

TWISTER

THE CELEBRATED INGENUOUS AND EXOTIC IN FASHION

GALLERY 20 > AUSTRALIAN FASHION AND TEXTILES

ngv The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia



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INTRODUCTION

Twister is the inaugural exhibition in a new gallery space specifically dedicated to Australian fashion and textiles at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia. It signals the beginning of an ongoing program of fashion and textile exhibitions in the new gallery space. Drawing from the NGV's extensive collection, *Twister* investigates new ways of viewing and interpreting fashion.

In this exhibition, works from the collection have been re-assessed and re-presented within a challenging thematic framework that avoids the traditional linear, chronological approach. Relationships between individual works are developed using three themes – the Celebrated, the Ingenious and the Exotic.

Twister examines the influences and motivations of designers and makers, and explores the relationship between the context in which fashion is created and the minutiae of its construction. Our understanding of fashion chronology is questioned, and we are asked to consider unexpected connections between the works on display, such as a platypus cape from the 1890s and a Jenny Kee knit from the 1980s. Multiple interpretations of the works are presented through layered and unexpected juxtapositions of the three themes.

Displayed in state-of-the-art glass showcases, created specifically for the new gallery space, *Twister* offers a fresh approach to the installation of fashion. The methods of display have been simplified to the point where they become invisible, allowing the viewer to engage directly with each work without distraction. Utilizing customized display techniques that enable maximum visual access, works are presented to allow 'viewing in the round' with intersecting perspectives through each glass showcase across the space. This approach is supported by a dynamic multimedia program that complements the exhibition by revealing further hidden details and views of the works on display.

TWISTER INVESTIGATES NEW WAYS OF VIEWING AND INTERPRETING FASHION.

SPECTACULAR CLOTHING IS OFTEN CREATED AND WORN WITHIN A CONTEXT OF CELEBRATION.

THE CELEBRATED

Spectacular clothing is often created and worn within a context of celebration. The meanings contained within each work on display in this section of *Twister* range from the literal rendition of party clothes to a more metaphoric commentary on individuality and belonging. Whether created to be worn at an Academy Awards ceremony, the opening gala of a new gallery, or as an assertion of a sub-cultural identity, these works collectively address the ways in which designers and wearers of fashion seek to convey confidence, glamour and recognition – and, in some cases, infamy – through their designs and the performance of dressing. Attention to the designer's choice of cut, colour, form and decoration of a garment reinforce connections between individual ideas and cultural expectations of celebration through dress.

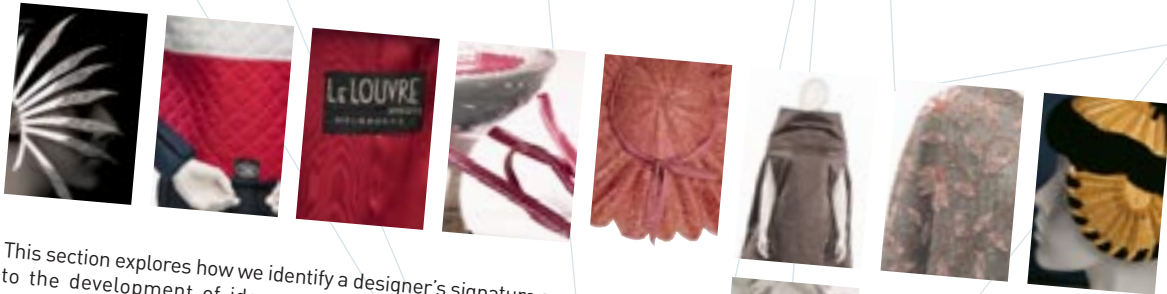


The works in this section exemplify the 'look at me' phenomenon. Central to the success of each of the works featured here is their visibility and ability to engage the gaze. In some cases the wearer seeks recognition within the mainstream. For others, the ultimate goal is subversion of the status quo via parody and transformation.

