

Mikimoto Gender Neutral Pearl Necklace

Kaori Nakano

Mikimoto and Comme des Garçons have teamed up to design a gender-neutral pearl necklace. These two internationally renowned Japanese brands have produced a work of jewelry embracing the cutting-edge concept of gender neutrality, combining the traditional beauty of Mikimoto pearls and the playful spirit of Comme de Garçons in the clasp and details of the design.

As a gender-neutral creation, it is assumed of course that men may wear it as well.

Pearls, with their warm, white glow conveying an image of purity and chastity, have long been regarded as jewelry for women, but when we look back into history, this was not necessarily always so. Pearls were an indispensable element of the costume and jewelry of the maharajas of India; the Tudor-dynasty monarch Henry VIII of England wore robes studded with pearls, and many of his male courtiers wore pearl earrings. A portrait of the English explorer Sir Walter Raleigh shows him with a large pearl earring in one ear. This was before the time of cultivated pearls, so all the pearls of this era were naturally harvested from the oceans, often at a great risk. For Renaissance gentlemen, pearls were a symbol of wealth, as well as an expression of the exuberance and valor of the great new Age of Exploration. This fashion persisted into the 17th century, and England's Charles I also wore a large pearl earring. Since women of the time wore pearls as well, it is apparent that in that period pearls were not gender specific.

The popularity of gender-neutral pearl jewelry in the 21st century, as embodied by this Mikimoto—Comme des Garçons creation, is the result of the newly emerging perspective of gender fluidity—the idea that we can change our behavior from moment to moment, from masculine to feminine to something that is neither, that any attempt to assign the strictures of gender to our incomparably precious uniqueness is sheer nonsense. According to this view-

point, valuing the inner uniqueness of each individual, free from any gender association, is the path to creating a genuinely diverse society.

The gentle yet powerful sheen of pearls is a perfect symbol of the Renaissance person of the 21st century, liberated from outdated, fixed preconceptions and committed to contributing to the realization of a truly diverse society.

Another factor that cannot be overlooked in this trend is the value of sustainability. Pearls are handed down from generation to generation, embodying continuity. They also possess a quality of enduring

timelessness that is unaffected by passing fashions. And they have versatility. This Mikimoto—Comme des Garçons creation amply demonstrates that a simple necklace of perfectly formed pearls has the versatility to be worn with anything from street fashion to casual wear to a men's suit.

By prizing the contemporary stress on the values of sustainability and timelessness, Comme des Garçons, known for its radical and cutting edge designs, has succeeded in preserving and enhancing the intrinsic beauty of Mikimoto pearls.

And so it is that this Mikimoto—Comme des Garçons pearl necklace not only highlights the pure essence of the individual, liberated from the restrictions of gender and all other extraneous expectations, but shines as a symbol of luxury for our new Age of Exploration, a voyage in pursuit of sustainable happiness.



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Historian of fashion and essayist. Guest Professor at Showa Women's University. After completing doctoral studies at the University of Tokyo, went on to be a guest researcher at Cambridge University and worked at Meiji University as Specially Appointed Professor. In addition to contributing serial columns to *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, *Yomiuri Shimbun*, and many other media outlets, serves as a public speaker, business consultant and advisor. Publications include *Fashion Innovators* (Nihon Jitsugyo Shuppansha), *Royal Style: Fashion History of the British Royal Family* (Yoshikawa Kobunkan), and many others.