

Lessons from the Work of NIGO

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In spring 2026, the Design Museum presents NIGO: From Japan with Love, the first global retrospective of his career. From streetwear to product design, NIGO's work shows how design can move across disciplines while staying rooted in culture and making.

From streetwear and music to ceramics and architecture, the work of NIGO demonstrates how design practice can move across disciplines while remaining grounded in cultural context and making. In spring 2026, the Design Museum will stage **NIGO: From Japan with Love**, the first global retrospective of a designer who has helped shape contemporary fashion, branding and collaboration over the past three decades.

For Design and Technology teachers, the exhibition offers a case study in design development, iteration, identity and the relationship between past and future influences with school visit opportunities.

From Harajuku to Global Influence

NIGO first rose to prominence in the 1990s through his streetwear label A Bathing Ape (BAPE), launched in the backstreets of Harajuku, Tokyo. His work quickly became associated with limited production runs, strong visual identity and cultural storytelling, helping to establish what is now commonly referred to as 'hype culture'.

Over time, NIGO has gone on to co-found Billionaire Boys Club with Pharrell Williams, establish HUMAN MADE, and become the first Japanese Artistic Director of Paris fashion house KENZO since its founder, Kenzo Takada. Throughout his career, he has consistently drawn on influences including vintage Americana, Japanese youth culture, music, toys, graphics and traditional craft.

The exhibition traces this journey through more than 700 objects, many from NIGO's personal archive, charting his development from teenage collector to global creative director.

Designing with Reference and Intent

A central theme of the exhibition is NIGO's belief that:

"the future is in the past"

Rather than viewing heritage as something to copy, NIGO uses historical references as starting points for new ideas. Early sections of the exhibition recreate elements of his teenage bedroom, filled with toys, magazines, music and clothing that shaped his visual language.

For students, this provides a powerful example of how research, collecting and analysis can inform design decisions. The exhibition shows how ideas evolve from observation and curiosity into products with purpose, audience and identity.

Iteration and Brand

As NIGO's career developed, collaboration became a defining feature of his practice. The exhibition highlights partnerships with global brands including Nike, Louis Vuitton, Uniqlo, Pepsi, Disney and Nintendo.



These projects demonstrate how designers must balance brand identity, user appeal and commercial constraints, while still pushing creative boundaries.

Making and Materiality

The final section of the exhibition moves away from fashion and branding towards craft and making. In recent years, NIGO has focused on traditional Japanese practices including tea ceremony and ceramics. His own hand-thrown ceramic pieces are displayed alongside a full-scale glass tea house, designed specifically for the exhibition.

This shift reinforces a key message that design is not defined by discipline, but by thinking, making and intent. Whether working with textiles, graphics, product design or ceramics, the same processes of investigation, iteration and evaluation apply.

Details

Opens: May 2026



Exhibition Details
tinyurl.com/w9jvwm26