For full details of these works see pages 6-8

THE INGENIOUS

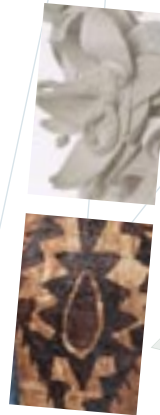
How do concepts of the ingenious operate within the realm of fashion and how can we determine which works communicate this best? Original, innovative and new are all words that spring to mind, but they represent only one approach to developing the criteria for this theme. More broadly, it is recognition of the designer's capacity to combine a complex mix of inspiration, concept and form that underpins this way of looking at fashion.



This section explores how we identify a designer's signature approach to the development of ideas or the fabrication of a new work, whether it be a shoe, a hat or an entire outfit. Often executed with great subtlety and humour, the designer may combine disparate sources, influences, creative and technical practices and redefine them in a distinctive style or garment form. Here, we seek to examine what it is that sets these works apart.

The catalyst for the creation of the work may be the raw materials, historical and cultural inspiration, or the investigation of a specific technique. The resulting ingenuity is manifest in anything from a hat made of pink loofah, created in the resourceful environment of post World War II rationing, to the sculptural form of a contemporary skirt that doubles as a dramatic A-line cape.

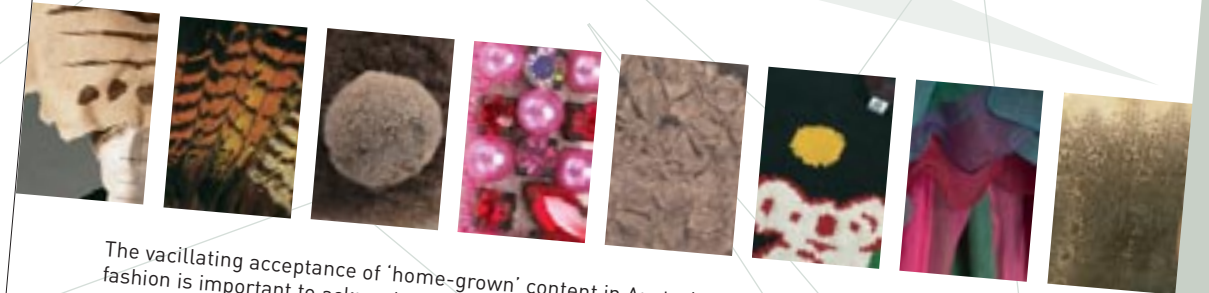
For full details of these works see pages 9-12



THIS MAY MANIFEST ITSELF IN THE APPLICATION OF NATIVE ANIMAL MOTIFS, FORMS THAT MIRROR THE SHAPE OF A PARROT OR PATTERNING THAT EVOKES THE MARKINGS FOUND ON A NATIVE ANIMAL SKIN.

THE EXOTIC

The focus of the Exotic encompasses both the literal and the metaphorical – the physical nature of materials used and the inspiration behind a garment's design. Numerous related concepts can be identified at work within our understanding of the exotic. These include: luxury versus the everyday, foreign versus familiar, imported versus local, and natural versus unnatural. The materials incorporated in the works on display in this section of *Twister*, whether taken directly from nature or manufactured to replicate natural materials, reveal much about a work, regardless of when it was made or identity of the maker. For example, the use of animal skins (whether simulated or real) can be viewed in terms of contemporary ethical, political and environmental perspectives that are often at odds with the prevailing attitudes and motivations that were in existence when the work was created.



The vacillating acceptance of 'home-grown' content in Australian fashion is important to acknowledge, both in reference to the past and the future. Some of the selected works in the Exotic reflect the conscious decisions of the designer to incorporate Australian iconography in their work. This may manifest itself in the application of native animal motifs, forms that mirror the shape of a parrot or patterning that evokes the markings found on a native animal skin.

For full details of these works see pages 13-15

THIS SECTION EXPLORES HOW WE IDENTIFY A DESIGNER'S SIGNATURE APPROACH TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS OR THE FABRICATION OF A NEW WORK, WHETHER IT BE A SHOE, A HAT OR AN ENTIRE OUTFIT.

