





Process Makes Perfect

A photographic partnership bleaches and tones its way toward a modern view of fashion.

Left and above: Guzman's goal was to set off Tokio Kumagai's cutting-edge fashions.

Even the creative world of the fashion industry has its curiously elegant rituals. One of these is the promotional mailing that designers send to editors and department store buyers to advertise new lines. Traditionally, these promos are stultifying packages of dull prose and workmanlike photography. But Japanese designer Tokio Kumagai changed that with a promo for her spring 1989 menswear collection—a booklet of striking photographs that set off her cutting-edge designs.

The pictures were made by the Guzman studio, a New York City-based partnership consisting of still-life photographer Constance Hansen and portrait photographer Russell Peacock. Guzman (the two photographers use the name when working together on fashion shoots) was selected over such stiff competition as Bruce Weber and Peter Lindbergh because of its signature look—sparse and modern yet very elegant. "Guzman uses soft textures and sepia toning much like other photographers do," says Marcia Iwatate Ueda, the in-house art director who designed Kumagai's promo. "But the final images don't look like anybody else's."

As usual in all of Guzman's fashion

work, the Kumagai shoot was preceded by a day of preparation and testing. About 30 articles of clothing were delivered to the Manhattan studio, where Hansen and Peacock shot 4×5 Polaroids of themselves and an assistant modeling the garments to see how the clothing would look in pictures. Using the Polaroids for reference, the two photographers and Ueda culled 11 outfits from the original selection.

The next day, Hansen and Peacock assembled their lighting hardware: a spotlight, umbrellas, and a small softbox. Although the arrangements varied, the 2,400-watt/second spotlight always provided the main light, and was usually positioned above the model at a 45-degree angle. Twelve hundred watt/seconds of fill light, achieved with the umbrellas and softbox, kept the spotlight from creating harsh shadows.

With the lighting in place, the photographers were able to concentrate on their Sinar 8×10 view camera—specifically the in-camera manipulation that helps produce their distinctive look. They achieve the selective fuzziness of their images by tilting the camera's back on its axis, which throws part of the film out of the plane of focus. To en-



Guzman photographers Hansen and Peacock achieve selective fuzziness in images by tilting their view camera's back on its axis.

hance the effect, the photographers use a 16-inch Dagor lens (a longer-than-normal focal length for the 8x10 format), setting it almost to its widest aperture. The lens and aperture combine to produce very shallow depth of focus, so that the tilting produces a dramatic loss of sharpness.

Because they used Polacolor Type 809 instant film, Peacock and Hansen were able to adjust the camera throughout each setup, playing with its movements until they got what they wanted.

But making the 8x10 Polaroid print was just the beginning. What followed turned the instant image into a much more atmospheric commodity. The Polaroid was rephotographed with 4x5 Polaroid Type 55 P/N black-and-white film, which produces a developed negative in addition to the usual positive. (The negative must be cleared in a sulfite bath, then washed.)

"Sometimes it took ten prints to get just one that we were satisfied with."

The copying process did more than simply turn the color image into a black-and-white one. Although the black-and-white film's long scale helped preserve the original's tonal delicacy, some high-light separation was lost—an effect that contributes to the evocative merging of subject and background in the final photographs.

Guzman's manipulations continued with the printing of the negatives. First, the developed prints were bleached. "That ate away at the highlights, making them even whiter," says Hansen. The process was highly experimental: Lighter and darker prints were subjected to various degrees of bleaching. "Sometimes it took ten prints to get just one that we were satisfied with," says Peacock. After bleaching, the prints were treated in sepia toner to give them their brown, "vintage" look.

While Ueda is clearly pleased with the results, she admits that the process unsettled her a bit. "I didn't like that the photos were all on Polaroid," she says. "It was nerve-racking to start off with a color image that was so conventional looking, even though I knew it was part of the process."

Nevertheless, Guzman's elaborate procedures resulted in a coolly elegant fashion statement, chic enough to do further duty as ads in Japanese publications such as *Bruta*, *Edge*, and Japanese *Esquire*. In this case, process made perfect. —MICHAEL KAPLAN