fascinating to see how students at Bunka Gakuen University approach their research and translate it into their study programs, offering a deeper understanding of their research methodologies.





DAY 6

I had the privilege of attending the Bunka Open Day, an annual event held by schools across Japan where students showcase their artistic and academic achievements. This event allows prospective students and visitors to experience the school's work and atmosphere firsthand. During my visit, I explored various workshops, gaining insights into processes such as dyeing, accessory design, garment production, and final design projects.

One highlight was the fashion show, marking the 26th annual Department of International Fashion Culture showcase. The show, entirely managed by third-year students, covered everything from design and production to video and lighting. It showcased the dedication and craftsmanship ingrained in Japanese education. Seeing that the students were responsible for the production and organisation was truly inspiring.

Additionally, I noticed parallels and potential synergies with AMFI's practices, particularly in using CLO for pattern development. However, I also observed opportunities for a broader integration of 3D tools—not just for design visualization but also for production and supply chain optimization. This insight opened up exciting possibilities for future collaborations and curriculum development.

REPORT





This exchange has reinforced the importance of bridging global perspectives in design education. The experience also inspired me to reflect on how cultural narratives and technical precision can coalesce to create socially responsive designs.

CONCLUSION

My teaching exchange at Bunka Gakuen University was an enriching and impactful experience, fulfilling and expanding upon my objectives for the visit. Through workshops and lectures, I engaged students in discussions on the designer's role as a change agent within societal and cultural contexts. The Visual Storytelling Workshop gave students practical tools to translate their research into compelling visual narratives. By showcasing examples such as AMFI's Hypercraft projects, I encouraged them to focus on their process and outcomes, resulting in a deeper appreciation for how research can inform design.

The Critical Examination of Design Politics workshop, inspired by ideas from Ruben Pater and Tony Fry, fostered a critical dialogue about how design interacts with power structures. This session challenged students to think beyond aesthetics and consider the cultural and political implications of their work. Exploring these dimensions resonated with students and faculty alike, and the workshop helped cultivate a sense of responsibility in design.

Beyond the classroom, my visit to the Bunka Library provided invaluable insights into historical costumes and the Bunka pattern-making methods, offering a glimpse into how Japanese students conduct research. Attending the Bunka Open Day allowed me to witness firsthand the technical rigour and creativity fostered within their programs, particularly in the 26th Annual Fashion Show, which highlighted student-led design and production. Observing the integration of CLO for pattern development further opened my eyes to potential synergies with AMFI's curriculum, particularly in expanding the use of 3D tools for visualization, production, and supply chain optimization.

This exchange has reinforced the importance of bridging global perspectives in design education. It has highlighted opportunities for AMFI to incorporate new approaches, such as emphasizing craftsmanship alongside innovative technologies, and for continued collaboration with Bunka Gakuen University. The experience also inspired me to reflect on how cultural narratives and technical precision can coalesce to create socially responsive designs.

I look forward to bringing these learnings back to AMFI and building pathways for deeper academic and professional exchanges between our institutions.

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