MAGG, Melbourne
1920–25, 1950–77

Zara HOLT, chief designer
1904–1989

Betty GROUNDS, business partner
born Australia 1909

Evening dress (1968)
silk, metallic thread, plastic,
viscose rayon

Presented through The Art
Foundation of Victoria by
Mrs Patricia Davies, Member,
1988 (CT53–1988)

This evening dress, created by
Zara Holt for her fashion label
Magg, was worn to the spectacular
gala opening of the National
Gallery of Victoria, on 20 August
1968, when it moved to its new
home on St Kilda Road. With its
dramatic hemline and textured
brocade encrusted with rows
of plastic sequins, this one-off
creation was tailor-made for
the celebration.



James LYNCH, decorator
born Australia 1966

Des KIRWAN, designer
born Australia 1965

Punk outfit (c. 1983)
cotton, leather, paint, metal,
plastic, fur, blood, rubber, wool
Purchased, 1984 (CT163a–m–1984)

Punk music, dress and attitudes
manifested themselves in
London during the mid 1970s to
early 1980s. Mass culture was
rejected out of hand in favour of
extreme, defiant and provocative
imagery, sounds and actions.

Likewise, mainstream dress
codes were discarded and
individuality was asserted by
punks within the realm of a 'tribal'
sub-culture.

In this outfit James Lynch
customized his own version of
punk in Melbourne as it existed
in the early 1980s. The black
leather jacket, self-consciously
adorned with safety pins, fake
fur, graffiti-style band names
and metallic studs, reflects the
creator's desire to identify with
a local and international
underground phenomenon,
while asserting the primacy
of the individual.



Lizzy GARDINER
born Australia 1966

**The American Express® gold
card dress (after 1995)**

plastic, metal
Purchased, 1999 (1999.56)

This dress was Lizzy
Gardiner's personal
homage to, and
subversion of, the
famously fashionable
US annual event, the
Academy Awards.

Nominated for Best
Costume designer
award in 1994,
Gardiner responded
with irony to the
expectations that out-
fits worn to this 'night
of nights' should be
expensive, exclusive
and extremely mem-
orable. Gardiner's
personal version of
this dress is featured
in this exhibition,
while the original is
held by the American
Express archives,
USA. Made from a
total of 220 credit
cards, unlined and
linked by simple metal
rings, the dress sits
within a particularly
Australian lineage of
designers, including
Jenny Bannister and
Peter Tully, who have
worked with unusual
and everyday found
materials to create
their unique designs.



LA PETITE, Melbourne
1939–86

Pat RODGERS, designer

Neil RODGERS, business partner
Evening dress (c. 1956)
silk, cotton, glass, plastic, metal
Gift of Mr. J.O Wicking, 1999
(1999.451)

This evening dress encapsulates
the more traditional interpretation
of 'dressing to impress'.
Like many Melbourne boutiques
of the 1950s, the creation of
exclusive and desirable gowns
for key social events drew
considerable inspiration
from the northern hemi-
sphere, particularly
Paris. The influence
of French fashion in
Australia at this time
can be seen in
numerous ways:
label names with
a French flavour
(i.e.
La Petite,
Le Louvre),
fabrics
imported
from
France,
and the
use of
French
mannequins to
model fashion to the local
market. The wish to associate
with the French fashion Mecca
also translated into garment
designs, which were a direct
homage to the fashionable
silhouettes of French designers.
In this dress the influence of
Christian Dior is evident.



Leigh BOWERY
 born Australia 1961, worked
 in Great Britain from 1981,
 died 1994
The Metropolitan (c. 1988)
 cotton, rayon, leather, plastic,
 metal, paint
 Purchased, 1999
 (1999.180.a-b d-i)

Working at the limits of fashion,
 music and performance, Leigh
 Bowery created multiple
 versions of himself for public
 consumption. Using artifice,
 exaggeration and hundreds of
 metres of tulle and lycra, his
 make-up and costumes were a
 direct challenge to one's comfort
 zone. A key figure in London's
 1980s club scene, Bowery's
 relentless self-reinvention
 generated expectation and
 awe in those who witnessed his
 confronting and outrageous
 parody of dressing up. The
 resulting infamy and cult status
 form an integral part of his work.



