Maison Margiela
PARIS

TABI

Research for

MaisonMargiela/folders

ARCHIVES DEPARTMENT

Tabi

The Tabi is our split-toe shoe. The silhouette first appeared in the opening look of Maison Margiela's debut show for Spring-Summer 1989, where our team transformed the traditionally flat shoe into a heeled boot and dipped the soles in red paint, allowing the boots to imprint their unique footprints as models walked the white runway.

Inspired by the traditional 15th century Japanese sock bearing the same name, our Tabi has been reinterpreted across collections. The original design was cut to follow the natural contour of the foot and elevated on a wide cylindrical heel mirroring the diameter of the human heel, a shape we continue to recreate today.

Each pair is the result of an artisanal process. The practice gathers eleven artisans, each with their specific expertise, whose mastery and sensitivity to the craftsmanship and the unique form of the Tabi, ensure a standard and quality that cannot be industrialised. Each shoe is finished with a single white stitch, the identifying signature of the Maison.

Since its creation, it has undertaken many different shapes and materialities, acting as a canvas for the Maison's experimentation and unique visual language, and has been appreciated and collected by a global community.

Initial Research from the Archive

Maison Margiela
PARIS

SPRING SUMMER 1989



The Very First Tabi Boots

Martin Margiela discovered the *jika tabi* during a trip to Japan in 1984 and immediately became captivated with them. He preserved **the traditional elements of the original design** (the separation of the toes, the hook closure) and decided to add **an 8 cm cylindrical heel** to ensure stability and comfort. Martin Margiela wanted to create **a shoe that didn't look like a shoe**, and that was as close as possible to the natural foot. The Tabi boots from this first collection are made of **flesh-coloured suede calfskin**, creating **the illusion of a barefoot placed on a heel**.

By the 23rd walk of the show, the Tabi boots left **red footprints** on the white cotton canvas runway. The soles of the shoes had been dipped in red paint, leaving their traces on the canvas and marking the Tabi as a real **manifesto**.

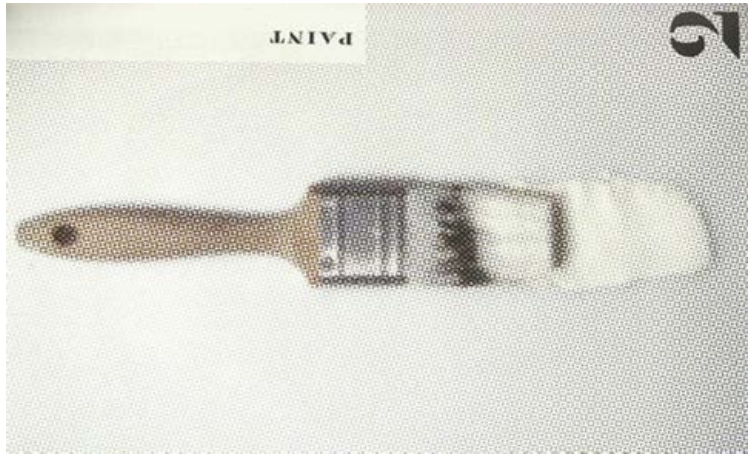




SPRING SUMMER 1990







White Painted Tabi Boots

Paint has held **a central role** in Maison Margiela's creative and visual vocabulary since the beginning. From the outset, paint functioned as **a medium** that revealed rather than concealed **the passage of time**.
Over time, paint became **a recurring element** within the Maison's universe, applied to garments, shoes, furniture, and even the models' skin.

Bianchetto was introduced in 1989 and extended into the the Tabi shoe. Items were painted white to enact a **tabula rasa** (a blank slate). Through this act, the past of each object was partially erased, allowing it to be **recontextualised** and imbued with new meaning.

The paint will naturally crack and fade over time, gradually revealing visible signs of use- a signature of Maison Margiela. This is symbolic of the beauty of **impermanence**, **transformation** and **decay**.

AUTUMN WINTER 1991

Felt Tabi Clogs

In SS91, the Tabi was reinterpreted as **a clog** with high wooden heel. While for Spring Summer the shoes revealed the toes, for Autumn Winter, the feet are covered in **navy blue felt.**

The collection's video presentation reveals **the behind-the-scenes** look at the **fabrication process.**







AUTUMN WINTER 1992



Leather Tabi Clogs

For Autumn-Winter 1992, long dresses and tunics were created by the Artisanal Atelier using **leather coats from the 70s**. Their linings were removed, collars dismantled and leather scraps repurposed to extend the hems of the coats.

