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The Ballad of Kei Ninomiya

Between Paris and Pitti, the avant-garde designer prepares for the next chapter

In the almost 15 years since the foundation of his own brand, **Kei Ninomiya** has become a chef d'orchestre of fashion, in constant pursuit of new sounds to add to his ensemble. After graduating in French Literature from Aoyama Gakuin University in **Tokyo**, he went on to the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in **Antwerp**. In 2008, he dropped out over the summer after being taken on as a pattern-maker at **Comme des Garçons**. Four years later, he was given his own label under the Comme des Garçons umbrella, and **noir kei ninomiya** was born.

Over the years, the brand has gone from being a new name in the **avant-garde lineup of Paris** to one of the most appreciated brands, until becoming today a model of success built as much on the extreme inventiveness of concepts and creations as on the excellence and intelligence of the final product. And recently, Ninomiya has added a new movement to his symphony with the launch of **DSM Kei Ninomiya**, a new brand entirely distinct from noir kei ninomiya, more accessible and thematic, conceived for all ages and all genders. This new venture also marks a new chapter in the DSM universe: it is the **first iteration of the Dover Street Market brand**, imagined as a vessel to nurture all kinds of creative endeavours, projects, and experiments.

Within a year of its announcement, DSM Kei Ninomiya is already a **guest designer at Pitti Immagine Uomo 110**, where it will be formally introduced to the upper echelons of the fashion industry and the public. Given that Ninomiya is known for his grand runway productions, the new brand's runway debut is one of the season's most anticipated moments.

I had the chance to sit down with Ninomiya to discuss his creative process and most recent projects.

I believe the appeal of a garment lies not only in its visual appearance but also in the physical experience and the sense of exhilaration one feels while wearing it. As for the creative process—while by no means easy—I am constantly seeking new approaches.



DSM Kei Ninomiya marks Dover Street Market's first in-house brand. How did the brand come into being, and what role did DSM's philosophy play in shaping its direction?

One aspect of DSM's approach is that we are constantly taking on new challenges. This project represents **a new challenge** and the **next step forward**, building on the production infrastructure that Dover Street Market Paris – Brand Development (DSMP-BD) has established through its support of independent brands. The DSM brand draws inspiration from the people who gather at DSM; the clothes are made for them. It is much like the relationship between the clothes and the people who gather at DSM - they influence one another.

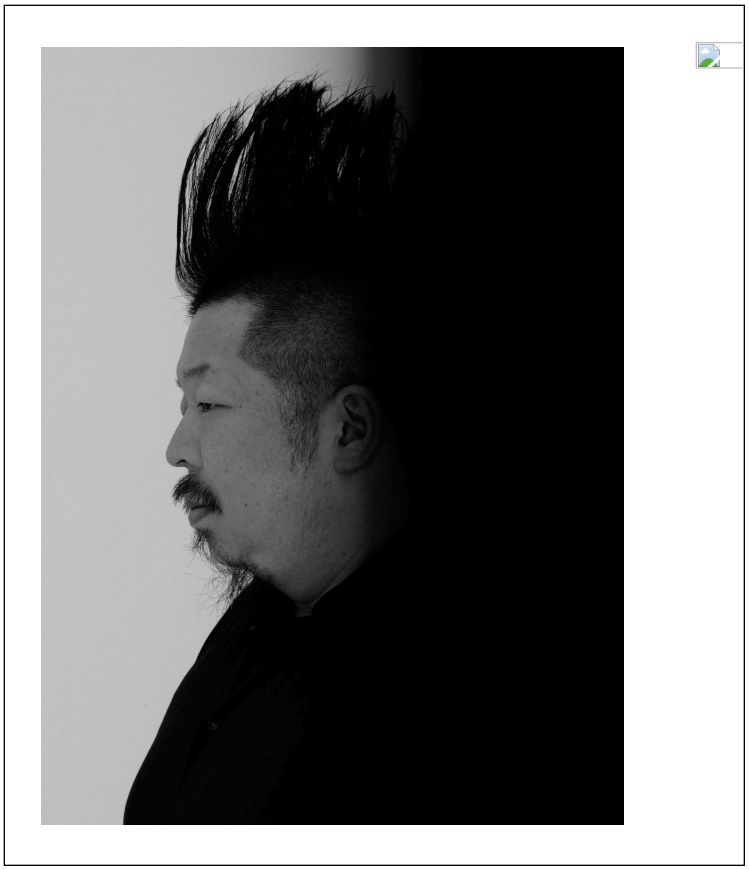
How did your previous experience come into play with this new project? Why did you decide to expand with this new label?

I learnt everything I know about clothing from **Comme des Garçons**. My project at DSM is a natural extension of that. This represents a new challenge for both DSM and myself.

