



## MEDIA RELEASE

### NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

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## Clothes make the man: Australian fashion icon Martin Grant celebrated in first-ever major retrospective exhibition at National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

*Martin Grant* | The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia | 28 March 2025 – 26 Jan 2026 | Ticketed



**7 February 2025:** A leading figure of the global fashion industry, Paris-based Australian-born fashion designer **Martin Grant** is celebrated for his contemporary reinterpretations of wardrobe classics, including impeccably tailored suiting, exquisitely draped gowns and dramatic capes and jumpsuits. Heralded by the late Andre Leon Talley (former editor-at-large of US Vogue) for creating 'precise, sharp and full of grace' garments with a 'couture vocabulary', Grant has dressed the likes of Cate Blanchett, Lee Radziwill, Naomi Campbell, Lady Gaga, Juliette Binoche, Tilda Swinton, Blake Lively, Emma Stone, Eva Longoria, Rebel Wilson, Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser of Qatar and Queen Rania Al Abdullah of Jordan.

Conceived in close collaboration with the designer, *Martin Grant*, opening at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia in March 2025, is the designer's first major full career retrospective exhibition. With close to 100 works drawn from the NGV Collection, alongside more than 40 loans from the designer's own personal archive and private collections, the exhibition surveys Grant's illustrious four-decade career from the mid-1980s to the present day. The exhibition also offers an unprecedented insight into Grant's creative process and milieu through photography, sketches, artworks, press clippings and runway footage.

Exhibition highlights include a visually arresting display of eveningwear and ballgowns in monochromatic hues, each presented on specially designed invisible mannequins that create the illusion of the garments floating in mid-air. The selection of works exemplify Grant's refined understanding of structure, volume and draping in a range of exquisite fabrics, including sumptuous silk taffeta, luxurious draped wool and shimmering metallics.

Grant's signature outerwear – including expertly tailored jackets, peacoats and trench coats that balance minimalism with a playful approach to proportion, underpinned by rigorous pattern-cutting – are also a feature.

Showcasing Grant's clever recalibration of historical silhouettes and period references into contemporary classics, highlights include his iconic leather *Napoleon coat* and red wool *Joan of Arc dress*, respectively worn by Naomi Campbell and Cate Blanchett.

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A further section of the exhibition reflects on the Grant's' early years in Melbourne and Paris, and showcases designs worn by Cate Blanchett, Lee Radziwill, Catherine Baba, Rebel Wilson and Lady Gaga in major fashion editorials and runway presentations. The garments will be displayed alongside editorial and portrait photography by a number of leading photographers documenting his work, revealing the global appeal of Grant's aesthetic and his vast network of industry collaborators.

**Minister for Creative Industries Colin Brooks said:** 'After four decades dressing the biggest stars in the world, Martin Grant is coming home for his first major retrospective. This latest exhibition continues NGV's run of spectacular fashion exhibitions, while celebrating the work of a Melbourne-born, global design leader.'

**Tony Ellwood AM, Director, NGV, said:** 'Martin Grant is a self-taught, Melbourne-born designer who has truly captured the attention of the international fashion world. With a background in sculpture, he approaches fashion with a sculptor's eye, creating garments that have a direct formal relationship to the body.'

'In 2024, Grant gifted the NGV more than 200 works from his own personal archive, transforming our holdings of his work and making ours the most significant collection anywhere in the world. Through this exhibition – Martin's first full career retrospective – we hope to share his refined artistry and aesthetic sensibilities with all Victorians and visitors alike,' said Ellwood.

Of the world-premiere retrospective exhibition, **Martin Grant said:** 'The National Gallery of Victoria houses the largest and richest fashion collection in the southern hemisphere. To have my design career represented in this exhibition in Melbourne, the city of my birth, is a true privilege and an honour.'

Grant's working method is focused on the development of a design through the direct manipulation of fabric on a dressmaker's mannequin. Designs rarely begin as two-dimensional sketch but emerge from an image held in Grant's imagination. His design process always begins with selection of fabric, which is draped and sculpted over the mannequin, with key designs revisited and refined over subsequent collections. Throughout his career Grant has worked with a restricted colour palette, often using classic fabrics, such as felted wool and silk satin, and with very limited use of surface embellishment.

Audiences can also appreciate the full breadth of Grant's career through early and rarely seen designs from the mid-1980s in Melbourne, when Grant began working in the local fashion industry at just 16 years of age, including his architectural slash-back linen dress. Designs from the early 1990s, when he re-established his eponymous label in Paris, also feature. These include his striking *Couture coat*, affectionately known as the Mary Poppins coat.

Also, on display is *Look 24, Dress*, a sculptural ballgown in red taffeta from his spring-summer 2010 collection alongside a photograph of the garment captured by Sarah Moon, one of France's most respected photographers and filmmakers. The photograph *La Robe Rouge*, 2010, is a key example of the enigmatic and dreamlike images of fashion that Moon creates to capture the works of leading fashion designers.

## ABOUT MARTIN GRANT

Martin Grant began his career as a young fashion designer in Melbourne in the mid-1980s. He was part of a thriving independent fashion scene and an active participant in the Fashion Design Council parades, which were known for their innovative approach to the presentation of contemporary Australian fashion. After six years of successfully running his own fashion label in Melbourne, Grant formally undertook studies in sculpture at the Victorian College of the Arts. Travelling to the United Kingdom in 1990, Grant then worked for two London-based fashion houses before making the decision to move to Paris. In 1992, Grant re-established his fashion label and four years later opened his own boutique in the Marais district. In 2003 Grant was invited to join Barney's New York's as Artistic Director of the Barney's Private Label, a tenure he held for 10-years and in 2014 he designed uniforms for Qantas. Grant's recent collections, address industry excess, seeing him revisiting his archives and focusing on not only designing but problem-solving.

*Martin Grant* will be on display from 28 March 2025 – 26 Jan 2026 at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia at Fed Square, Melbourne. Entry fees apply. Tickets and information are available via the NGV website: [NGV.MELBOURNE](https://www.ngv.com.au/melbourne)

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## IMAGES:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/hykf7tns6tnrnog4rt3y7/AOgkHmCYcComv0Ao3HIUywo?rlkey=7nyhuef7q6ksu7884r7503nh0&st=h1s094am&dl=0>

**IMAGE CAPTION** (left to right): **Martin Grant** (designer) *Look 18, shirt and trousers*, 2019, pre-fall 2019; **Polly Borland**, *Portrait of Cate Blanchett* 1999; **Martin Grant** (designer), *Look 5, dress*, 2014, spring-summer 2014

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