The Tabi shoes take the form of **a clog** once again, this season reimagined as **a boot**.

Following the same process used for the coats, **leather scraps** are used to create the shoe.





AUTUMN WINTER 1995



Shades of Fuchsia – Tabi Mary Jane

The runway show for the Autumn Winter 1995 collection took place in **a circus tent** near Paris. Inside, the audience was seated on wooden benches arranged in a circle, allowing them to admire the models walking on the runway in the center.

The main theme of the collection was a color: **fuchsia**. The first looks featured mostly black outfits with **subtle touches of fuchsia**, such as a pair of shoes, before the color **gradually took over entire ensembles**.

Cut Tabi pumps were presented in **multiple shades of pink and purple**. Some models in the collection featured a strap, **reminiscent of today's Mary Jane Tabi heel**.







SPRING SUMMER 1996

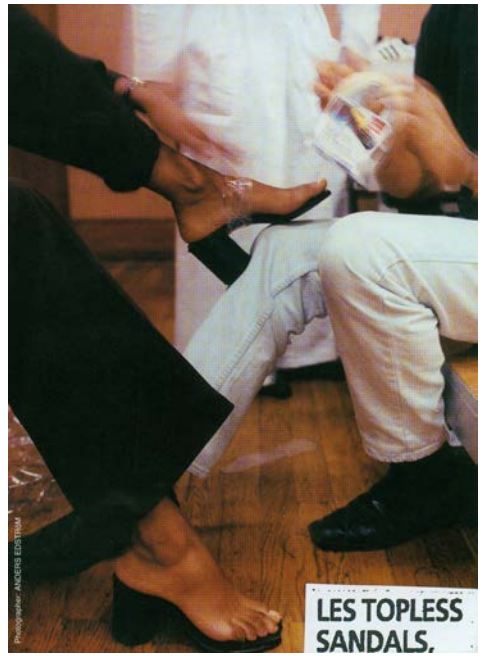


Invisible Tabi Shoe

From the very beginning, Martin Margiela dreamed of creating an **invisible shoe** : simply a barefoot placed on a sole with a leather heel.

For the Spring Summer 1996 collection, **his vision came to life**. Black leather Tabi soles with cylindrical heels were secured to the foot using **several layers of transparent adhesive tape**, giving the surreal impression of **walking barefoot on heels.**







Maison Margiela
PARIS

AUTUMN WINTER 2001



Thigh-High Tabi Boots

Building on **the oversize** research started in SS00, this exploration continues in the AW01 season.

The lower halves of the collection’s silhouettes are often **short**, featuring shorts, skirts, and dresses cut above the knee, revealing **leather thigh-high Tabi boots** in black, camel, or brown.

Some thigh-high boots are encased in nylon tights, while others are **painted white** or adorned with small plastic stars. Unlike previous versions, the heel is not cylindrical but **wedge-shaped** this time.





SPRING SUMMER 2002

Cut Tabi Mules

The SS02 collection is divided into three themes: **cut**, **circle**, and **folding**. Oversized garments from previous collections are **cut at the waist**, creating intentional irregularities.



The same process was applied to the thigh-high Tabi boots from the previous season. For Spring/Summer 2002, these boots were **reused** but this time **cut flush to create a mule-like shape**. The proportions of the silhouette were completely reversed. Some pairs were then painted white or in pastel colors.



AUTUMN WINTER 2003



Tabi Confettis

Shown in the middle of the temporary exhibition *J'aime pas la culture* set at the Bassin de la Villette, **the color yellow** spreads throughout the collection.

Before the show begins, four men in white coats scatter **yellow confetti** on the floor, tracing the runway. During the show, some models **hold yellow streamers**, while others have black streamers tied around their ankles. Some models also **scatter confetti as they walk**, looking directly at the audience and **smiling**. The atmosphere is joyful and festive.

Some Tabi boots from the collection are covered with **glued yellow confetti**.



SPRING SUMMER 2004

Tabi Shoes Covering Heel and Toes Only

The SS04 collection places a strong emphasis on **the front** of the silhouettes, almost completely neglecting the back. The hair is styled forward, **covering the models' faces.**



For this season, **a new twist** has been applied to the traditional Tabi boots : **the side parts of the shoes have been removed,** leaving only the heel and the toe sections.