Your second collection of the latest line, developed in collaboration with Dover Street Market Paris-Brand Development, is strongly rooted in football culture. How did this project come to life?

This brand creates collections **based on a community theme** each season. The theme for the 26AW season was football. Football wear has transcended the boundaries of mere sports-

wear, evolving into a unique fashion style and expanding beyond its original definition to embrace a broader aesthetic. That is what appealed to me.



DSM Kei Ninomiya and noir kei ninomiya present two very distinct aesthetics and speak to different audiences. Would you say they reflect two sides of your own personality?

It is not merely a matter of having two sides. In the noir kei ninomiya collection, we are always seeking new forms of expression, and I believe this will also be the case with DSM Kei Ninomiya (DSM KN). I think the key difference lies in the fact that noir starts from an **abstract point**, whereas DSM KN is more **concrete**.

You often talk about having a drive to create new things. Why is creating new things so important to you? What is the purpose of it? And what is "new" to you? What is the process behind creating something new?

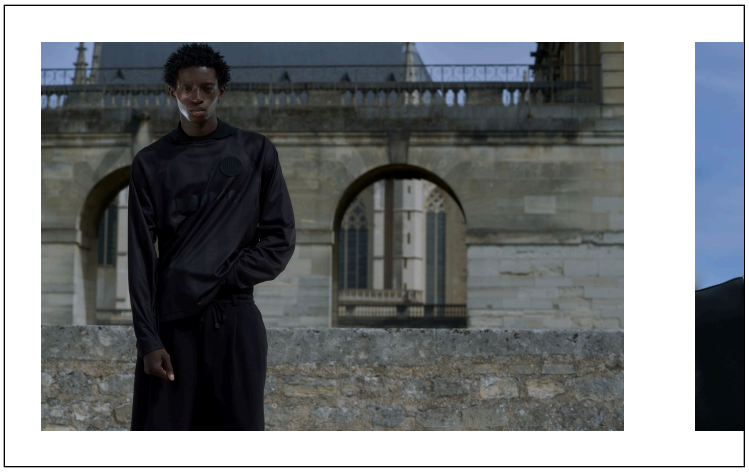
I am always on the lookout for **new experiences in fashion.** This can happen through my own creative process, through discoveries in old archives, or through the work of other designers. This is because I believe the appeal of clothing lies not only in its visual appeal, but also in the physical experience and the **sense of elation** that comes from wearing it. As for the creative process, whilst it is by no means easy, I am constantly searching for new approaches.

DSM Kei Ninomiya has been named guest designer for Pitti Immagine Uomo 110 in Florence next month. Can you tell us anything about the upcoming collection? Has the opportunity to present at Pitti influenced the direction of the line in any way?

I am **deeply honoured** to have been given this opportunity. I view this initiative as a chance for people to experience the brand more deeply through a show. I believe that whilst it will raise awareness of the brand amongst a wider audience, it will also serve as a new challenge for the brand itself, making it a highly meaningful endeavour.

You have said before that the fashion show is probably the most important part of the process since it is the first time that your creations are shown to the world. And then, after a collection is over, you immediately move on and think about the next one. But what about outside the runway? Are you interested in any way in how your clothes are brought to the outside world?

Although I said that the show is 'the most' important, that does not mean I have no interest in other areas. I take a keen interest in everything related to clothing – from shop displays and how products are presented, to the quality of mass-produced items and what appeals to customers – and **I am involved in all these aspects** as part of my work.



There are countless aspects to consider when setting up a show. Music, for example, is a fundamental aspect of your shows, and it's always mesmerizing. You have to have great teamwork to pull off shows as you do. How do you and your team approach such complex endeavours?

It all comes down to a **wonderful relationship**. I don't usually make many requests myself. As I'm entrusting the work to someone I trust, it gets done without the need to share too many details.

Cities like Paris and Florence have deeply rooted fashion traditions, while your work often feels highly contemporary and forward-looking. How do you approach creating within that context?

I am deeply interested in and respectful of the **traditions** and context of fashion. My approach to design is to aim for something new, so at times it is necessary to deliberately

step away from that (in order to seek new forms of expression), and I think that is how it comes across.

Social media and the internet allow people from all over the world to connect like never before. But being physically present somewhere has a different effect. What impact has presenting in Paris had on your work?

My approach to work hasn't changed since the beginning. However, working with the **Paris team** on this project has been a great source of inspiration for me.

What is the biggest obstacle you've had to face to get where you are today?

There are always minor issues. We are **constantly striving** to resolve them on a daily basis.

Thought the story DOVER STREET MARKET KEI NINOMIYA.

Illustrator Luke Gryffyths
Photographer (portrait) Chikashi Suzuki
Photographer Mark Yareham
Stylist Antonio Autorino
Model Sekou
MUAH Cyril Laine
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