LE LOUVRE, Melbourne
 est. (c. 1929)
Lillian WIGHTMAN, chief designer
 Australia 1903–92
Evening coat (c. 1935)
 cotton, silk
 Gift of Mrs Pringle from the
 estate of the late Mrs Guy
 Bakewell, 1982 (CT186–1982)

I believe that good clothes are a
 most wonderful form of art, a
 most satisfying and interesting
 occupation, something that
 delights the soul.

Lillian Wightman¹

Le Louvre chief designer Lillian
 Wightman equated clothing with
 art. In this evening coat, the
 designer's skillful articulation
 of the complex collar and subtle
 gathering of the shoulder and
 sleeve construction demonstrate
 the capacity for fabric to be
 manipulated into sophisticated
 3-D forms.



THOMAS HARRISON, Melbourne
 1929–75
Thomas HARRISON, designer
 Australia 1897–1981
Hat (1946–50)
 loofah, silk
 Gift of Thomas Harrison, 1976
 (D307–1976)

World War II saw the introduction
 of clothing, fuel and food
 rationing. With shortages in
 the availability of decorative
 trimmings and luxury fabrics,
 milliners were forced to improvise.
 Thomas Harrison sculpted this
 delicate hat by overlapping slices
 of pink, dyed loofah (material
 usually associated with bathing),
 forming the crown and brim in
 one seamless sweep.



WILLIAM BEALE, Melbourne
 (c. 1946–92)
William BEALE, designer
 Australia 1929–92
Sunrise hat and bag (c. 1946)
 cotton, straw, silk
 Purchased, 1997 (1997.145.a-b)

The *Sunrise hat and bag* are rare
 examples of William Beale's
 earliest designs and were made
 for a Sydney client to wear to the
 Melbourne Cup. Combining
 contrasting materials and
 dramatic sculptural form, Beale
 created a ray-like effect, evocative
 of the rising sun.

Beale was renowned for the
 theatrical titles he gave to his
 works and for the matching hat
 and bag sets he created. These
 were regularly launched by
 Beale with extravagant parades
 in the fashionable hotels of
 the day.



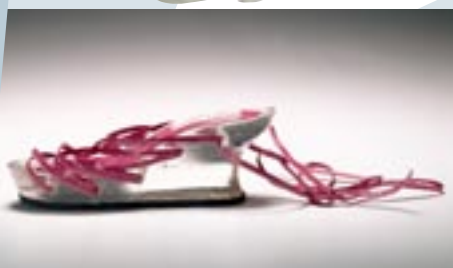
HALL LUDLOW, Melbourne
1947–60
Hall LUDLOW, designer
born New Zealand 1919, arrived
Australia 1947
Evening ensemble 1955
linen, silk, cotton, metal, elastic
Gift of Mary Newsome, 1995
(1995.520.a–b)

One of the few designers who would do everything from choosing fabric to cutting and then stitching a garment, Hall Ludlow created this dress and wrap in the same year that he won the Australian Gown of the Year award. Rarely using a pattern, Ludlow draped and cut each garment over a form, paying close attention to proportion and detail.

The use of white linen and a seemingly simple silhouette in the dress are accentuated by Ludlow's signature rows of parallel stitches. These construct and sculpt the flourish of linen blooms that frame the wearer's neck and face.