Some of the shoes feature **two contrasting colors** on the front and the heel. This design complements **the bicolored tights** and sometimes extends across the entire silhouette, creating **a striking color contrast between the front and the back.**



AUTUMN WINTER 2012



Concrete covered Tabi boots. Other types of shoes are covered as well, the Tabi appear to be sculpted in cement", some of them have graffiti-like designs painted on.



ARTISANAL SPRING SUMMER 2014



The Artisanal SS 2014 collection is described as ‘a dive into the world of collectors: lifestyle spaces, archives and limited editions.’ It highlights one of the Maison’s ways of expressing its creativity by collecting, resurrecting, and recasting vintage pieces.

All shoes of the collection are Tabi ankle boots made in gold metal twill.



WOMEN SPRING SUMMER 2017





Pale blue and grey jacquard scuba Tabi

The scuba Tabi boot features a moulded rubber sole, and an ornate jacquard upper strapped in Velcro.





WOMEN AUTUMN WINTER 2017





The Autumn Winter 2017 Ready-to-Wear collection,brings the purity of the MM wardrobe center stage, reducing garments to their core.

White painted baloon Tabi boots
Décortiqué black Tabi boots

The Tabi are interpreted by the décortiqué and white painting technique.





ARTISANAL CO-ED SPRING SUMMER 2020







For its Spring-Summer 2020 Artisanal show, Maison Margiela presents a shoe collaboration with Reebok fusing the iconic Tabi with the Instapump Fury.

The collaboration draws on themes key to the Artisanal show: a re-evaluation of the values of bourgeois dressing exercised through the codes that define it. The shoe builds on Maison Margiela's analyses of the conversation between humanity and technology in the digital age. Employing the technical inventions of Reebok, it is a statement shoe for the age of the cyber-industrial revolution.



ARTISANAL CO-ED SPRING SUMMER 2020





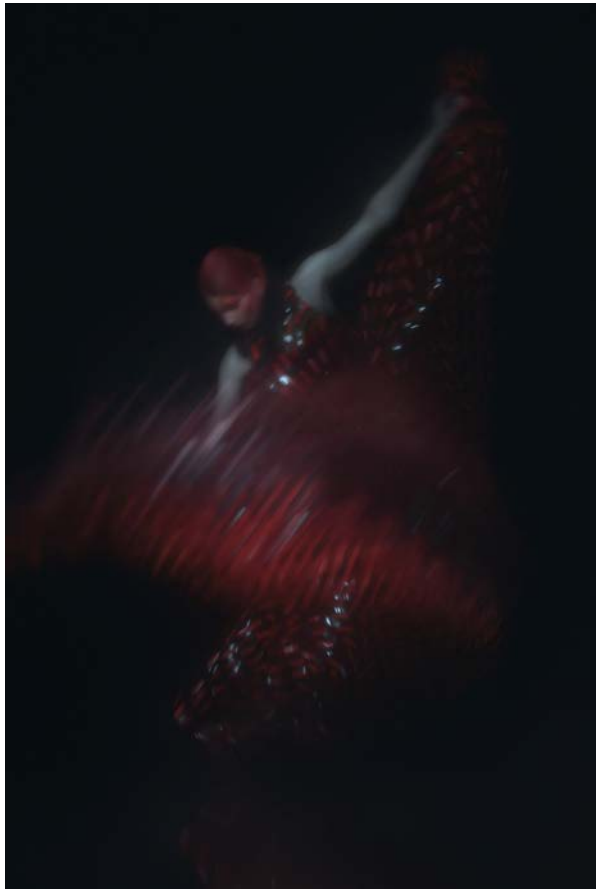
Maison Margiela’s Spring-Summer 2020 Artisanal collection identifies the nature of the bourgeois gesture and investigates the impact of heritage codes in the age of cyber-industrial revolution.

Maison Magiela’s Tabi features throughout the show in new manifestations: a knee-high riding boot, a derby, an ankle-strap dorsay and an ankle-strap pump.
All crafted in black glazed leather, some Tabi have been hand-painted.