JOHANNA PRESTON, Melbourne
est. 1991
Johanna PRESTON, designer
born Australia 1967
Wedge sandals 1997
perspex, leather, rubber
Purchased, 1997 (1997.63.a–b)

Combining traditional bespoke (handmade) techniques with her own bold, structured styling, Johanna Preston's works reflect her appreciation of historical shoe shapes. Matched with the need to develop a personal language of footwear forms, these *Wedge sandals* reinterpret the exaggerated platforms of chopines, worn by courtesans during the sixteenth century in



Renaissance Italy, Spain and England. At the same time, they signal her desire to extend the range of materials and heel shapes in her designs. Using clear, laminated perspex and hot-pink leather lacing, Preston presents her contemporary notion of footwear as 'jewellery for the feet'.



ALEXANDER McQUEEN, London
est. 1994
SARAH HARMARNEE,
est. Melbourne 1991
Sarah HARMARNEE, designer
born Great Britain 1970, arrived
Australia 1971, worked in Great
Britain from 1996
Blade headpiece 1997
autumn/winter
ready-to-wear collection,
'It's a jungle out there!'
silver-plated metal
Purchased, 1998 (1998.10)

Harmarnee created this work for fashion designer Alexander McQueen's 1997 runway show entitled 'It's a jungle out there!' Working outside the traditional jewellery format, Harmarnee constructs pieces that traverse the line between passive decorative embellishment and dramatic assertion of sculptural form. The sharp blades framing the wearer's cheek contrast with the delicate lace-like surface treatment of the metal.



PACIFIC SISTERS, Auckland
est. (c. 1992)
Rosanna RAYMOND, designer
born New Zealand 1967
H'nard K'nore G'hang G'near
outfit 1995–97
cotton, tapa, coconut shell, jute,
shells, wood, metal, flax
Purchased, 1997 (1997.143.a–d)

We follow the ancient way of working from the environment. We get our inspiration from our immediate urban/media environment. We don't stare at coconut trees – we stare at motorways.

Rosanna Raymond²

Pacific Sisters is a Polynesian fashion, performance and music collective that celebrates and reconstructs Island culture and identity. Imagined as a 'thick skin for the streets for warriors in the '90s',³ this outfit fuses indigenous materials with contemporary denim. Placing a traditional understanding of personal cultural heritage within the context of contemporary urban life, Raymond customizes a pair of Levi's jeans and a Levi's jacket, making them personally and culturally relevant.

RUDE BOY, Melbourne
est. 1996
Glen ROLLASON, designer
born 1969
Outfit 1998
polyester, cotton, elastane,
metal, nylon, plastic
Purchased, 1998 (1998.37.a–g)

It's a sportswear label to do nothing in.

Glen Rollason⁴

Reinterpreting menswear, the Rude Boy label presents a parody of contemporary street fashions. This outfit combines wristbands that double as 'stubbie' holders, a reversible denim bib that makes reference to historical waistcoats, denim pants with a spanner pocket, and a 'hunting' cap lined with gingham. The result is an ironic comment on the popularity of active sportswear and workwear in the realm of casual male dress.



MARTIN GRANT STUDIOS, Melbourne 1982–89
MARTIN GRANT, Paris est. 1992
Martin GRANT, designer born Australia 1966, worked in Paris from 1991
Cape skirt 2001 autumn/winter silk, cotton, acetate, metal Purchased, 2001 (2001.562)
 Martin Grant's designs do not

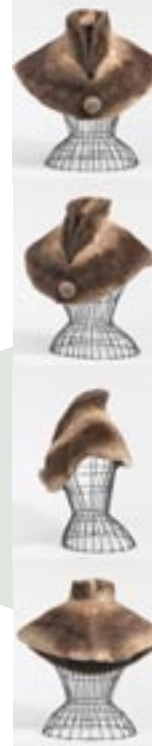
rely on strong pattern or overt decorative devices. His colour palette is restrained, allowing him to focus on the cut of the cloth, tailoring and construction, to create powerful, sculptural garment forms. The *Cape skirt* utilizes a simple silhouette with two subtle side-seam incisions. These slits function as pockets and armholes, and, as the name suggests, this hybrid garment can be worn as either a cape or a skirt. Subtle stitching over the surface is reminiscent of the quilting normally reserved for garment linings.