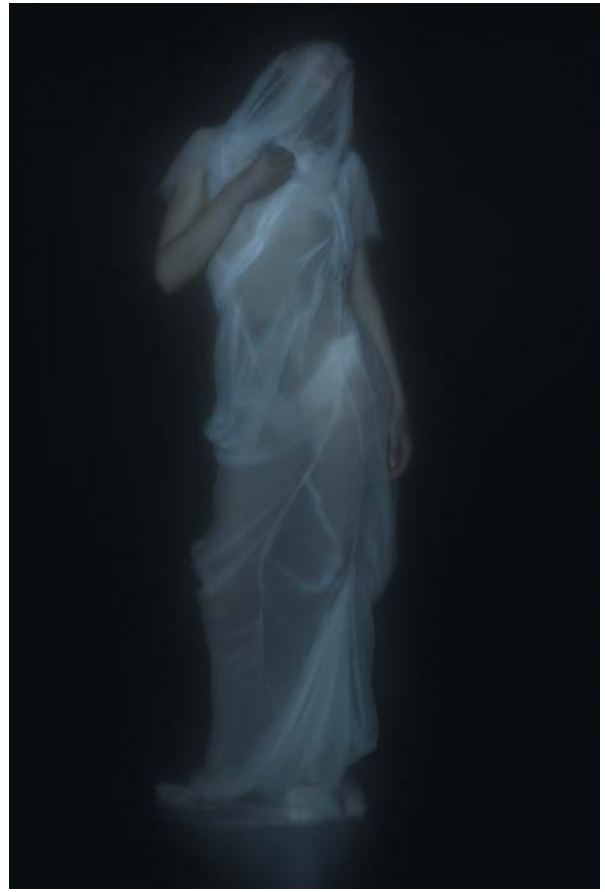


ARTISANAL COED AUTUMN WINTER 2020

Leather Tabi toe shoes imitating the irish dance shoes : The Ghillies.
Shoes appear as hand-made Tabi Ghillies in tweed or chiffon, as dance sandals familiar to the Ballets Russes, and as leather Tabi toes for dancing.









ARTISANAL CO-ED AUTUMN WINTER 2022

Black sand-flocked pointed Tabi derbies.
Sandstorming is a new technique which conjures the effect of a sandstorm in fabrication and surface decoration achieved through needle-punch, flocking or beading.

Tabi pumps with a new pointed toe appear in ruby crystal.









ARTISANAL CO-ED AUTUMN WINTER 2022

Tabi cowboy boots feature in tan leather covered in crystal.





Recicla collaged monster pumps are repurposed heels spliced from vintage pumps originally created by a variety of fashion houses throughout the 20th century.

Through elaborate resizing methods, each monster pump is collaged from three vintage pumps designed by three different maisons, and include museum pieces and collectables.



CO-ED SPRING SUMMER 2024







Black leather and Bianchetto linen Tabi monster sling-backs

Bianchetto leather Tabi monster sling-backs

Bianchetto leather Tabi bourgeoise spectator pumps





ARTISANAL CO-ED SPRING SUMMER 2024

Ponyskin Tabi knee-high boots with hand-painted retrograding by Christian Louboutin for Maison Margiela





Pink velour and faux lizard Tabi ankle-strap pumps by Christian Louboutin for Maison Margiela





TABI CLAW ARTISANAL AW2025 & SS2026

Clear plastic Tabi Claw boots printed with a pale collage of (17th-century Dutch) nature morte flower paintings and set on perspex wedges.





Tabi Claw boots overlaid with paper printed with a collage of (16th-century Flemish hand-painted and embossed) floral leather wallpapers in shades of brown and cognac and set on perspex wedges

The Plexi Claw High Boots reinterpret a Maison Margiela archival design through material illusion. The fabric was developed for our Artisanal couture collection, made from printed computer wires.





TABI COLLECTORS FIRST EDITION 2025





Maison Margiela introduces the debut edition of the Tabi Collector's: the Tabi Broken Mirror Embroidery. Conceived as a yearly series dedicated to collectors, each edition will reinterpret the Maison’s most iconic codes in limited-run creations.

The first iteration presents a three-dimensional interpretation of the Broken Mirror treatment. Each pair is hand-embroidered with more than 8,000 glass beads, sequins, and metallic embellishments. The metallic fragments are crafted in varying shades and laser-cut to evoke the fractured surface of aged glass. Individually treated, they form a gradation at the edges, simulating the natural oxidation of a broken mirror over time. Transparent glass beads are interspersed throughout the embroidery, accentuating depth and dimension.