AKIRA, Sydney est. 1993
Akira ISOGAWA, designer born Japan 1964, worked in Australia from 1986
Etheric zest outfit 2000 autumn/winter wool, cashmere, silk, glass, plastic
 Kaiser Bequest, 2000 (2001.101.a–d)

I'm not someone who designs conservative business suits ... I like people to wear my designs back to front, upside down – whatever they like.

Akira Isogawa⁵

By reinterpreting the customs, materials and techniques of traditional Japanese costume, Isogawa creates contemporary garments that present the wearer with numerous possibilities. Incorporating unstructured layers and asymmetrical shapes, there is no single prescribed way to wear the outfit. In this outfit, the beaded bolero jacket can be reversed and worn as a top.



UNKNOWN, Australia
Fan (c. 1880) ivory, cockatoo feathers, silk, metal
 Gift of Mr James Reid, 1964 (748A–D5)

Feathers became a highly sought after fashion commodity in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Vast quantities were used to adorn hats and other accessory items, such as muffs and fans. Hats, in particular, were heavily trimmed with feathers and sometimes even whole birds. Millinery houses traded internationally and indiscriminately for these desirable materials. However, some materials were sourced closer to home.

Believed to have been made by Chinese settlers in Darwin, this fan combines a carved ivory stick and guard with the feathers of the female red-tailed black cockatoo, commonly found in northern Australia.

UNKNOWN, Australia
Cape (1890–95) platypus fur, silk, cotton
 Gift of Mrs F. Smith, 1985 (CT105–1985)

While the use of fur and feathers in fashion today is laden with political, moral and environmental implications, in the late nineteenth century these were quite acceptable and highly regarded materials. The popularity of fur was widespread throughout the world at this time, and Australia's fashion industry was voracious in its demand for materials to meet consumers' needs. In this environment, many amateur hunters looked to the local fauna to supply individuals and manufacturers.

This cape features Tasmanian platypus fur, identifiable by the large pelts. Platypus fur was not valued as a potential export item as it was difficult to work the thick skin into garments. Tasmanian laws changed in 1907 to give platypus legal protection.

BATA, Czechoslovakia est. 1894
Shoes (1951–55) lizard skin, leather, metal
 Gerstl Bequest, 2001 (2001.80.a–b.)

BEECRAFT, New South Wales
Bag (1951–55) lizard skin, leather, metal
 Gerstl Bequest, 2001 (2001.81)

FASHORNE
Gloves (1951–55) snake skin, kid, metal
 Gerstl Bequest, 2001 (2001.82.a–b)



Unusual or 'exotic' skins have long been used extensively in the making of shoes and other accessories. The restrictive rationing in place during and after World War II forced designers and makers to be extremely resourceful, utilizing available materials. It was during this period that the use of cork, timber, raffia, snake, lizard and fish skins became commonplace. The popular use of reptile skins for shoes, gloves and bags prevailed well into the 1950s.

These accessories combine snake and lizard skins and formed part of the extensive wardrobe of Sydney woman Edith Ma in the early 1950s. Renowned for her personal flamboyant style, Ma combined elements of traditional Chinese dress with key accessories inspired by the fashionable trends evident in America, Europe and Australia.



HALL LUDLOW, Melbourne
1947–60

Hall LUDLOW, designer
born New Zealand 1919,
arrived Australia 1947
Button and buckle samples
(c. 1960)

glass, plastic, metal, cotton
Presented through The Art
Foundation of Victoria by
Mrs Mary Lipshut, Member, 1995
(1995.483-1995.940)

The use of fur and feathers in fashionable dress is not the only way in which fashion can be made to appear exotic. Concepts of luxury, excess and decoration are also bound up with the attractiveness and 'sparkle' of materials such as sequins, beads and paste jewels. These buttons and buckles form part of a range utilized by Hall Ludlow in his fashion collections. Function has been surpassed by form, with some pieces so large and encrusted that they ultimately serve as decoration to accentuate rather than fasten a garment.



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FLAMINGO PARK, Sydney
1973–95

Jenny KEE, designer
born Australia 1947
Jan Ayres, knitter
born Great Britain 1947
Blinky (1977)
wool
Purchased, 1986 (CT25–1985)

I'm inspired by the colours of nature, by the colours of the Australian bush. It constantly changes and I am constantly inspired.

Jenny Kee 1988⁶

The referencing of Australian flora and fauna by fashion designers has not always relied on a literal use of their skins, but has extended to encompass their role as an inspiration and source of imagery, colour and pattern. Jenny Kee's *Blinky*, *Kooka* and *Kanga* knit series form an important part of the distinctly Australian handknit revival that took place in the 1970s and 1980s. By combining bold colours and key emblems of Australian identity, Kee produced garments that derived their inspiration from within Australia. Often referred to as 'art knits', these garments formed only one part of the substantial body of work produced by Kee, which reflected an explicitly homegrown approach to fashion design.

FLAMINGO PARK, Sydney
1973–95

Linda JACKSON, designer
born Australia 1950
Rainbow parrot costume 1977
silk, elastic
Purchased, 1992 (CT30 a-c-1992)

The many hued colour palette and simplified, layered construction of Linda Jackson's *Rainbow parrot costume* is typical of the designer's unconventional approach to creating fashion. Jackson has played a key role in popularizing Australian motifs. Inspired by her immediate environment, she has combined everything from opals and native flora and fauna to sea creatures and Indigenous Australian designs into her textiles and garments.



JENNY BANNISTER, Melbourne
est. 1976

Jenny BANNISTER, designer
born Australia 1954
Extinct hat 1984
calf skin, ink, polyester
Gift of the Artist, 1998
(1998.201.d)

Having worked in the fashion industry for close to thirty years, Bannister is well known for the inventive and adventurous clothing she created during the 1970s and early 1980s. A vocal advocate for developing an independent Australian fashion design identity, during those years Bannister sought inspiration in the topical and accessible ideas and materials of her immediate environment.

Indulging a personal fascination with the Tasmanian tiger, the *Extinct hat* is Bannister's playful simulation of the skin of the extinct *Thylacine* (Tasmanian tiger). The stripes and improvised spots of this now mythical creature have been created by stencilling black dye onto calf skin. The exaggerated wide, flat form of the hat is the perfect vehicle on which to display these exotic markings.



ANDREW McDONALD, Sydney
est. 1994

Andrew McDONALD, designer
born Australia 1962
Mules 1995
barramundi skin, suede, leather, wood, rubber, metal
Gift of Paul Trevillian, 1995
(1995.762.a-b)

Sydney shoe designer Andrew McDonald used the skins of barramundi fish for these *Mules*, 1995. The surface effect is delicate and textured, although the skins are actually very resilient and hardwearing. Many of the methods and tools used for the design and creation of handmade shoes have remained unchanged over the centuries. It is often experimentation with exotic materials that provides the greatest scope for contemporary designers to develop their own approach to design.

NOTES

- 1 'Working women in Victoria: Lil Wightman "qualifies for over-seventies" couturier', *Sunday Press*, 30 November 1975, p. 21.
- 2 Letter from the artist to the NGV, Fashion and Textiles Department, 1997.
- 3 *ibid.*
- 4 M. Ulman, 'Rude Boy', *Fashion Journal*, no. 25, February–March 1998, p. 20.
- 5 'The Big 6: A profile of innovative Australian designers', *Marie Claire Australia*, May 1997, p. 137.
- 6 J. Kee, *Jenny Kee Winter Knits*, Australia, 1998, p. 7.

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Zara HOLT chief designer
Evening dress (1968) (detail)
silk, metallic thread, plastic, viscose rayon.
Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by Mrs Patricia Davies, Member, 1988 (CT53–1988)

The NGV gratefully acknowledges the work of Robyn Healy, Senior Curator International Fashion and Textiles in devising and developing the original concept for this exhibition.

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